

**Not just Heads and Hands but Hearts as Well: An Exploration of the Attitudes of Irish Primary Classroom Teachers Currently Providing Inclusive Education for Children with Significant Special Educational Needs.**

By

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## Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctorate of Education (EdD), 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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## Abstract

*In the developed world over the last number of decades, there has been a movement away from the placement of young persons with significant special educational needs (SEN) in specialised, segregated educational settings, replaced by the commitment to their enrolment in local mainstream schools, to be educated with their siblings and neighbourhood peers. This policy, where a student with significant SEN spends his / her official school day in the mainstream classroom, originally termed integration, is now more commonly referred to as inclusion, or inclusive education. For the purposes of this study, the students are considered as having significant SEN if they have been granted additional teaching support and / or the services of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) by the National Council for Special Educational Needs (NCSE).*

*The classroom teacher has been identified as a critical factor in the success of inclusive education. A teacher's attitudes towards the inclusive process strongly influences their commitment to this initiative. The study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the attitudes of Irish primary school teachers working in an inclusive classroom. The researcher examined potential determinants in the formation of teachers' attitudes, beliefs and emotions in relation to working in the inclusive classroom; such as teacher education, working relationship with SNA, rewards and challenges associated with the inclusive classroom, influence of the wider school community, experience of contact with parent/s of child with significant SEN and experience of contact with outside professionals supporting the child. Twelve teachers in Irish primary school inclusive classrooms (N= 12) participated in the study. Data were generated through the use of interviews and teacher-written journals.*

*Although the majority of teachers held positive views towards the inclusion process, concerns were expressed about lack of supervised placement in the inclusive classroom during initial teacher education (ITE), the availability of ongoing teacher education in inclusive practices, working relationship with SNA, time constraints and the balance of rights between the needs of the child with significant SEN and those of their class peers. While the vast majority of participants viewed their school principal as being supportive of inclusive education, they differentiated between what they considered as administrative support for the policy of inclusion and personal affirmation by the principal of the teacher working in the inclusive classroom. The findings have implications for policy makers, teacher educators, professionals in the health services, school support services and school principals. The researcher makes some recommendations to address the identified challenges to the formation of positive teacher attitudes to inclusive education.*

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## Chapter 1

### Thesis Introduction

*Teachers have hearts and bodies, as well as heads and hands* (Nias, 1996, p. 306)

*Successful implementation of an inclusion programme depends on the attitudes of those who will work most closely with the students involved* (Burke & Sutherland, 2004, p. 163)

### Thesis Structure

This thesis investigates the attitudes of classroom teachers, in the context of Irish primary schools, currently working with children identified as having significant special education needs (SEN). This chapter, the introduction to the thesis, provides a short background of the development of the concept of inclusive education. Chapter 2 examines the development of policy in special / inclusive education in the Irish context. In Chapter 3, a review is carried out on the literature, national and international, surrounding the work of the classroom teacher in the inclusion process. Chapter 4 describes the methodology chosen by the researcher to investigate the research questions. The findings of the study are reported and commented upon in Chapters 5 and 6. The final chapter reflects on the findings of the study, considers the implications of the data and makes a number of recommendations.

### Historical Development of Special Education in the Irish and International Context

Terms such as *inclusion*, *inclusive education* and *inclusive classroom* are now firmly embedded in the professional lexicon of Irish teachers. For those who have entered the teaching profession in the past few years, it must seem as though it was always thus. Pupils with special

educational needs (SEN) are a feature of virtually every school in the country. A review of the history of Irish education, however, reveals that the conjoining of special education and mainstream education is a relatively recent occurrence. The policy trajectory of inclusive education in the Irish context is more fully explored in Chapter 2.

It has been pointed out by Sebba and Ainscow (1996) that on an international basis, the appropriateness of having separate systems of education for those with and without SEN began to be challenged by advocates of civil rights and social equity, resulting in what Forlin (2001) describes as, “a slow but consistent movement towards the inclusion of children with SEN in regular classrooms” (p. 235). For some countries in the developed world, the impetus towards preventing the educational segregation of pupils with SEN from their typically developing peers had been underway for four decades (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996).

The movement towards inclusive education in Ireland has progressed at a somewhat slower pace, in comparison to many of our European and North American counterparts (Kinsella and Senior, 2008). The changes in Irish educational policy did not happen in isolation but reflected more general changes in Irish society. The fact that the concept of inclusion does not reside solely in the sphere of education but is also embedded in the wider social ecosystem has many implications for how teachers’ perceptions of inclusion are constructed, and how teachers’ discourse around this issue is framed (Booth, Nes and Strømstad, 2003; Hegarty, 2001; Pijl, Meijer and Hegarty, 1997; Shearman, 2003). This important topic will be revisited in the sections covering both rationale for the study and the literature review underpinning the study.



### **National and International Influences on Change of Provisions**

Many commentators (McLeskey & Waldron, 2003; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Pather, 2007; Timor & Burton, 2006; Slee, 2008) point towards the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and, latterly, the World Education Forum at Dakar in April 2000 (Forlin, Keen & Barrett, 2008) as being major catalysts in the promotion of debate on desegregating children with SEN. The Salamanca Statement was not just, “arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the special needs field” (Ainscow, 2005, p. 109/110) in terms of educational philosophy, but also brought about a linguistic shift which ushered in “new terminology and a new educational agenda” (Vislie, 2003 p.18). One element of this new lexicon was the term *inclusion* rather than the previously used descriptor *integration*; also described as *mainstreaming* in some jurisdictions (Butler & Shevlin 2001: Pather, 2007). Critics pointed out that the concept of *integration* frequently referred to mere locational integration (Norwich, 1990) and tended to focus on an individual deficit approach (Graham, 2006). In essence, such a view “allows” those children with a Foucaultian “otherness” to fit into the existing school culture, to make the child, “fit the class” (Mintz, 2008) rather than the class fit the child.

### **Terminology Relating to Inclusive Education**

The terminology attached to concept of inclusion may need some unpacking. The term *inclusive education* may be regarded in its broadest sense as referring to overcoming barriers that prevent the participation and learning of all children, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, social background, sexuality, disabilities or attainment in school (Angelides, 2000, LePage, Courey, Fearn, Benson, Cook, Hartmann & Nielsen, 2010; Pijl Meijer & Hegarty, 1997; Singal, 2008).

Of late, however, observe Peek, Uk and Lesar (2008) the descriptor *inclusion* has tended to focus more exclusively on children with special educational needs (SEN) being taught in a mainstream setting. Although now in quite general use, a clear definition of the terms *inclusion* or *inclusive education* still seems quite difficult to determine. Farrell (2004), a long-time writer and researcher in the area of special education concedes that, “inclusion remains a complex and controversial issue that tends to generate heated debates” (p. 6). He views the term as referring to, “the extent to which a school or community welcomes pupils with SEN as full members of the group and values them for the contribution which they make” (2004, p. 7). These sentiments are echoed by Soodak (2003), another well established writer in the area of special education, who observes that, “philosophically and pragmatically, inclusive education is primarily about belonging, membership and acceptance” (p. 328).

The concept of inclusion also embraces pupil diversity and therefore, “seeks to create schools and other social institutions based on meeting the needs of all learners as well as respecting and learning from each other’s differences (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999, p. 114). The descriptor *inclusion* has been defined by two Irish writers, Meegan and McPhail (2006) as, “A term which expresses commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school or classroom he or she would otherwise attend, regardless of the degree of severity of their disability” (p. 55).

Within this paper all references to *inclusion*, *inclusive education* or *inclusive classroom*, may be understood as residing within a construct, where a child with significant special educational needs spends his / her entire school day in a mainstream classroom, with the exception of perhaps short periods of withdrawal by the learning support / resource teacher for extra tuition. In some jurisdictions, particularly the United States (U.S.), the term *inclusion* may

signify that the child / young person only spends part of the school day in a “regular” classroom, the remainder of the day being spent in a specialised unit within the school (Leatherman, 2007). The presence of the child in the mainstream classroom for the entire school day is frequently described as *full inclusion*.

The very ubiquity and pervasiveness of the above terminology, however, belies the fact that there is no, “universally agreed definition of inclusion” (Pearson, 2005, p. 17), that it is, “most controversial” (Mock & Kauffman, 2002, p. 202) within the sphere of special education, that it may have become a form of *eduspeak* (Slee, 2008, p. 104) or, “*a fashionable phrase*” (Barnby, 2006, p.237) disconnected from its original intent. Indeed such a term courts the danger of becoming what Zuffiurre (2007), terms a, “*floating signifier*” (p. 142) utilized by various groups for different purposes. Examining the educational provision for pupils with SEN in the Irish context, Meegan and McPhail (2006) note that there are large groups of parents and educators who are confused by the concept of inclusion.

The very familiar term “*special needs*” comments Wilson (2002) lacks clarity. He views it as being used by the, “special needs industry” (p. 62) to create the impression that policy makers and special educators know what they are talking about. The term *special needs* has become somewhat overused, turning up on almost a daily basis in the print media. Wilson (2002) comments that it could be said that we, all of us, have special educational needs at some point in our lives, particularly when faced with learning skills for which we may have no natural aptitudes. The concept of labeling or categorizing children with special educational needs remains a hugely contested area (Clark & Dyson, 1995; Dyson & Millward, 1994; Lindsay, 1997; Norwich, 1999; 2002; Vehmas, 2009). And yet, for administrative purposes, some definitions and labels are a practical necessity. In the Irish context, special educational needs

have been defined in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004

(EPSEN Act) (Ireland, 2004a) as follows:

In relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition. (Ireland, 2004, Section 1)

A major provision of this Act was the establishment of a body, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), to oversee provision of education for young persons with identified special education needs. The NCSE assumed many of the responsibilities previously undertaken by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in providing support for young persons with significant SEN. The above definition required the generation of key criteria for the NCSE when assessing which children presented with special educational needs and what supports were to be put in place for their education.

The terminology surrounding the concept of inclusion, however, is not only to be found in arcane teacher policy documents and directives from the DES but also in the wider public domain of television and in print media. The universality of such terminology along with the inherently understood moral propriety (Barrow, 2001; Mittler, 1999) and the human rights agenda (Ainscow, Farrell & Tweddle, 2000; Florian, 1998; 2008) attached to inclusion may make it extremely difficult for teachers to critically interrogate such a concept. This problem will be dealt with in greater detail at a later stage in this thesis.

While accepting that the conceptual understanding of SEN in the Irish context is “seriously deficient” (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008, p. 141), nevertheless for clarity and comparability in this area, the researcher sought teachers who are currently teaching a mainstream class in which there is a child who has been adjudged by the NCSE as having a Low

Incidence disability as outlined in that organisation’s guidelines for primary schools (NCSE, 2009a, Appendix 6). Such children will be regarded as having a *significant* special educational need, differentiating them from pupils who may simply have a mild cognitive delay. A level of difficulty also arises when describing the cohort of children in a class who do not have a diagnosed disability. While accepting that the core of inclusive education is the recognition of all children as simply a diverse group of learners, for ease of reporting in this study, children without diagnosed SEN will be described as, “*typically developing*” children. The term *normative group* describes that group of children reaching achievement markers expected for their age / class group.

### **Rationale for Study**

This section of the thesis seeks to establish justification for the implementation of the reported study. Some of the topics and areas of interest which are briefly touched upon here are explored in greater depth in the Literature Review.

#### ***The Role of the Classroom Teacher in Implementing Inclusive Education***

Although the everyday understanding of the term “inclusion” may seem quite attractive, in that it implies that everybody is included in society (Hegarty, 2001; Pather, 2007), it also poses challenges in education settings (Stanovich & Jordan, 2002) and requires changes in teacher roles and school policies (Avissar, 2003; McLeskey & Waldron, 2003). Even under the most advantageous circumstances, Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008) observe that, “teaching is not a straightforward enterprise” (p. 293) but ranks in the top quartile on complexity for all occupations (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart & Eloff, 2003) and is amongst the most challenging

(Williams & Gersch, 2004) and stressful (Griffith, Steptoe & Cropley, 1999; Friedman, 2003; Howard & Johnson, 2004) of all the service or assisting professions. The arrival of children with significant SEN poses many challenges for mainstream schools. Even those whom Low (1997) classifies as “hard inclusivists” admit that inclusion is “challenging” (Ainscow, 2005, p.109) and “problematic” (Lloyd, 2000, p. 136). Although there is still ongoing debate as to what level of support a child with significant SEN may require from within the school (resource teacher / special needs assistant) or from outside professionals (speech and language therapist / occupational therapist / behaviour therapist / paediatric psychiatrist) it needs to be acknowledged that the professional with the lengthiest contact with such a child throughout the school day, is the classroom teacher.

While it is somewhat of a truism to point out that no classroom of children may be described as a homogenous entity, in that there will always be a diversity of pupil characteristics and abilities, nevertheless teachers may have become used to predictable norms of academic achievement and behavioural patterns. The inclusion of pupils with significant SEN within the classroom, may, for the teacher, disturb the even tenor of their days in that it, “significantly complicates an already complex task for the teachers” (Wigle & Wilcox, 1996, p. 326). Such pupils observe Nind and Cochrane (2002) frequently present the greatest challenge to the routine confidence and competence of teachers.

It is now accepted by most educators and researchers that the classroom teacher, rather than the special education teacher has, in fact, the major role in the implementation of inclusive education. The class teacher is viewed as, “critical to the implementation of such (inclusive) practices” (Timmons, 2001, p. 473); “pivotal to the success of an inclusive model of education” (Forlin, Keen & Barret, 2008, p. 251). Inclusive education is, “largely dependent” (Rose, 2001,

p. 148) on the classroom teacher who is viewed as being “a key element in the successful implementation of the (inclusion) policy” (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002, p. 130) and, “the key to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in general education” (Stanovich & Jordan, 2002, p. 173) rather than special education support staff (Fisher, Roach & Frey, 2002; Forlin, 2001; Liasidou, 2007; van Kraayenoord, 2003; Slee, 2008).

### ***Teacher Attitudes in Relation to Inclusive Education***

A critical determinant in a teacher’s implementation of inclusive education lies not so much in their perceived existing technical pedagogical skills but more so in their attitudes towards the inclusion process (Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou, 2007; Avramadis & Norwich, 2002; Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). For teachers to be effective in an inclusive classroom, they need to have a strong commitment to the inclusion process (Florian & Rouse, 2009). For such a commitment to develop, teachers must believe that they are adequately prepared and supported for the potential challenges of the inclusive classroom (Grieve, 2009; Thomazet, 2009). A strong sense of self-efficacy enables a teacher to confidently face new challenges (Bandura, 1995, 1997; Friedman, 2003; Roll-Pettersen, 2008) and supports a degree of risk taking (Sebba & Ainscow, 1996). Teachers may, inherently, have all the requisite skills needed for implementing inclusive education but they also need to possess positive attitudes in relation to their capabilities (Avramadis & Kalyva, 2007; Thomas, Walker & Webb, 1998).

### ***Definiton of Term Attitude within this Thesis***

Teacher attitude is a major factor in establishing teacher expectations of educational outcomes for students with SEN, with negative attitudes tending to set limitations on students’

potential for achievement (Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004). The psychological construct of *attitude* has been defined as a multidimensional trait comprised of three components; cognition, affect and behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Bohner & Wanke, 2002; Haddock & Maio, Ryan, T., 2009). Cognition encompasses a person's knowledge and beliefs; affect examines feelings and emotions; behavior describes overt behavior. Grieve (2009) observes that many psychologists have also defined attitudes as a blend of beliefs and values, where values are viewed as principled preferences for acting accordance with beliefs. In this study, the term *attitudes* is to be understood as a broad term covering the attitudinal elements of: perceptions, knowledge, beliefs, feelings, emotions, values and reported actions.

### *Constrained Discourse*

Given the importance of the role of the classroom teacher, it seems reasonable to actively seek the "voice" of those practitioners working on a daily basis with pupils with SEN. Despite the level of debate and research around the topic of inclusion, it can be difficult to find material in which classroom teachers describe their experience of the process. There appears to have been an assumption, but little debate, on the belief that teachers as a body are supportive of the inclusion process (Florian, 1998; Lopes, Monteiro, Sil, Rutherford & Quinn, 2004; Lohrmann, Boggs & Bambara, 2006; Berry, 2007). Those who are somewhat unconvinced of the practicality of the inclusion process contend that, "teachers are not highly supportive of inclusion" (McLeskey & Waldron, 2003, p. 108). The perception that including students with significant SEN may lead to two competing philosophies: accommodation of different needs and pressure to maintain academic standards, leads Heung (2006) to conclude that teachers have become "sceptical" (p. 313) of inclusive education. Jordan et al. (2009), while strongly advocating



inclusive education, believe that the popular opinion among regular classroom teachers is that the inclusion of students with special educational needs in their class is, “a policy doomed to fail” (p. 1). If this is true, it raises the very important question as to why there should be such a disconnection between a major (and long term) policy and the attitudes of those on the ground charged with implementing that policy.

Some observers consider that those who are most enthusiastic about inclusion are not so much teachers in everyday settings but those furthest removed from classroom realities, such as policy makers, special educators and teacher educators (Berry, 2007; McLeskey, Waldron, Takshing, Swanson & Loveland, 2001; Nes & Stromstad, 2006; Nind & Wearmouth, 2006; Zambelli & Bonni, 2004). This brings to mind Schön’s (1987) view of policy makers living in the “high, hard ground” of theory while those in the workplace have to struggle with “the swampy lowlands” of practice. This study proposes, in a modest way, to gauge the perceptions of some of the “grass roots” of the Irish teaching force in relation to views on inclusive education.

Writing in 2001, Butler and Shevlin pointed out that although inclusive education was being proposed as the norm, “there is no evidence that the attitude of Irish teachers towards inclusion has been assessed in advance of the implementation of such a policy” (p. 125). Some writers are also concerned that teachers may feel unable to express unexpurgated views on the experience of the process of inclusion. Pather, writing in 2007 comments on the “invisible voices” of teacher in the debates around inclusion. These voices have remained invisible (or perhaps inaudible) for a number of reasons. Although Carrington and Robinson (2004) view inclusion as developing from a long history of educational innovation, Kinsella and Senior (2008) place inclusion in the wider context, where inclusion, “represents the confluence of

several streams of thought, namely social, political and educational” (p. 651). Such a confluence inevitably feeds into popular culture, an important aspect observes Corbett (1998), “often overlooked in debates on education in general and special education in particular” (p. 3).

However, because the terminology and everyday concept of inclusion has spread beyond the purely educational and into broader social and political societal norms, there exists the danger according to Slee (2008) of, “the constriction of public discussion and debate by political and managerial discourse” (p. 103) around the concept of inclusive education.

Strong advocates of inclusion admit to the danger of “cultural vigilantism” (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006, p. 305) which leads to constant scrutiny of policy and practice with a view to identifying and exposing any compromise of the principles of inclusive education. This perceived level of scrutiny may explain why in the Portuguese context, classroom teachers interviewed by Lopes et al. (2004) said that they felt unable to voice doubts as they, “felt uncomfortable questioning something that is perceived as being “politically correct” (p. 412). It is interesting to note that the fora in which they felt most restricted in voicing opinions were national educational conventions and professional meetings of educators.

The possibility exists, therefore, that the authentic voice of classroom teachers dealing with pupils with SEN is being stifled, if not unheard. Were this to be the case, it would in fact, act as an inhibitory factor in making inclusive education work to its fullest extent. This small scale study, with practitioner speaking to practitioner, may allow a small segment of classroom teachers implementing inclusive education to have their voices heard.

### *Timeliness of Study*

What may hitherto have been beliefs and aspirations are now given legislative imprimatur by the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN Act) 2004. This Act requires mainstream schools to enrol children with significant SEN, should this be the wish of the parents. With one or two provisos, schools are legally obliged to place children with SEN in mainstream classrooms. Groups who would previously have provided the education for this cohort of children, through specialised school settings, now also act as advocates on their behalf in accessing mainstream education (McDonnell, 2003). The role of special schools themselves seems to be in question. In their Strategy Statement for the period 2008-2011, the NCSE, have as one of its primary objectives, “The review of special schools in the context of inclusive education” (NCSE, 2008, p. 19). For many who have worked within the education system for any length of time the word *review* has become broadly synonymous with *reduction*. If such proves to be the case, it predicts that an increasing number of children with significant SEN will be enrolled in mainstream schools. Present cultural and societal values suggest that the exclusion of, or discrimination against, any minority will be firmly eschewed in the belief that, “anything separate or different is inherently discriminatory” (Kauffman, 2000, p. 65).

The factors listed above seem to suggest that the number of children with significant SEN in mainstream schools will increase over the coming years with the likelihood that most, if not all, classroom teachers will have a pupil / pupils with significant SEN within their classroom at some stage in their teaching careers (Winter, 2006). Figures recently available from the NCSE indicate a rise in the number of children in nine of the eleven Low Incidence categories (Tables 1 and 2). It is not yet clear whether this is due to increased prevalence of these conditions within the population, or to an improvement in the diagnostic and assessment procedures.

Comparison of Tables 1 and 2, on this page and the following page, indicate an increase (in censuses carried out in August, 2009 and August, 2010) in the number of pupils in nine of the eleven categories of Low Incidence disabilities, the exceptions being *Assessed Syndrome* and *Severe / Profound General Learning Disability* (NCSE Special Education Administration System (SEAS) database, 2009, 2010). Some categories show a significant increase in number over the two reports. In the *Multiple Disability* category, there has been an increase of 42%. In Severe Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance category (with a relatively small number of children), an increase of 32% is indicated. While the results of two censuses taken within a calendar year cannot be interpreted as a trend, in the mathematical sense, they do point to a pattern of increasing numbers of children with significant SEN enrolling in mainstream schools.

**Table 1**

**Number of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Education allocated Additional Teaching Hours by the NCSE  
August 2009**

Special Education Needs Category	Post Primary	Primary	Sum
	No. of Pupils	No. of Pupils	
<b>Disability / Special Educational Needs Category</b>			
Assessed Syndrome	86	267	353
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	944	2375	3319
Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	1771	3237	5008
Hearing Impairment	294	587	881
Moderate General Learning Disability	221	462	685
Multiple Disabilities	456	1002	1460
Physical Disability	1256	2359	3615
Severe Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	335	546	881
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	43	19	62
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	454	2827	3281
Visual Impairment	163	256	419

Source: National Council for Special Education, Special Education Administration System.

Table 2

**Number of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Education allocated  
Additional Teaching Hours by the NCSE  
August 2010**

<b>Special Educational Needs Category</b>	<b>Post Primary</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Total</b>
Assessed Syndrome	88	253	341
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	1090	2953	4043
Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	2054	3730	5784
Hearing Impairment	325	649	974
Moderate General Learning Disability	244	511	755
Multiple Disabilities	510	1429	1939
Physical Disability	1394	2757	4151
Severe Emotional / Behavioural Disturbance	390	726	1116
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	31	24	55
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	493	3314	3807
Visual Impairment	176	283	459

*Source: National Council for Special Education, Special Education Administration System.*

The above data appear to indicate an increasing number of children with diagnosed disabilities being enrolled in Irish primary and post primary schools. Were that pattern to continue, it would suggest the likelihood of an increasing number of mainstream primary school teachers encountering within their classroom, pupils with more challenging and complex difficulties.

The research is also timely, the researcher believes, with the advent of new actors into the policy arena. The NCSE see as part of its remit, “input into the design and planning of pre-service and in-service training programmes” (NCSE, 2008, p. 24). The recently established Teaching Council will exert a powerful influence on the curriculum for Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) and Post Graduate teaching qualifications. The provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers is also undergoing a certain level of change. Courses are now being provided not only by the Colleges of Education, universities and Education Centres within what might be

termed a public service ethos, but also on a commercial basis by organisations which may have no tradition or history of teacher education. This study seeks to make a modest contribution to existing knowledge relating to the implementation of inclusive education in the Irish context and thus help inform educational policy makers and teacher educators.

### *Identified Gaps in Current Research*

A search through the Index to Theses in Great Britain and Ireland through the online search facility of Dublin City University (DCU) on 26/01/2009 reveals that although there are a number of theses on the effects of inclusion on Irish classroom education at Masters level, few if any can be identified at Doctoral level. Virtually all Doctoral theses on this topic in the index have been submitted to universities / colleges in the United Kingdom and therefore may not focus on inclusive education in the Irish context. In this study I hope to make a modest contribution to research at Doctoral level on the attitudes of Irish primary school classroom teachers in regard to inclusive education.

### *Chapter Summary*

In this chapter, the researcher has traced the historical background of the movement towards inclusive education, as a model (perhaps an inexorable force) aimed at catering for the needs of young persons with significant special educational needs in a local, mainstream school rather than in specialized, segregated settings. The central importance of the classroom teacher in the provision of inclusive education has been highlighted. The pivotal influence of teacher attitudes to effectively implementing the inclusion process has been raised. The researcher has set out his rationale for undertaking the study.

The following chapter seeks to explain how pupils with significant SEN (or disabilities) “appeared” in mainstream classrooms in Ireland. It tracks the policy trajectory in the Irish context which initially excluded children with disabilities from all state-founded schools, then established segregated or specialized setting for young persons with disabilities and currently seeks to educate such persons in their local, mainstream school alongside their siblings and age peers.

## Chapter 2

### Tracking the Policy Trajectory of Inclusive Education in the Irish Context

*“Whether we like it or not it is impossible to avoid policy. We can ignore it, subvert it, rewrite it, but we cannot escape it.”* (Thomas & Loxley, 2007, p. 94)

#### Introduction

The core objective of this study is to explore the attitudes of Irish primary school classroom teachers providing inclusive education for children with significant SEN. This chapter traces in a concise manner, policy milestones which have resulted in young persons who may previously have been excluded from any form of educational setting, now in the majority of cases, being able to attend their local mainstream school with their siblings and neighbourhood peers. Although the word “disability” is now somewhat controversial and carries ideological overtones, it will be used in the earlier part of this chapter as it was the descriptor in general use in that historical period. The term “disability” will be discussed and contested at a later stage in this chapter.

The concept of inclusive education did not arrive, as it were, *ready-made*, but can be seen rather as part of a continuum of educational provision for those with SEN. This continuum might be seen as beginning with segregation, then moving to integration and now to inclusion (Corbett, 1998; Hegarty, 2001; Pearson, 2005). Movements along the continuum occurred at varying paces in different jurisdictions. This chapter traces the progression of policy trajectory towards inclusion in the context of the Irish State.



### **Education for Those with Disabilities in Ireland Up to 1950s**

Although the movement towards inclusive education has been underway for many decades in many western European countries (Scruggs & Mastepieri, 1996; Ferguson, 2008), in the Irish context, we have been latecomers to both the practice of inclusion and the enactment of legislation to provide a statutory framework for inclusive education (MacGhiolla Phádraig, 2007; Meegan & MacPhail, 2006). It is only in the last-half century that the Irish State has become directly involved in legislating and providing for the education of young persons with significant SEN (McGee, 1990, 2004). Prior to this time, those with disabilities, whether physical, intellectual or emotional / behavioural were regarded as outside of the remit of the Department of Education (DoE), the executive arm of government charged with providing for the education of Irish children. The education (usually termed “training”) of this group of young persons was dependent on the advocacy of voluntary organisations supported by religious and charitable groups (Coolahan, 1981).

Although the Irish State, at that time, was not inimical towards the education of young persons with disabilities, its existing structure of education provision was somewhat inflexible. While the then Department of Education did not view itself as having a role in the establishment of educational settings for children with disabilities, it did, as observed by McGee (2004), “allow itself to be persuaded of the need” for such services (p. 72). The Irish Constitution of 1937 (Ireland, 1937) committed the State to providing for free primary school education, but also allowed for the possibility of subcontracting the obligation to other parties:

The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate education initiative, and, when public good requires it, to provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regards, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation. (S 42.4)

Thus, in many cases, schools established by voluntary or charitable bodies were subsequently recognised as special schools by the Department, who had limited powers in such settings. At that stage, the education of persons with a disability was very much, “dependent on the charity of people of goodwill” (Kauffman, 2000, p. 70). The first special school in Ireland to be recognised by the State (in 1947) was St. Vincent’s Home for Mentally Defective Children. The name given to this school gives an indication that children’s disabilities were viewed through the lens of the medical or deficit model, with any difficulties residing solely within the child. The word “home” in the school’s title is also revealing – indicating the need for a segregated setting for children who were “different”. The provision of any form of education for those outside of the normative group in the Irish State at that time was viewed by O’Murchú and Shevlin, (1995) as a “charity ball for the disabled” (p. 87).

### **Social Changes**

In the 1950s and 1960s changes occurred in the prevailing views of both the public and Department of Education about the educational provisions for the education of persons with disabilities. Such changes were not so much driven by educational philosophies as by social movements outside of our shores. Indeed, inclusion itself is viewed as a social movement rather than an educational innovation by Booth, Ainscow and Dyson (1998). During these decades, the establishment of the Civil Rights movement in the United States led to a social policy reform in that country (Highham, 1997). One of the outcomes of the civil unrest engendered by emancipatory civil rights groups was the 1954 Supreme Court decision on the racial desegregation of schools. Pupils who hitherto were forced to attend schools segregated on a racial basis, could now attend their local schools. Although racial segregation in Ireland was not

an issue at that time, civil unrest in the United States, in pursuance of the civil and human rights of “persons of colour” had become a very well publicised, worldwide *cause célèbre* (Graham, 1990; Green & Cheatham, 2009). In that same jurisdiction, in the 1960s and 1970s, the de-institutionalising of persons with mental illness on the basis of infringement of personal and human rights took place.

“Educational discourses can be seen to “travel” from one country to another” (Arenesen, Miteola & Lahelma, 2007, p. 98). The hugely influential Salamanca Statement has already been referred to in the introductory chapter. Movements in other jurisdictions began to affect perceptions on entitlements in the Irish context. If not immediately embracing persons with disabilities into the existing mainstream school system, the Irish State began to accept more direct responsibility for providing for the education of this group, albeit in segregated settings.

Through the late 1950s and early 1960s increased pressure from parental, voluntary and religious groups resulted in the establishment of an increasing number of special schools recognised by the Department of Education. By 1967 there were 19 schools for pupils with mild general learning disability and 20 schools for pupils with a moderate general learning disability (McGee, 2004). A further indication of greater recognition of the need to address the education of those with disabilities was the very innovative appointment of the first inspector for special education in 1959 (Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South, (SCoTENS) 2004).

### **Influential Reports**

That the needs of persons with disabilities were being reconsidered, (if not reconfigured) could be gauged from a number of reports produced at that time. In 1960 a report was published:

The Problem of the Mentally Handicapped (Ireland, 1960). Two years later a commission was established to consider the area of mental handicap and in 1965, published their report:

Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Ireland, 1965), which now re-categorised the previously all-encompassing “mentally handicapped” group into mild, moderate and severe categories (Sweeny & Mitchell, 2009). From this remove, it might appear that the Report simply entrenched prevailing views and prejudices. It did not view children with severe or profound disability as coming within the remit of education. While it also supported the continuation of parallel, or segregated, education for those persons with a moderate intellectual disability, this in itself, points out McGee (2004) was in advance of some other jurisdictions, where such groups were excluded from formal education settings.

The Report was also prescient, in that it foresaw the need for *special classes* within mainstream schools, for pupils with mild general learning disability (MGLD). In one sense this initiative was an early first move in bringing pupils with a disability into a mainstream school setting (if not into mainstream classrooms), establishing the *presence* of a group heretofore excluded. It could also be said, however, that many children within the category of MGLD were already within the school population, but undiagnosed. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, a policy of segregated schooling for those with physical and intellectual disabilities was generally maintained, with no legislative provision for special education (McGee, 1990). However, Pijl et al., (1997), note that, “As a rule, laws and (financial) regulations do not run counter to public opinion and often government legislation follows developments in our society” (p. 12). In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, improvements in the financial fortunes of the Irish State, in tandem with a burgeoning awareness of the need to acknowledge individual human worth, acted as a vector in causing Government to scrutinize legislative provision for education

in a general sense, and more specifically within that, for pupils who might need special provisions.

A White Paper on educational development, (Ireland, 1980) did consider the educational needs of those with disabilities but argued that *integration* was a very complex issue. The authors considered that demographic and geographic factors meant that the integration of such pupils could not be fully addressed. While this may seem dismissive, it also reflected sensitivity towards the increased cost base of catering for pupils with SEN, when based on the model of the special school setting. For a country still in the midst of an economic downturn and with an increasing school population, this stance represented, “a very cautious, pragmatic one which tried to balance economic considerations with educational principles” (McGhiolla Phadraig, 2007, p. 289).

That the impetus for change in the education of persons with disabilities was inexorably gaining momentum could be seen in the vision expressed in the *Report of the Special Education Review Committee* (SERC) (Ireland, 1993). This Report was not only influential in its time, but still resonates to the present day. The concepts of *special needs*, (as opposed to handicap), was now defined as:

Those whose disabilities and / or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefitting adequately from education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age, or for whom the education is generally provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging. (p. 18)

The Committee also had a view as to where such needs might best be met, when it stated that it favoured, “as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary” (p. 22)....“except where individual circumstances make this impractical, appropriate education for all children with special educational needs should be provided in ordinary schools”

(pp. 19-20). The recommendations of this Report reflected the findings of a hugely influential report on the provision of special education, in the UK context. The Warnock Report (Great Britain, 1978), sought to include children with disabilities stating: “handicapped and non-handicapped should be educated in a common setting so far as possible” (Section 7.3). It also promoted the concept of a continuum of educational provision, depending on the needs of the pupil: “Within each form of educational provision there should be scope for variety and flexibility in the way in which individual needs are met” (Section 6.9). Warnock was pragmatic and cautious in that she conceded that integration (inclusion) was not an option for some children; “Others may need to attend a special school for the whole of their school career” (Section 6.10). Implementing the recommendations of the Report would, “pose a challenge to the educational system as a whole” (Section 7.4).

It could be said that the SERC Report, too, was cautious and pragmatic, in that it did not recommend a sea-change from complete segregation to total integration. Rather, it acknowledged the need for a continuum of provision for those with significant SEN, ranging from full-time placement in a mainstream classroom, with additional support, to full-time placement in a residential special school. The influence of this Report was evident in the White Paper on Education: Charting Our Education Future (Ireland, 1995). In this paper, the Government confirmed that its objective was:

To ensure a continuum of provision for special educational needs, ranging from occasional help within the ordinary school to full-time education in a special school or unit, with students being enabled to move as necessary from one type of provision to another. (p. 24).

### From Integration to Inclusion

At this point it may be apposite to unpick some of the terminology around the concept of inclusion. Earlier in the chapter it was noted that the first break from segregated education was an effort to establish the *presence* of pupils with disability in mainstream schools. A discussion of the terminology around this concept of the physical presence of the child with significant SEN in the mainstream setting is not merely tautological, it also highlights perceived ideological beliefs linked to the terms *integration* and *inclusion*. A number of authors have pointed out that debates around the terminology cannot adopt simplistic stances as the meanings of the terms have never received universal agreement (Avramadis & Norwich, 2002; Florian, 2008; Hegarty, 2001; Pearson, 2005; Slee, 2006 Slee & Allan, 2001).

There is, however, general agreement that the concept of integration, at its most basic level, simply facilitated the physical presence of the child with a disability in the mainstream setting, what Norwich (1996; 2002) termed “locational integration”. This type of integration may have simply needed some physical adaptations to the structure of the school but did not necessitate any re-thinking of the fundamental philosophical enterprise of educating a more diverse body of pupils. Integration could be said to have been based on an assimilation model, requiring the child with a disability to adapt to the existing mainstream school model, rather than having the school re-configure its philosophy and teaching approaches in order to welcome and accept the child. The concept of inclusion, in contrast to that of integration, was not philosophically neutral. The fundamental *raison-d'être* of the inclusion movement is not so much to simply place a child in the mainstream school setting or to change teaching approaches for a child with SEN but is premised on a deeper philosophical notion derived from socio-ethical

discourse strongly focused on values and human rights (Naaken & Pijl, 2002; O'Brien, 2003; Yalon-Chamovitz, Mano, Jarus & Weinblatt, 2006 ).

Although by the turn of the 1980s, UNESCO formally adopted *inclusion* as a descriptor (Vislie, 2003), its realization remains controversial (Farrell, 2004; Slee, 2008). Perhaps a better way to view inclusive education is a fluid, ever-developing concept, an ongoing process rather than a yet-achieved state (Booth & Ainscow 2002). Pragmatists point out that far more important than definitions of integration or inclusion is the quality of education provided for the child with SEN, irrespective of what descriptors are used (Lindsay, 1997, 2003, 2007; Norwich, 1993, 1996; Pijl et al., 1997). Acceptance of ideological impurities (Norwich, 1993) may lead to a more mature, committed and flexible approach to the inclusion of children with SEN. As will be observed in the remainder of the chapter, in the Irish context the descriptor *inclusion* had now largely supplanted the term *integration*. It should be noted that although the word “inclusive” was now used on a more frequent basis in policy documents, its meaning was never explicitly defined but had to be inferred from the surrounding context.

### **Legislative and Political Initiatives in Special / Inclusive Education in Irish Context**

Two further initiatives in the area of special education were unveiled in 1998, one legislative, and one that could be said to have its basis in more immediate political response to public disquiet. One of the objectives of the Education Act (Ireland, 1998) is: “to give practical effect to the constitutional rights of children, including children who have a disability or who have other special educational needs, as they relate to education” (Section 6 (a)). It also sought, “to promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education” (Section 6 (c)). Again, the cautious pragmatic approach to the



provision for education of those with significant SEN can be observed in the *caveat*: “to provide that, as far as is practicable and having regard to the resources available, there is made available to people resident in the State a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of those people” (Section 6 (b)). This Act was viewed by Meegan and McPhail (2006) as, “a singular landmark in Irish life as it formalized, for the first time in the history of the state, a national legislative mandate in education” (p. 59).

For some, however, the Act was a disappointment. Its implementation was contingent on the Government assessment that necessary funding was available. In addition, the Act’s definition of the concept of disability seemed far more restrictive than that of SERC. The Act appeared to adopt a deficit / medical model of disability, locating difficulty within the person, rather than the more inclusive social model, which while accepting impairment within the person, views any difficulty as residing in society’s response to that impairment (Corbett, 1998; Erevelles, 1996; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Mintz, 2007). The Act defines disability as:

- (a) The total or partial loss of a person’s bodily or mental functions, including the loss of a part of the person’s body, or
- (b) The presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness, or
- (c) The malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person’s body, or
- (d) A condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or
- (e) A condition, illness or disease which affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgements or which result in disturbed behaviour (Section 2 (1)).

In 1998 also another initiative concerning the provision for the education of persons with special educational needs was unveiled. Although the thinking of school authorities in the arena of SEN had been informed by preceding reports and legislation, there had been very little direct

intervention by the DES, the body which controls financial, staffing and governance of schools. It could be said that the most visible changes in the educational provision for young persons with SEN came about, not by thoughtful policy planning, but rather in reaction to court actions initiated by parents or advocacy groups, being, “ reactive rather than proactive in setting policy agenda and in the formulation of that policy” (Earley, 1999, p. 151).

Following a series of court actions (O’Donoghue v. Minister for Education, 1993; Sinnott v. Minister for Education, 2000) and somewhat negative portrayals in the media, the then Minister for Education and Science, Mícheál Mairtin, T.D., first announced the launch of a new policy initiative: *Comprehensive Initiatives for Assessment and Delivery of Special Educational Needs* (DES, 1998). The Minister also indicated that he had now put in place an “automatic entitlement” to education for pupils with SEN. A level of policy inducement was also added, in that mainstream schools could now seek what were termed *resource teaching hours* for pupils whose SEN satisfied criteria laid down by the DES. When the number of sanctioned teaching hours reached twenty two and a half hours, a full-time resource teacher could be appointed (DES, 1999).

One result of this announcement was a huge increase in the number of parents and schools commissioning medical and psycho-educational assessments, with a view to gaining additional levels of teaching support within mainstream schools. In a relatively short time after the Minister’s announcement, schools were invited to apply for additional support for some pupils with SEN, in the form of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) (DES, 2002). The large numbers of successful applications for support for children diagnosed with disabilities also had implications for employment within schools. By 2003, there were 2,200 full-time resource teachers and 5,500 SNAs (National Disability Authority, 2004). The reconsideration of provision

for persons with SEN was also reflected in a number of reports produced around that time. A task force reported on existing provisions for those with autism (Ireland, 2001a) and support for those with dyslexia was also investigated (Ireland, 2002).

In the context of Irish primary and post primary schools, changes in policy, or policy strands, are operationalised through guidelines, termed *Circulars*, issued by the DES; conforming to Séan Lemass' dictum that, "the responsibility of government is to press matters to a decision. The responsibility of civil servants is to press matters to a conclusion" (Murray, 1990, p. 29). These circulars are not simply advisory, they also have a coercive power within the school system, regulating such matters as staffing schedules, annual financial support and schools' opening and closing hours, among other factors. A high level of control over school provision for resources for pupils with SEN was exercised by the DES through the mechanism of circulars. While working at a level below national legislation, policy documents issued by the DES have a very strong influence on the provision of services for those needing additional support (Travers, 2010).

Other documents issued by the DES began to indicate a move away from the idea of "expertism" (Vlachou, 2004; O' Gorman & Drudy, 2010) where a support teacher qualified in special education would be viewed as having responsibility for the child with SEN, rather than the classroom teacher. The Learning-Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) stated: "The class teacher has primary responsibility for the progress of all pupils in his / her class(es)", which would entail, "a significant change in the role of the class teacher" (Section 3.4). This policy document advocated the class teacher as being the primary educator of any child with SEN but working in cooperative and consultative way with support staff within, and outside of the school, whilst also maintaining strong links with the child's parents.

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

The final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the passing of several pieces of legislation aimed at making society more inclusive of persons with a disability, such as the Equal Status Act 2000 (Ireland, 2000); Employment Equality Act, 2004 (Ireland, 2004b); Disability Act 2005 (Ireland, 2005). The Act that appeared to hold most promise for making education for young persons with significant SEN truly inclusive, was the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (EPSEN Act, 2004) (Ireland, 2004a). It also held the potential for more directly affecting the day-to-day working life of teachers. The term *Special Educational Needs*, which by now had greatly supplanted the term *disability* was defined as:

A restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (Section 1 (1)).

The Act not only provides for a statutory guarantee of education services for persons with special education needs (McGhiolla Phadraig, 2007) but also explicitly states: “A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs” (Section 1 (2)). The process for the assessment of children thought to have SEN was also addressed. Crucially, for schools apprehensive about enrolling children with the most challenging types of SEN, the Act appeared to promise the provision of a range of professional services needed to support a child with SEN in a mainstream classroom. A provision of the Act (Section 19 (1)) established a new body, The National Council for Special Educational Needs (NCSE) to oversee the implementation of educational provisions of the Act. An official appointed by the Council, a Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) was charged with organizing a *team* for advice on how best to address the needs of a child with SEN, when drawing up an educational plan for that child. The team might include a psychologist from

the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and, “Any other person whom the parents or the special educational needs organizer considers appropriate” (Section 8 (4) (c)). The educational plan developed by the team was charged to specify, “the special education and related services to be provided to the child to enable the child to benefit from education and to participate in the life of the school.” (Section 9 (2) (e)). For children below five years of age, the local Health Board, now replaced by the Health Service Executive (HSE), was given responsibility for assessment of medical and educational needs.

Although the Act seemed to promise much, it was not without its critics. The definition of special educational needs was still quite restrictive, leaning towards the medical / deficit model of locating difficulties within the child, without taking into account a child’s wider socio-ecological surroundings which might cause, or exacerbate SEN not within the stringently delineated psycho-medical descriptors (McGhiolla Phádraig, 2007). The Act confirmed the provision of services for those with SEN as being on a needs-based, as opposed to a rights-based policy (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Kinsella & Senior, 2008). The addressing of the identified needs of a person was contingent upon the availability of funds or resources and could be viewed as, “an unambiguous potential opt-out clause for the State” (Meegan & McPhail, 2006, p. 60). This Act was passed during a period of economic boom for Ireland and therefore such a *caveat*, perhaps, did not cause widespread concern. Advocates of inclusive education had hoped for a completely independent body to oversee the provision of necessary services for those with SEN. The NCSE, however, operates within the DES policy and therefore within its budgetary framework, thus giving it a rather limited operating independence from the DES.

The assessment of children below five years of age was to begin soon after the passing of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004a) with the full provisions of the assessment and education plan for

persons from ages six to eighteen to be implemented on a phased basis. It was envisaged that all sections of the Act would be implemented over a five year period, beginning in 2005 (DES, 2007). Ireland's economic downturn, which began in 2008, brought the funding-contingency element of the EPSEN Act into sharp focus. In the Financial Budget of 2009, the Minister for Finance announced the suspension of the implementation of the EPSEN Act. The NCSE viewed this turns of events as, "most disappointing" but, " understandable that the change in the country's economic circumstances might impact on the speed with which the Act might be implemented" (NCSE, 2009b, p. 3). The need for further retrenchment in support for persons with SEN was evident in the capping of numbers of SNAs (DES, 2011) and the pausing of the allocation of resource teaching hours (NCSE, 2011).

### **Deep Structures and Surface Structures of Policy Formation in Special Education**

Examining the development of policy in the area of special education, within the Irish context, McDonnell (2003), puts forward the concept of *deep structures* and *surface structures* in educational systems. Deep structures involve, "theories, values, assumptions and beliefs" (p. 261) whereas surface structures reflect the more visible features of day-to-day practices such as teaching methodologies and distribution of resources. McDonnell contends that it is the surface structures of schooling that are more frequently researched, with the deeper structures often taken for granted. This study examines teachers' understanding of the deep structures of inclusive education by discussing and reflecting upon their teacher education, both initial and in-service, and their beliefs and assumptions derived from classroom experiences, in a climate where the rhetoric of inclusive education grows ever stronger but the reality is that of a reducing level of resources available in the face of increased demand (see Tables 1 and 2).

In the Introduction Chapter of this thesis, the researcher has offered a personal opinion that the implementation of inclusive education may bring many rewards but may also pose significant challenges for the classroom teacher. It could well be said that all such views are simply highly subjective judgments on the part of the researcher and may not reflect the existing reality. The following chapter examines some of the academic literature, both national and international, to ascertain, inter alia, whether the writer's views have a sound factual basis in the wider teaching community.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

*First, collect, scan, and read the literature to verify that you have chosen a justifiable topic.*  
(Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 17)

#### Introduction

This literature review was undertaken with three primary objectives in mind:

- (a) To demonstrate that the subject is a researchable topic (Creswell, 2003)
- (b) To familiarise the writer with the existing body of knowledge on the subject of the attitudes of primary teachers working in a classroom in which there is a child with significant SEN.
- (c) To provide a framework for establishing the importance of the study, as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of the study with other findings (Creswell, 2003).

#### Strategies Used to Search the Literature

Much of the research on the topic was undertaken through use of electronic (online access) to academic journals and data-bases residing in the St. Patrick's College / Dublin City University (SPD/DCU) and Trinity College, Dublin library systems. Initially, use was made of the data-bases which had potential to identify useful information on the topic to be researched: Academic Search Premier, Professional Development Collection, PsycARTICLES, Psychinfo. The data-base ERIC was extensively used as it held potential to identify a larger number of relevant journal articles than any of the other cited data-bases. At the outset of the search terms such as: *regular classroom teacher, special education, inclusion / inclusive education / inclusive classroom, experience, attitude, emotions, professional training, challenge, stress, rewards*, were entered into the data-bases. The downloading and reading of the cited articles frequently helped

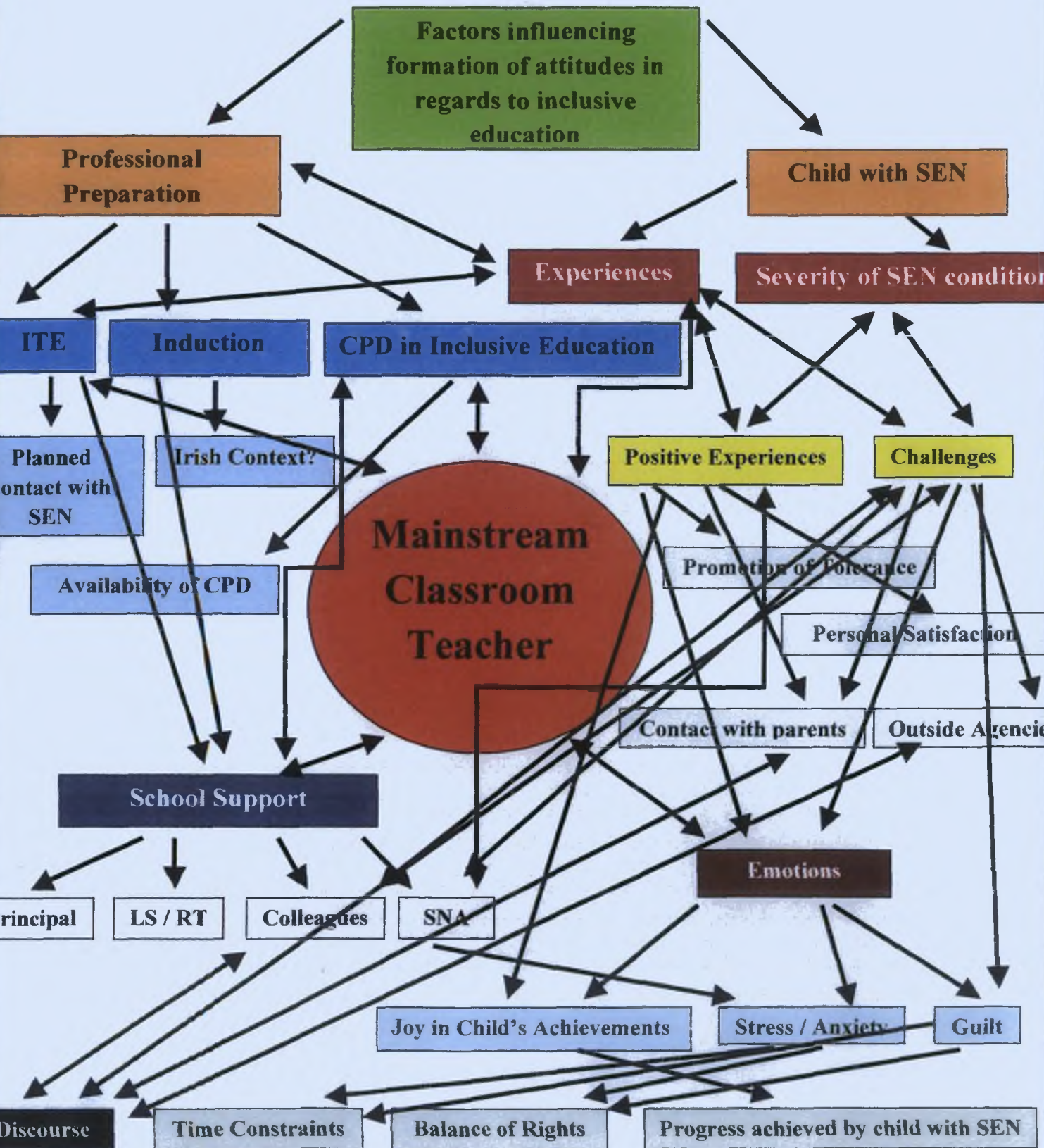


in identifying other areas of interest, resulting in the subsequent use of search words such as: *self-efficacy, stress / stressors / emotions; parental involvement; paraeducators / learning support assistants / special needs assistants; (constrained) discourse*. Sometimes a more defined response was obtained by using the same search words within a particular journal e.g. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, International Journal of Inclusive Education, British Journal of Special Education, Irish Educational Studies, Social Psychology of Education, Teacher Development, Teaching and Teachers*.

A time limit of 26 years (start year 1985 to year 2011) was set for journal publications. In some instances a journal published outside of this time frame, but cited in a relevant journal, will be discussed. Where the text of a journal article was not available online (e.g. REACH, LEARN) a hand-search of hard copies was carried out on volumes within the specified time frame.

In looking at complex and enduring issues of teachers' lives and professional personas, as opposed to their daily work, journal articles seemed inadequate as they lacked both depth of analysis and breadth of socio-historical context. For this purpose, seminal texts in book format were sought out in the libraries of St. Patrick's College, Dublin City University and Trinity College, Dublin. As the construct of the core teacher identity has probably remained somewhat stable over the last century, the time frame needed greater latitude. This literature search, therefore, runs from start year 1916 up to the present day. Close examination of the above literature, along with information gained from attendance at lectures and seminars of this professional course and with the addition of the writer's personal experience of the Irish teaching context identified several areas of potential interest. To aid the construction of a framework for the Literature Review, the researcher first drew up a visual map of his search strategies (Figure 1)

**Figure 1**  
**Literature Review Map**



This graphic presents the mainstream classroom teacher, providing inclusive education for pupils with significant SEN, as being at the epicentre of the study. Factors which might influence the formation of teacher attitudes towards inclusive education are also to be explored. Such factors encompass elements of a teacher's professional development, teacher self-efficacy and perception of available support. This study did not seek teachers' views in the abstract, but utilized exploration of their personal experiences of inclusive education, both positive and challenging.

### **Teacher Attitude towards Inclusion**

There is much research to demonstrate that the attitude of teachers towards inclusion is pivotal to its success in mainstream schools. Avramadis and Norwich (2002) were of the opinion "a key element in the effectiveness of inclusion must be the views of the personnel who have the major responsibility for implementing it: that is, teachers" (p. 129). This finding is supported by many other international studies (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Lipski & Gartner, 1996; Minke, Bear, Beemer & Griffin, 1996; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Attitude formation is, in itself, a very complex process involving many facets of an individual's psychological background and personality. To examine or change an attitude, the factors that contributed to such an attitude must be identified and interrogated. One of the bigger factors in the formation of a teacher's attitude towards the process of inclusion is the level of their self-efficacy, that is, the belief in their ability to successfully teach children with SEN within their classroom.

### *Teacher Self-Efficacy*

The concept of self-efficacy has been defined by Bandura (1995) as, “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 2). Teacher efficacy can be viewed as a teacher’s belief in his or her abilities to organise and complete a series of actions in order to successfully achieve personal objectives in the context of his or her work (Klassen, Tze, Gordon & Betts, 2011). Successful experiences in particular settings, viewed as “authentic mastery experiences” by Bandura (1986, p. 399) help to build a high sense of self-efficacy. Those teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more willing to accept challenges in their work, more able to adapt their thinking and strategies and are more resilient to stress and possible burnout (Gugliemi & Tatrow, 1998; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Conversely, those teachers who lack confidence tend to avoid situations in which they doubt their ability to perform successfully. Self-efficacy is cyclical in nature. Perceived success in a certain context strengthens one’s confidence about repeating the experience. Negative experiences confirm one’s perception of being unequal to the task, leading to further avoidance (Friedman, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

In relation to teachers, two particular domains have been identified: personal teacher efficacy (PTE) and general teacher efficacy (GTE) (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). A teacher’s GTE measures the optimism or pessimism of that teacher, in general, to cope with the predictable adverse circumstances to be encountered in virtually any classroom, such as unsupportive home environments and problems in motivating students. Soodak (2003) views a teacher’s PTE as being a major factor in that teacher’s belief in their ability to successfully teach students who may be less predictable; those with significant SEN. A strong level of PTE is a critical element in getting teachers to initially engage with pupils who have significant SEN. As

indicated previously, inclusive education may pose new challenges for classroom teachers. Their confidence in being able to successfully meet these challenges is a very influential factor in how they experience inclusive education (Silverman, 2007).

In-depth studies in both the national and international literature indicate that even experienced teachers, who have spent many years in classrooms without contact with pupils who have significant SEN, are apprehensive about working in the inclusive classroom, feeling that they have not received adequate professional preparation for this task (Bennett, Deluca & Bruns, 1997; Boling, 2007; Jobling & Moni, 2004; Marshall, Ralph & Palmer, 2002; Travers, Balfe, Butler, Day, Dupont, McDaid, O'Donnell & Prunty, 2010).

There is still much debate as to whether “generic” teacher education will suffice in preparing teachers for working with pupils who have significant SEN. Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) maintain that good teaching is good for all children, a concept upheld by Kauffman (2000) who views special education as being simply consistent good teaching. While this may be a comforting view for “hard” inclusionists, educational policy makers and teacher educators, perhaps it also requires a level of contestation. Much of the current view of pupils with SEN appears to favour the concept of *delay* rather than *difference* (Porter, 2005). This stance implies that teachers simply need to use a level of differentiation within the skills and resources that they already possess.

A strong, but pragmatic advocate of inclusive education (Florian, 2008) admits that the mantra of good teaching being good for all may not always be correct, “because we know that what works for most does not work for some” (p. 204). The possibility of a culture clash between maintaining academic standards and welcoming a diverse body of students must also be taken into account (James & Simmons, 2007). A level of tension may arise in circumstances where

those professionals trained to work in the professional worlds of standards and results encounter children with significant SEN (Brantlinger, Jiminez, Klingler, Pugach & Richardson, 2005; Jones, 2005; Kalambourka, Farrell, Dyson & Kaplan, 2007). In this setting, previously held ideals of achievement may count for little when dealing with children with profound and multiple disabilities (Evans & Lunt, 2002). Pupils with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) may also seriously challenge the faith of teachers in their standard “toolbox” (Hanko, 2002; James & Freeze, 2006). In an attitudinal survey conducted with twenty teachers, Rose (2001) observed that it is teachers’ perceptions of the challenge, as opposed to the core of the challenge itself, which has affected progress in making the concept of inclusion truly inclusive in practice.

In a meta-analysis of teachers’ perceptions ranging over twenty three years and surveying 10, 560 teachers over twenty eight surveys, Scruggs and Masteropieri (1996) produce findings to demonstrate that attitudes towards inclusion are strongly tied to both confidence in skills and access to resources. The authors note the positive correlation between the extent of professional training and attitudes towards the concept of inclusion. A strong factor in the development of teacher self efficacy is that they have received professional education to enable them to meet anticipated challenges in their work (Horne & Timmons, 2009). This study, therefore, will closely examine teachers’ views on their professional training for the implementation of inclusive education. Although this study seeks to explore the attitudes, views and experiences of serving teachers, it also takes into account their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) which would have played a large part in moulding their professional persona (O’Brien & Schiallaci, 2002). In the case of newly qualified teachers (NQTs), it may represent their most recent contact with teacher educators, as opposed to more experienced teachers who may have been able to avail of some form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) during the course of their careers.

## ***Teacher Education / Professional Development for Inclusive Education in Initial Teacher Education***

A major report on teacher education, The James Report (Great Britain, 1972) viewed professional education of teachers as being comprised of three cycles. The first phase is that of initial teacher education which occurs prior to full entry to the teaching profession. The second phase is the induction process when teachers have just begun their teaching careers. In-service or continuous professional development (CPD) comprises the third and on-going phase of professional development. This section of the literature review uses this sequence of development throughout.

### **Initial Teacher Education (ITE)**

On a surface level, initial teacher education would appear to be the juncture at which most opportunity arises to equip future teachers for a working life in inclusive classroom (Garmon, 2004). Those students at present attending Colleges of Education (as undergraduates of the Bachelor of Education ( B.Ed.) or Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes are the most easily served. Unlike fulltime teachers, they are already on campus and are not yet depended upon on a daily basis to cater for a class of students. The duration of their course should allow for continuous and concentrated input in the area of teaching pupils with SEN.

The SEN pre-service professional education inputs can be divided into three sections: Permeation, Focused Elements and Optional Elements. The permeation model involves the integration of special needs education into all components of the course. Each subject tutor is

expected to address such concepts as: differentiating the lesson content, adjusting the pace of the lesson, use of resources and methods for the assessment of the efficacy of those provisions. This model has many strengths observes Mittler (1992), in that it places the teaching of SEN pupils within the realm of the standard curriculum teaching and not in the domain of “specialist” lecturers. It also allows more time to be devoted to SEN education/training. The major flaw is that it depends entirely on the quality of each individual tutor. Golder, Norwich and Bayliss (2005) also point to the fact that permeation, “can become invisible and therefore difficult to monitor” (p. 93). A study by Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000, p. 290) involving a survey of eighty one teachers, reveals that many students viewed their experience of permeation as “unplanned and incoherent”.

Focused Elements refer to the model where special needs issues can be provided at one or more points in the course. In contrast to the permeated approach, focused courses are provided in a self-contained module, provided by specialist staff. A survey study by Garner (1996a) of 52 NQTs, reveals that far more student teachers rated the “discrete” SEN course as more satisfactory than the permeated model.

Optional Elements are those available in addition to the compulsory requirements needed to gain accreditation. Students are offered the opportunity to study particular aspects of SEN at a greater depth or at a more specialised level. This usually involves placement in a setting where the student teacher will work with a child with SEN. Because of pressure of numbers, this option is not generally available to all prospective teachers; an outcome regretted by many students (Garner, 1996a, 1996b; Hastings & Oakford, 2003). Attitudinal effects brought about by contact between student teachers and pupils with SEN seem at first glance to be somewhat contradictory. Some researchers, utilising data from questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation



(Avramidis et al., 1999; Bishop & Jones, 2002; Jobling & Moni, 2004 ) maintain that student contact with SEN pupils promotes a more positive attitude; on the basis that, “personal contact with disabled people can give the disabled a face and a body of flesh and blood whose rights cannot be disregarded as easily as those of a theoretical course” (Vanderfaeille, Fever & Lombaerts, 2003, p. 276).

Other writers (Hastings, Hewes, Lock & Witting 1996 ; Tait & Purdie, 2000) felt that contact with SEN pupils does not significantly alter students’ attitudes. Whereas the study by Hasting et al. had a relatively small sample of students (one hundred and twenty five), the research undertaken by Tait and Purdie involved 1,626 student teachers. However, the quality of such contact needs to be considered. Hastings, in a later article (Hastings & Oakford, 2003) qualified these findings by pointing out that mere contact with pupils with SEN by student-teachers, was not, in itself, enough to bring about attitudinal change. He felt that if contact is made only on an intergroup level (group of student teachers meet class of SEN pupils), negative attitudes are unlikely to change. If the contact is at an interpersonal level where each student works with an individual SEN pupil, negative stereotypes are likely to break down (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman & Earle, 2006). This high quality, but supervised and supported contact, is especially critical where pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties are concerned, comment Hastings and Oakford ( 2003) following a questionnaire survey of 93 student teachers. The need to have students’ experiences structured is also strongly emphasised by Brownlee and Carrington (2000). A survey of 1155 student teachers by Romi and Leyser (2006) indicated that extended theoretical SEN training without the requisite successful, supported, experience with SEN pupils can have the effect of increasing concerns and lessening student-teachers’ support for inclusion.

In the international literature, there is much evidence of unease about the adequacy of the consistency and level of training provided for pre-service teachers in the area of SEN. The provision of SEN training for student teachers has been described as *ad hoc* (Garner, 1996b), in the United Kingdom, *piecemeal* in the United States of America (Kamens, Loprete & Slostad, 2000) and *fragmented* and *poorly managed* (Forlin, 1995) in the Australian context.

Kearns and Shevlin (2006) reported on the findings of a research study which looked at the initial preparation of teachers for SEN in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Thirteen providers of initial teacher education participated in the study. The authors found that the number of hours allocated for the teaching of students in the area of SEN varied from a maximum of 90 hours to a minimum of 30 hours, with the lower amount being allocated to postgraduate students. These findings indicate that Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) have had a variety of inputs into the teaching of children with SEN, with some being given theoretical perspectives only, while others gained experience of being in a classroom with children who have SEN.

### *Induction*

Even for the most enthusiastic, hardworking and committed student teachers, fulltime caring for a class of children brings many challenges. For the first time they are taking sole responsibility for the teaching of a classroom of pupils. Gold and Roth (1993, p. 7) point out that beginning teachers are “a special needs group” still at the “survival stage” (Day, 2002, p. 423) and therefore in need of considerable support. Teaching is a stressful occupation for all practitioners (Gold & Roth, 1993; Woods & Carlyle, 2002) but far more so for young beginning teachers (Jepson & Forrest, 2006) who are expected “not only to teach but also to learn to teach” (Worthy, 2005, P. 381). No matter how good a student they may have been in their College of

Education, they now discover that everyday teaching may not always conform to theories covered in lectures. Koetsier and Wubbels (1995) write on the “reality shock” that beginning teachers experience in their first year. For many, if not most Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), there appears to arise a level of cognitive dissonance between theory learned in college and the daily reality of working life. They discuss “transition shock” and have expressed dissatisfaction with, “the bridge between theory and practice” (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997, p. 9) and have come to view theory and practice as, “two independent domains linked by a tenuous act of faith” (Russell, 1988 cited in Smethem & Adey, 2005, pp. 1/2). This view is echoed in the Irish context by Kellaghan (2004, p. 23) who conjectures that students frequently have difficulty in relating the relevance of their course work to practice and interpreting it in the context of their actual teaching.

Perhaps full-time responsibility for a class of pupils, rather than a supervised practicum, wonderfully concentrates the mind. The newly qualified teacher is now at the liminal verge, “the phase in the lifetime of a teacher between the experience at preservice and that of becoming a fully qualified professional” (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, p. 3). NQTs now begin to link elements of their experiential and theoretical knowledge and also begin to actively seek to develop skills and strategies in which they feel that they are lacking. At this stage of self-questioning, teachers may be at their most receptive to new concepts and approaches. As students, with perhaps short and intermittent contact with SEN pupils, they may not have been able to realise the significance of the SEN education provided in college (Hobson, 2003). When faced with the challenge of preparing for, teaching, and assessing a pupil with SEN, NQTs may now wish to become active participative learners rather than merely passive students. This may be the optimum time for influencing attitudes, as studies have reported that teachers were most positive about inclusion

in their first two years of teaching (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin et al., 2008; Goddard & Foster, 2001). At this stage in their career observes Hargreaves (2005), “They have no habits to abolish, nor practices to abandon” (p. 873) and therefore are more open to educational change and reform.

In the Irish context, induction is a relatively new (and numerically restricted) support offered to NQTs. A Pilot Programme was initiated in 2002. This programme was incrementally expanded on a yearly basis. In 2010 the programme catered for 578 NQTs in 250 schools, supported by 224 mentors (personal communication by researcher with the Director of the National Pilot on Teacher Induction). Until recent times, decisions shaping the provision of initial teacher education were predominantly within the ambit of the Department of Finance (who funded such education) and the then titled Department of Education (who validated the provision of such education prior to approving the disbursement of approved funds). The passing of the Teaching Council Act (Ireland, 2001b) laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Teaching Council body to oversee the promotion of teaching as a profession, promote professional development and regulate standards in that profession.

The establishment of the Teaching Council, in 2006, saw the entry of this major new actor in fields of policy formation and policy implementation in the area of teacher education. A draft policy document published by the Teaching Council (Teaching Council, 2010) stressed the importance of the induction process, outlining its policy as, “being based on a keen appreciation that teaching is an instance, *par excellence*, of lifelong learning and that initial teacher education cannot furnish “finished products”. (p. 13). The report also recommended that induction should be available to all NQTs and that satisfactory completion of such a programme be a requirement for registration as a teacher. In an address to the Magill Summer School, in July, 2010, the

Minister for Education and Skills, Mary Coughlan, T.D., affirmed the Council's stance (DES, 2010a). She announced that from September, 2012, induction would become a mandatory, rather than optional, requirement of teacher qualification and registration. This programme was to be provided through a variety of modes and would require attendance of a minimum of twenty hours, out of school time, over the course of the school year. Whereas at present a relatively small number of teachers have availed of the induction element of the continuum of teacher education, all teachers in the very near future will have this input as an integral part of their teacher education.

### ***Continuous Professional Development (CPD) or In-Service Training (INSET)***

“Teachers are the only constant feature in the changing map of education provision” observes Clements (1999, p. 31). As a working teacher with over thirty five years experience in Irish primary schools, this researcher would concur. And yet, within that constancy, a large level of continuous adaptation, if not change, is needed. It is not only curricular changes that teachers must learn to absorb. They need to be able to see themselves as part of the broader weft and weave of their surrounding culture. The teacher cannot be viewed simply as a technical transmitter of empirical knowledge. S/he may also be called to act in the role of moral leader, public intellectual and change agent of society (Dewey, 1916/1966; Quicke, 1998). The educational system, then, can be seen as the informal matrix for the transmission and validation of the ever-changing values of the dominant political and cultural structures (Curran, 2007; Dunne, 2002; Kateb, 1989; Oancea, 2005; Zufiaurre, 2007). It would appear that teachers must consider the (possibly intemperate) view of Smelter and Rasch (1994) that in their schools they may be, “social engineers rather than educators” (p. 36).

Coping with such levels of flux in both external changes in the surrounding society and internal changes in core roles of teaching, indicates that no one single level of training or education is sufficient. Kellaghan (2004) observes that preservice training is only the first of several stages in teachers' professional development. In the Swedish context, Ahl and Nilsson (2000) advocate recurrent in-service, now more commonly referred to as Continuous Professional Development (CPD) after basic formation. Classroom management skills required for the inclusive classroom need to be refreshed on an ongoing basis as the nature of the student body becomes more diverse (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Lupart, 1998) The provision of irregular short courses is not satisfactory (Dirkx, 2006). At present the Department of Education and Skills, through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) provide short courses of CPD for self-identified needs of schools and individual teachers, but these cannot be seen as part of a planned continuum and depend on the sense of agency of individual principals and schools. Other writers (Villa, Thousand & Chapple, 1996) have also cautioned teacher educators (and those providing the finances) against the "one shot" training experience. This view is strongly endorsed by Drakenberg (2001). Hoban and Erickson (2004) point out that short courses only provide short-term gain and must be supplemented by long-term courses to cope with the pace and complexity of change. What is needed according to van Kraaynoord (2003) is, "a move away from one-off professional workshops to a more sustained and complex form of contact among teachers and those who support them" (p. 363).

In the Irish context, major initiatives in teacher professional development appeared to be undertaken only when policy makers sought to implement new practices or approaches. A cynic might view such education as a possible emollient to smooth the expected choppy waters caused by asked-for changes in teachers' long serving routines. In the Irish context, teachers, in recent

years, have attended more professional development (usually day-long) courses than at any previous time in the history of the State. This transpired in order to ensure the state-wide implementation of the revised primary school curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) and the initiation of visible and accountable school planning. Each school in the State received the same provision, irrespective of its size, location or cultural environment. In some senses this may deepen the belief of teachers in Ireland that all professional development must be of the same content, must be organised centrally by the DES and must be available without the need for personal reflection, payment or individual application, to the entire Irish teaching force; leading to an entrenched “dependency culture” (Sugrue & Uí Thuama, 1997). It is interesting to note that the advent of inclusive education, itself a challenge to the long established quotidian primary schooling regime, merited no such initiative. More modest interventions by groups such as the Special Education Support Service (SESS) have made their expertise available to schools, but only on a limited basis due to their level of funding and staffing. One-day professional development courses facilitated by Education Centres are frequently aimed towards (or at least attended by) teachers whose job description appears to place them in the area of “expertism” i.e. resource teachers and learning support teachers.

The fact that the contemporary world is characterised by uncertainty and instability, remarks Sugrue (2002), means that teachers are increasingly being asked to reinvent themselves. Because change is constant, teachers’ skills must not remain static. Teachers, like most other professionals, will need to retrain or “upskill” as the situation requires. The lack of planned and structured professional development for serving teachers is not unique to Ireland. Robson, Sebba, Mittler and Davies (1988, p. 3) make the telling comment, “it is chastening to contrast the

quantity and quality of professional updating of knowledge and skills which is available to a young person in the field of human service with that open to certain other professions”.

That continuous professional development in the area of inclusive education is, “axiomatic” (McLeskey et al., 2001) for ensuring that teachers are well prepared for successfully implementing inclusive programmes, seems beyond doubt. Who then should provide ongoing professional development, whether in general pedagogy or inclusive education, and by what methods? How to circumvent the logistical difficulties of providing ongoing education to a large body of teachers is quite a conundrum. Traditionally, the teaching force in Ireland looked to the DES to fund and organise virtually all forms of professional education. In the current cultural and economic climate, there may be a need to move away from such a paternalistic orientation to a situation where teachers seek out CPD pertinent to their current needs.

There is some evidence that teachers are being encouraged to accept personal responsibility for upskilling in the teaching of SEN pupils. *In Touch*, the official publication of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), a professional body representing the vast majority of Irish primary school teachers, now carries many pages of advertisements for both long and short courses in the areas of inclusive education, SEN and additional learning needs. Such courses are not targeted at “specialists” such as learning Support / Resource Teachers, but rather at classroom teachers who wish to augment their skills in teaching a diverse pupil population. This study will examine teachers’ awareness of existing supports for CPD and their attitude towards availing of such support.

The advent of electronic, or online, distance teacher education may assist in making professional development more widely available. Advertisements for online courses in the area of inclusive education, special educational needs and additional learning needs are currently to



be found in both teacher journals and national newspapers. In the traditional method, course places were limited by availability of premises and lecturers and also by the geographical location of potential participants. Online education allows teachers to remain in class, it allows teachers away from urban centres to access further education and it allows teachers more flexibility in timetabling their continuing education and also to communicate with other teachers on a state-wide basis (Heubner & Wiener, 2001). In one sense, then, online CPD could be described as more democratic than the traditional methods as it is more easily accessible to a greater number of teachers (Jung, 2005).

There are however, some *caveats*. Even strong advocates of online distance education admit that it, “is not a panacea” (Heubner & Wiener, 2001, p. 521) pointing out that although electronic data bases had been provided, some students had never learned how to use them. The authors also noted that the most successful students tended to be, “highly-motivated, self-disciplined, and generally older” (p. 522). In addition, there are questions about the type, nature and duration of such courses (Signer, 2008). In this study, participants are asked about their experience of such courses and their views about how they conceive the optimum provision of modules on SEN. The options of face-to-face contact, online presence, or blended courses are also explored.

### *Teacher Identity*

While in any occupation one must invest some of one’s personal “self” and derive some personal satisfaction from the work, the literature suggests that, in teaching, the personal and professional selves are inextricably linked (Hargreaves, 1994; Huberman, 1993; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Jackson, 2002 ; Kelchtermans, 1996; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Lortie, 1975; Nias, 1989, 1996). Much research demonstrates that teachers place emphasis on the intrinsic

rather than extrinsic rewards of the profession (Barmby, 2006). Teachers are not simply, “well-oiled machines” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835) who use their professional skills to impart previously defined areas of curricular knowledge (Kelchtermans, 1996). A teacher’s greatest resource may lie just as much in their character and personality as in equipment or technical skills. If one accepts the premise that, “teaching involves caring deeply about students as human beings” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 372) it follows that the essence of their work is the quality of the intensive interpersonal relationship between themselves and their pupils. Central to this, is of course, the social, communication, managerial and leadership skills of the teacher. Nias (1989) remarks, “what gets taught is the teacher” (p. 14), pointing out that teachers invest their “selves” in the teaching profession. For many, if not most teachers, professional success in the classroom is equated to a sense of personal satisfaction and happiness.

Accepting that such an altruistic attitude may be regarded as laudable, there are some inherent dangers. In the caring or assisting professions such as teaching, the work / life equilibrium may become distorted (Crocker & Park, 2004; Walkinton, 2005) to the extent that an individual may stake their overall self-esteem on their perceived success as a teacher. Haywood-Metz (1993) observes that teachers who depend on intrinsic rewards are extremely vulnerable to their students – students who, “can confirm or deny such teacher’s pride of craft” (p. 104). An important part of that craft is classroom management; the teacher’s ability to organise and control activities and movements within the class. In a study of 200 elementary school teachers, using the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Bibou-Nakou, Stogiannidou and Kiosseoglou (1999) found that the vast majority of classroom teachers consider classroom management to be of major importance to their sense of professionalism. The term “discipline” in the educational context has become associated with the pejorative connotation of the martinet, and yet without

some level of predictable control, very little teaching or learning may be possible (Soodak, 2003). Classroom discipline is, “an absolute prerequisite to achieving instructional objectives and safeguarding students’ psychological, social and physical well-being” (Zeidner, 1988 quoted in Brackenreed and Barnett, 2006, p. 156). The presence of students with significant SEN in the classroom may pose challenges for the class teacher (Blake & Monahan, 2007). Projected learning outcomes may not be achieved, causing the teacher to doubt their instructional efficacy. For a variety reasons (e.g. cognitive, emotional, behavioural, socialization) some of this group may not be willing or able to comply with routine classroom instructions.

Resistance to directions from the teacher can lead to confrontation with the child and embarrassment for the class teachers who fear the loss of their “personal dignity in the open court of the classroom ... with pupils sometimes as judge, jury and executioners” (Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985, p. 242). Teachers worry that the denting of their personal and professional personas are not confined to the limits of the classroom walls. Because the classroom is a “fishbowl” (Kletchtermans, 1996), open to scrutiny from many quarters, the teacher is sensitive to the possibility that s/he is being observed, and perhaps assessed, by principal, colleagues and, crucially, by parents’ of the pupils, observed Friedman (2003) in a survey of 322 Israeli primary school teachers.

There is considerable evidence to indicate that younger (or novice) teachers are most accepting of, and most enthusiastic towards, the inclusion of children with SEN (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Bennettet al., 1997; Forlin et al., 2008; Leyser, Kapperman & Keller, 1994; Scruggs & Masteropieri, 1996; Zambelli & Bonni, 2004). Such a level of commitment may, however, contain the seeds of its own destruction. The *persona of perfectionism* identified by

Hargreaves, (1994) in all teachers, is even more entrenched in novice teachers (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006) who, in their efforts to establish their professionalism, may not be willing to admit to difficulties or seek advice from colleagues. Strong commitment to an ideal without the personal or material resources to carry it to fruition may lead to a level of disenchantment (Kletchermans, 1996; McLeskey et al. 2001; McLeskey & Waldron, 2003).

### *The Emotional Lives of Teachers*

Until the relatively recent past, Huberman's (1993) portrayal of the teacher as an, "independent artisan", or, "a tinkerer or an instructional handiman...who can put to use a host of materials lying around at various stages of a construction or repair job" (p. 14) may have been a description acceptable to the general public and, indeed, to some members of the teaching community. In recent years, however, much emphasis has been placed on the enhancing of pedagogical competencies of teachers (Fendler, 2003; Fielding, 1999; Mockler, 2005), what McLaughlin (in Little & McLaughlin, 1993) terms, "a focus on the technology of teaching" (p. 88). Improving the skills of teachers cannot be faulted but it must also be borne in mind that the teacher, "is not a mere technician" (O'Gorman, 2007, p. 104). The sense of self-fulfilment, success and personal satisfaction (or lack thereof) in teaching reside not, perhaps, in the area of cognitive, rational processes but rather in the realm of the affective.

Hargreaves (1998), long time writer on teacher education and teachers' working lives, is firmly of the opinion that, "emotions are at the heart of teaching" (p. 835). Given that teaching involves intense interpersonal relationships between teacher and pupils (Gu & Day, 2007, this assertion appears to be merely stating the obvious. And yet, as outlined in the rationale section of this thesis, there appears to be a dearth of research in this important area. In a special issue of

*Teaching and Teaching Education* focusing on emotions in teaching, Reio (2005) decries this lack of attention, pointing to the importance of, “the role of teachers’ emotions in the formation of their identities as teachers” (p. 985). This lacuna is also commented on by Shoffner (2009) who views the role of teachers’ emotions as being under-recognised in teacher education policy. One factor in this lacuna may be that emotionality is viewed as being antithetical to professionalism (Sutton & Wheatly, 2003).

It is not just teachers who feel that emotions must be moderated. Hochschild (2003) discusses some of the societal and managerial pressures which come to bear on all workers who are in everyday contact with members of the public. Many teachers may feel that it is “unprofessional” for a teacher to display his / her interior emotions, that a “true” professional will always maintain the mask of what Nias (1997) describes as, “professional pleasantness” (p. 12) and what Grandey (2000) deems, “surface acting” (p. 381). Working in, “often in crowded conditions, with large numbers of pupils who are frequently energetic, spontaneous, immature and preoccupied with their own interests” (Nias, 1996, p. 296) obviously must generate a number of negative emotions such as anger, frustration and disappointment. Jackson (2002) points out that in the “helping professions” (p. 135) there is frequently a tendency to deny feelings of hatred or rejection towards clients. He views teachers as being in a paradoxical situation where, although the pupil-teacher relationship plays a key role in the learning process, the subject of pupil-teacher attachments and relationships is one that teachers find difficult or even threatening.

In an attempt to to reconcile interior “unallowable” feelings and “professional pleasantness”, teachers need to become adept at emotional regulation, “a process by which individuals influence emotions they have, when they have them and how they experience and express theses emotions” commented Gross (1998, p. 275), in an integrative review on the topic

of emotional regulation. In discussing the concept of teaching as “emotional labour”. Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) cite studies indicating that, for some teachers, attempting to resolve conflicts between the positive and negative emotions engendered by their work can be both stressful and alienating from their pupils.

In addition to this internal balancing of emotions, teachers also have to reconcile contradictory external expectations, where they are expected to be, “considerate and kind, yet demanding and stern, or optimistic and enthusiastic even when harbouring private doubts and misgivings” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 836). Job demands which entail conflicting values and which are not mitigated by personal control, observe Gugliemi and Tatrow (1998), create conditions which tend to produce distress, and possibly burnout, in teachers.

### *Teacher Feelings of Guilt*

With so many conflicting expectations, both from within the person and from outside society, it is not surprising that Hargreaves (1994) contends, “Guilt is a central preoccupation for teachers” (p. 142). While it must be accepted that some level of guilt may act as a factor towards motivation or innovation, Hargreaves (1994, 1998) views teachers’ sense of guilt as qualitatively different to that of other professions. For teachers, this guilt becomes, “bound up with overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 142). Much of this guilt derives from what may be an overemphasis on the concept of *caring* in the persona of the teacher. When accepting responsibility for children, and in particular for young children, it is axiomatic that a teacher must exercise a level of care for their charges e.g. maintaining a safe physical environment, ensuring adequate nutrition, providing suitable learning opportunities. If, however, caring becomes the central motif of a teacher’s life, it may, paradoxically, reduce the

quality of service provided by the teacher. If the purpose of schooling is, as a number of authors have asserted (Nias, 1997; Barrow, 2001; Hegarty, 2001), to enhance children's cognitive skills, the overemphasis on the caring element may cause the teacher to reduce the level of challenge within the learning tasks. Such an approach is undertaken from the best possible motives on the part of the teacher; promoting the self-esteem of the child by ensuring success and strengthening the teacher-pupil relationship by providing "fun" activities. In the current cultural climate cautions Hanks (2002), there may be a danger of regarding education, "solely in affective terms and not also in cognitive ones" (p. 383).

Due to the obvious needs of a child with SEN, the promotion of the sense of caring and the experiencing of the emotion of guilt may be even stronger. Some teachers complain of insufficient time for planning both differentiated work for the pupil with SEN and for collaborative planning with others who work with that child, causing them to worry about their ability to provide suitable learning materials for children with SEN (Gale, 2001; Soodak, 2003). Teachers often express a sense of guilt that they are not spending sufficient time with this cohort of pupils (Angelides, 2000; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Berry, 2007; Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Egelund & Hansen, 2000b). There is also a sense of competing guilt that the typically developing children in the class are being disadvantaged by the extra time spent by the class teacher with the child who has SEN (Forlin, 2008; Lohrman, Boggs & Bambara, 2006; O'Donoghue & Chalmers, 2000; Rose, 2001). Possibly due to the fact that much of the literature on inclusion is written by enthusiasts, speculates Rose (2001), it is rarely considered that pupils with SEN may take up, "an inordinate amount of time when compared to their peers" (p. 153).

Such conflicts appear to be almost irreconcilable and predicate the generation of more negative emotions than would be expected in a classroom in which there is not a pupil with significant SEN. Roll-Pettersen (2008) remarks on the anger and frustration of teachers who feel that their work, “may be blocked by their inability to address the learning problems of difficult-to-reach students” (p. 184) while maintaining the progress of the other class pupils. In a survey of 571 Australian primary school teachers, Forlin (2001) reports that 96% of the group felt that their difficulty in monitoring other students while attending to the child with SEN was a considerable source of stress. This issue will be one of the areas investigated in this study.

### ***Teachers’ Attitudes to the Perceived Severity of a Child’s SEN***

As with all children, pupils with SEN cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group. Although “hard” inclusivists (Low, 2007) would prefer to place emphasis on all children as simply being part of a diverse group, categories or labels are used for administration purposes by those who fund extra resources for children with SEN and by teachers and teacher educators for descriptive purposes. There would appear to be a level of general agreement in the research findings on teachers’ perceptions of a hierarchical order of difficulty in coping with the needs of various categories of SEN. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) point out that teachers were most positive about those pupils who did not require extra instructional or management skills from the teacher. This group tended to comprise children with mild physical or sensory impairments. However, Forlin (1995) observes, as the severity of the disability increased, the level of acceptance by teachers declined. The second most challenging group of pupils for teachers are those young people with intellectual disabilities (Forlin, 2001; 2008; Forlin & Hattie, 1996; O’Donaghue & Chalmers, 2000). This group of children may evoke resistance and feelings of



anxiety in class teachers note Engelbrecht et al., (2003) in a meta-analysis of the literature in this area. It must be remembered, however, pupils do not always fit neatly into a single category of disability. Teachers working with children with intellectual disabilities may have to deal with more than cognitive delays and the differentiation arising therefrom. Within the population with a moderate general learning disability, for example, there exists a high comorbidity of physical, sensory, communication and emotional difficulties. Dekker and Koot (2003) calculate the prevalence of such comorbidity within the target population of their study of 474 children to be at a level of 37%.

The group of children which presented most difficulty for teachers, and that teachers were most apprehensive about, was the cohort of pupils with the categorisation of Emotional Behavioural Disorder (EBD). Due to their unpredictable behaviour, their emotional outbursts and their apparent inability to adhere to general school norms and rules, children with EBD have been regarded as the group most difficult to be included in mainstream education (Angelides, 2000; Croll & Moses, 2000; Egelund & Hansen, 2000a; Flem & Keller, 2000; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Maras & Kutnik, 1999; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Talmor et al., 2005). In a survey of pre-service teachers, Brackenreed and Barnett (2006) report that teachers are particularly anxious about including children who have the propensity to either run away from the classroom or to engage in sexually explicit behaviours. There are a few dissenting voices in this consensus. Soodak (2003) has published research which indicated that teachers were more anxious regarding the inclusion of pupils with intellectual or physical disabilities than those pupils with behavioural disorders. A slightly different hierarchy of teacher perception of difficulty is also indicated by research published by Avramidis and Kalyva (2007).

Those pupils with the label of EBD are of considerable interest for a number of reasons. As mentioned above, they are the group which appear to cause teachers most difficulty in the inclusive process. In the Irish context those pupils diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are classified as having an emotional disturbance and are granted resource teaching hours and possibly the support of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) under the guidelines of the NCSE (NCSE, 2009a). The international literature suggests that this type of disability is the fastest growing of all categories. Norris and Lloyd (2000) have established that in the English context, between 1991 and 1996 that the number of prescriptions for methylphenidate (commonly used in the treatment / management of ADHD) had increased by over 2000 per cent. The most recent data available from the NCSE reveals that the combined categories of emotional behaviour disturbance / severe emotional behavioural disturbance account for 27% of the total number of primary school pupils in receipt of Low Incidence resource teaching hours. (Tables 1 and 2)

### *Special Needs Assistant (SNA)*

The inclusion of a child with significant SEN in a mainstream classroom may result in more contact for the classroom teacher with other adults than would normally occur. As alluded to in the previous section, a child identified with a significant SEN is frequently entitled to the services of an SNA. There can be little doubt that the SNA has the potential to be a very valuable asset to both the classroom teacher and the supported child (Rose, 2001). Although this thesis lays strong emphasis on the fact that the classroom teacher spends most time with the child with SEN, some writers observe that it may be the SNA who is in closest personal contact with this child over the school day (Cobb, 2005; Lacey, 2001; Moran & Abbott, 2002) but who may, in

fact, have least training for this work (French, 2001). While concurring with this view, Takala (2007) is concerned that the use of the SNA, “has become a primary mechanism to implement more inclusive schooling practice” (p. 51). Such a view raises questions about the professional role of the classroom teacher as educator with responsibility for all children.

While the roles of the SNA may encompass such duties as helping the pupil, helping the teacher and guiding learning situations (Logan, 2001), it would appear that it is the professionally qualified educator who should direct such activities. Such a role requires not merely pedagogical skills but also people-managing and supervisory skills (Rueda & Monzo, 2005; Thomas, 1992; Werts, Harris, Tillery & Roark, 2004). For many teachers accustomed to being sole rulers of their classrooms, this change may require a level of role adaptation (Logan, 2006; O’Brien, 2010). Friction between the teacher and SNA may result not alone in interpersonal difficulties but may also reduce the potential for inclusive education (Lawlor & Cregan, 2003). A teacher quoted in Moran and Abbott (2002) asserts that although the SNA is, “an invaluable asset”... the classroom teacher is the manager. There is a definite demarcation line” (p. 168).

Notwithstanding that most teachers welcome the additional help within the classroom, the presence of the SNA may also bring some difficulties. Without good management of such assistance, there exists the danger of the SNA becoming “glued”; (Lacey, 2001, p. 162) to the target child and thus inhibiting his/ her social interactions with class peers. Such a situation may promote exclusion rather than inclusion, as the continual presence of an adult may lessen the possibility of full social acceptance by peers. An over protective SNA, caution Moran and Abbott (2002), can reduce or stifle challenges that are necessary for the child’s cognitive,

physical or social growth. There is also some evidence of blurring of the role of classroom teacher and SNA in relation to contact with parents. Lacey's (2001) research indicates that in some instances parents had more contact with the SNA than did the class teacher and that some parents felt that information was primarily passed on through the SNA. Other research (Werts et al., 2004) suggests that the more severe the disability, the more likely this is to happen. The same research indicated that parents felt that SNAs should have a greater role in the writing of Individual Education Programmes (IEP) targets, a view endorsed in the Irish context by O'Neill (2008). The possibility of a level of friction between teacher and SNA arising from such situations is viewed as an issue worth examining in the study.

### ***Relationships between Classroom Teachers and Parents of Children with Significant SEN***

Parents / Guardians have a vital part in children's education. Article 42 of the Irish Constitution acknowledges (Ireland, 1937) that, "the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family". In an ideal world parents, and particularly parents of children with SEN, would be viewed as, "essential contributors to any continuum that seeks to meet the range of needs present in school today... experts in knowing the strengths and needs of their own children" (Day, 2007, p. 23). Parents of young persons with significant SEN have reported dissatisfaction with the value placed on their personal knowledge of their child by school authorities (Skrtic, 1995; Runswick-Cole, 2008). Much emphasis is now placed on the concept of parents as partners in their child's education. O'Connor (2007) comments that such a partnership model, "defines a relationship where teachers are viewed as being experts on education and parents are viewed as being experts on their children" (p. 539).

Such a neat definition, however, may become enmeshed in ambiguities in the context of the mainstream classroom; leading to, “the “no-man’s-land” that so often lies between the professional academic knowledge and the parents’ common sense or lay knowledge” (Laluvein, 2010, p. 195). Differing interpretations of what inclusive education should achieve may give rise to levels of tension between parents and teachers (Allan, 1996; Grove & Fisher, 2001; Pinkus, 2003). Farrell (2000) reports on levels of tension when differences arise between the views of teachers and parents as to best practices and learning targets for the child. This can result in something of a power struggle between parents and professionals as to whose views should prevail (Gale, 2001).

In addition to concerns about the school’s knowledge of their child’s abilities and needs, parents of children with significant SEN have also questioned the knowledge / skill base of mainstream teachers educating their child (Elkins, van Kraayenoord & Jobling, 2003; Palmer, Fuller, Arora & Nelson, 2001) and of the role and professional training of the teaching assistant (SNA) supporting their child (Soar, Gersch & Lawrence, 2006; Runswick-Cole, 2008; Werts et al., 2004). Parents who brought what they considered useful information to the attention of their child’s teacher sometimes felt that such assistance was ignored (Duncan, 2003). The need for a process of negotiation between parent and teacher is advocated by Laluvein (2010), in order to develop a level of reciprocity between, “teacher and parent’s personal judgement as to the value of additional information and his or her individual understandings of “good” pedagogic practice” (p. 197).

Lack of such mutual understanding can be a source of stress to teachers (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Interactions between teacher and parents, comments Lasky (2000), “can be

emotionally loaded” (p. 843) and thus possess the potential to either validate the teacher or cause self-doubt, frustration and anger. Parents of children with SEN, because of legislative imperatives, may have far more influence over their child’s education than their typically developing peers (Soodak, 2003). Understandably, parents of such vulnerable children tend to be very concerned and protective. For some parents, ensuring what they considered high quality education for their child with significant SEN, was considered to be, “exceptionally difficult and stressful compared to other troubling issues in their lives” (Duncan, 2003, p. 341). Parents of children with autistic spectrum disorder have expressed concern about their child’s ability to cope with noise, certain lighting, other children and verbal instructions in a mainstream classroom (Rogers, 2007) and experience anxiety about the potential social exclusion of their child (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Teachers may not always be fully aware of parental worries and concerns surrounding the school life of the child with significant SEN.

This conflict between the perspectives of parent and teacher may be brought into sharper focus, point out Nutbrown and Clough (2004), where parents are unwilling to accept the level of their child’s disability. The representation of parental involvement as non-controversial in the literature is challenged by Lloyd (2000), who suggests that, “parents may contribute to or even create their children’s SEN” (p. 135), a thorny issue which is generally ignored in the rhetoric of inclusion. In a survey of Australian teachers, Forlin (2001) reported teachers complaining of “excessive meetings” (p. 240) with the parents of pupils with SEN.

While recent research in the Irish context indicates a high level of parental satisfaction with the support provided for children with significant SEN, there is also, “a small but substantial proportion of parents” (NCSE, 2010, p. 79), who are dissatisfied. In this study, the

researcher will probe participating teachers' views on their relationships with parents of pupils with significant SEN in their classrooms.

### ***Research Question / Problem Statement***

A close examination of the literature, both in the Irish and international contexts, filtered through the lens of the writer's teaching and academic experience, prompts the following research question:

***What are the attitudes of Irish mainstream primary school teachers, in relation to the inclusion process, in whose classroom there is currently a child (or children) with significant special educational needs?***

Such a broad question must, necessarily, be broken into several sub-elements such as:

***(a) Professional development / Resources***

Do teachers consider that they have had adequate professional development for the implementation of inclusive education, both at pre-service, induction and in-service level?

What supports do teachers think are necessary for the optimum implementation of inclusive education in a mainstream classroom?

***(b) Personal impact / Personal experiences***

What positive experiences of inclusive education can be identified by classroom teachers?

Did the inclusion of a child with significant SEN cause the teacher to experience difficulty / stress in areas such as time management and adult supervisory skills?

Did the inclusion of a pupil with significant SEN pose challenges for the teacher's sense of self-efficacy in areas such as classroom management and pedagogical skills?

*(c) Emotional Reactions*

What, if any, emotional responses were evoked by the inclusion of a child with significant SEN? Affection, anger, caring, frustration?

What were the beliefs of teachers regarding the division of time / attention between the child with significant SEN and his / her classmates?

What are teachers' views on the appropriateness / inappropriateness on revealing their emotional responses to events in the classroom?

*(d) Influence of wider school environment on teacher attitude*

How would teachers describe their experiences of contact with, SNAs, school principal, teaching colleagues, the parents / guardians of the child with significant SEN in their classroom, and with external professionals / agencies also supporting that child?



*(e) Discourse around inclusion*

What are teachers' opinions on the overall process of inclusive education?

Do they believe that they can openly express their true beliefs and opinions?

What factors might promote / inhibit teacher discourse on inclusive education?

*Chapter Summary*

This chapter has examined the literature relating to teachers' work in the inclusive classroom. It has focused on areas of interest in this arena arising in the national and international literature. Recurring themes have been identified and utilised in the formulation of the research question, or problem statement, of this thesis. The following section discusses the methodology strategies chosen to prosecute the research question of this thesis.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology

*“Unless you can show your audience the procedures you used to ensure that your methods were reliable and your conclusions valid, there is little point in aiming to conclude a research dissertation”.* (Silverman, 2000, p. 175)

#### Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the attitudes of classroom teachers, who currently have within their class a child with significant SEN. This chapter outlines the writer’s overarching conceptual framework for the study. It further justifies the strategies chosen to prosecute the research question. Recruitment of the research participants, phases of the research procedure, ethical considerations, generation of data and the analysis of those data are described. Measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the study are also outlined.

#### *Researcher’s Stance on Research Paradigms*

Ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions, which in turn suggest methodological choice (Crotty, 2003). Our perception of what reality is dictates what our definition of knowledge might be, which in turn influences what methods we might choose to investigate what we consider facts and knowledge to be. It could be said that the arena of research can be divided into two major philosophical camps; adherents of *quantitative* research and the proponents of *qualitative* research. Quantitative research views itself as being founded on “the scientific method” – the method through which the natural sciences are investigated. The most substantial assumption in this conceptual framework is that objective knowledge (facts) can

be gained solely by direct experience and that results of any research should be replicable by other investigators.

In contrast to a research paradigm which sought measures of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency, a growing number of researchers began to look to a qualitative model; where, “the word “qualitative”, implies an emphasis on processes and meanings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 8) and the production of findings that are not arrived at by statistical procedures or any other means of quantification (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Whereas quantitative research believes that there is a reality out there to be studied, captured and codified; qualitative researchers, “assume a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Instead, they stress the social nature of reality – a reality “which exists in the minds of people and their interpretations” (Robson, 2002, p. 23) . Such a stance would dispute the concept of any single consensual reality, but rather, “assume that there are multiple realities, with differences between them that cannot be resolved through rational processes of increased data” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 14). In this study, the researcher adopted the middle ground between the above opposing positions. Accepting that there may be no universal reality, the concept of entirely individual personal realities poses serious problems for any form of research. Whilst locating the study firmly in the qualitative paradigm, this writer strongly agrees with Miles and Huberman (1994) in their view that, “Social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world – and that some lawful and reasonably stable relationships are to be found among them. The lawfulness comes from the regularities and sequences that link together phenomena” (p. 4).

As the investigation concerns human interactions and subjective perceptions, locating it within the overarching paradigm of qualitative research seems apposite. The researcher adopts

the ontological assumptions of constructionism, believing that meaning is not derived from an external reality but is a co-construction by human beings, primarily through the use of language (Blumer, 1969). The epistemological stance taken is that knowledge is not discovered but generated by all of those involved in the research process (Crotty, 2003). Such a view acknowledges that the researcher and the other participants in the study have the potential to influence each other, and thus influence any findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This has implications for the trustworthiness of the study. Measures undertaken to counter possible bias will be considered later in this chapter.

### *Theoretical Framework of Study*

Holding the above worldview of reality, and knowledge of that reality, suggests a number of theoretical frameworks to underpin any proposed research within such a paradigm. One might consider perspectives such as postmodernism, feminism, critical inquiry or some elements of interpretivism (Crotty, 2003; Flick, 1998; O' Donaghue, 2007). This writer has chosen to utilise the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism for a number of reasons, which will be explored in greater detail later in this section. The concept is associated with elements of sociology and psychology, brought originally to prominence by the writings of George Herbert Mead, particularly in his work, *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, 1934). This theoretic framework was further expanded upon by Herbert Blumer, who viewed this facet of the interpretivist framework as being underpinned by three central propositions:

- (a) Human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings that things have for them.
- (b) The meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction with one's fellows.

(c) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the thing he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p.2).

This theoretical framework seemed particularly suitable for the proposed study in that its central purpose is to investigate meaning generated by social interaction. For symbolic interactionists, the world is not simply “out there” awaiting scientific study but rather is, “socially and symbolically constructed” (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p.124) and is given meaning by the existence of symbols such as language. It focuses on subjective meanings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000) while taking into consideration the social context in which they occur. Flick (1998) quotes Styrker’s assertion that the fundamental methodological principle of symbolic interactionism is that the researcher, “has to see the world from the angle of the subjects he or she studies” (p. 18). Such a stance accepts, “that multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). This study seeks to understand the viewpoints of several teachers, and accepts that several individuals may have different views of the realities of including a child with SEN, each view being equally valid.

### *Research Design*

Having settled on an overall theoretical framework, consideration must now be given to methodology structures which might best fit the purpose of the research project. To seek the voice of teachers, one might select from a number of methodologies such as; survey research, grounded theory, heuristic inquiry, feminist standpoint research, among others. This researcher preferred to locate his research within the phenomenological research framework. The theoretic point of view adopted by phenomenology sees behaviour determined by the phenomena of

experience rather than by external reality, demonstrates a belief in the primacy of subjective consciousness, understands that consciousness bestows meaning, and that we gain knowledge not by directly reacting to outside conditions but by reflecting on our reactions to those conditions (Blumer, 1969; Cohen et al., 2000). Phenomenology can give us a wider perspective and allows us to, “get at the roots of human activity” (Husen, in O’ Donaghue, 2007, p. 22) by studying the nature and meaning of everyday experiences (van Manen, 1997).

### **Research Instruments**

While phenomenology proves an overarching theory for a proposed study, to operationalise the aims of the study, one or more discrete methods must be identified. This study seeks the views of teachers. The most obvious approach appears to be to simply ask them; but in what form? One method that is very suitable for gathering information and opinions and exploring people’s thinking and motivations is the interview method (Drever, 1995), viewed by and endorsed by Dilley (2004) as a, “way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds” (p. 129). Seidman (2006) views the interview process as, “being most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language (p. 7). The interview, observed Lincoln and Guba (1985), “permits the respondent to move back and forth in time - to reconstruct the past, interpret the present and predict the future” (p. 273), a focus of interest in this study.

Although the qualitative interview allows for great flexibility and freedom for the interviewer (Seidman, 2006), some quantitative researchers point to the danger of suggestibility on the part of the interviewee (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995) and bias on the part of the interviewer (Dilley, 2004). Such potential for bias was evaluated constantly throughout the study. The researcher adopted a reflexive stance during both data generation and data analysis

phases of the study. A reflective journal was maintained by the researcher, advice was sought from thesis supervisors and also from a critical friend. The data analysis procedure was constructed to make the process as transparent as possible not only to outside readers, but also to the researcher himself – thus allowing for ongoing evaluation of trustworthiness of potential findings.

### *Key Features of the Interview Methodology*

A semi-structured interview format was chosen for use in the study. Here the researcher has a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered, but the interviewee still has a wide degree of latitude on how to answer. Questions may not always follow in the exact order of the schedule and some questions may remain unasked. New questions can be asked to follow up on interviewees' replies that the researcher found interesting; allowing the interviewer to, "respond with skill, tact and understanding" (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 107). Whereas in a quantitative interview any variance from the established protocol will compromise the validity of the research, in the qualitative interview, a digression by the interviewee may frequently produce the most valuable data (Kvale, 1996). Quantitative interviewers are content with narrow and restricted responses (Denscombe, 2003), what Denzin and Lincoln (1998) view as, "a thin description" (p. 324). In a qualitative approach, the researcher, "reports not merely facts but also gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized that meaning, and reveals the experience as a process" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 324) resulting in a thick description.

### *Structure of Interviews*

Seidman (1998; 2006) advocated a series of three interviews to fully cover all aspects of data generation. I felt that it was unlikely that I would be able to get participants to commit to

such an onerous schedule and originally intended to ask participants to agree to two one-hour interviews. Taking all the above considerations into account, an interview schedule, divided into two sections was generated (Appendix A, Appendix B). These were later merged into a single interview (Appendix C). Reasons for this change are explained in section titled *Pilot Studies*, below. In formulating the questions, an attempt was made to cover those areas which the literature review has identified as being potentially fruitful avenues of discourse, while also keeping in mind Hatch's (2002) advice to allow for the researchers hunches about the phenomena that they are studying. However, the question phrasings have been constructed so as to be "loose" enough to allow participants to expand on their answers and perhaps to even formulate their own questions.

### **Teacher Diaries**

On reflection, I could see that using interviews as the sole means of data collection might lead to a rather thin or restricted vision of the participants' experiences. Ideally, I would have liked to sit in the classroom and observe the participating teachers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) commend the observation method as, "it maximizes the researcher's ability to grasp motives, beliefs and concerns, interests, unconscious behaviours and customs" of the participants (p. 273). Professional and financial restraints, however, prevented me from taking leave from my full-time teaching position in order to accomplish this. I then began to search for ways of augmenting the interview data. A search through the literature identified the concept of a teacher journal or diary. Robson (2002) observes that diaries can serve as proxy for observation in situations where it is difficult for direct observation to take place. Diary entries might add considerably to forming a view of the participants' daily working lives and provide a level of triangulation of data



generated in the interviews. On a somewhat reciprocal level, the entries in those journals might, indeed, help inform or re-shape the proposed interview schedules.

The core intent of this thesis is to explore the experiences, attitudes and emotions of the teacher. The literature, although somewhat more limited in the area of class teacher diaries than in other contexts (Kitching, Morgan & O'Leary, 2009), nevertheless indicated that such an approach might be useful in prosecuting the research question of this study. Journal writing can provide a vehicle for conveying inner thoughts and feelings (Hubbs & Brand, 2005); can help us puzzle through what is happening in our work and lives (English & Gillen, 2001); gives educators a chance to connect thoughts, feelings and actions (Jarvis, 2001); can be used by teachers to, "map particularly the simultaneous experience of routine positive and negative events in the classroom / school setting" (Kitching et al. 2009, p. 54), acts as a method of recording, "thoughts, reflections, feelings, personal opinions, and even hopes and fears" (Hiemstra, 2001, p. 20); and has the advantage of the immediate and experiential penetration in the related facts (Sá, 2002).

In these diaries, the perspectives of teachers themselves, on how they work and how they learn may be examined (Gilar, Ruiz & Costa, 2007). Entries also assist in developing the "voice" of the writer (Gleaves, Walker & Grey, 2008; McLeod & Cowieson, 2001); a major consideration of this study. The writing process, observes Boud (2001), provides an alternative voice for those less able to express themselves verbally, particularly in the sphere of feelings and emotions. The researcher's strategy towards responding to diary entries is covered in the section of this chapter entitled: *Gathering of Diary Entries*.

The above paragraphs have sought to establish a theoretical justification for the use of teacher journals as a research tool. Dealing with the practicalities of data generation, collection and analysis tends to be more problematical. Traditionally, journals or diaries have been associated with handwritten entries on a pad or paper (Hiemstra, 2001). Advances in technology now offer the opportunity to make diary entries in digital format. Such digital entries have been described as *e-mail cyberspace* (Russell & Cohen, 1997); *cyber-journals* (English, 2001), *electronic journaling* (Hiemstra (2001), *computer-mediated communication* (Shang, 2005). For teachers of a certain age, contact with pen and paper may be more aesthetically pleasing; but younger teachers may be more comfortable with using a keyboard rather than pen and paper. Whereas paper diaries have to be physically collected (posing difficulties if researcher and participants are at geographically distant locations), digital entries can be harvested easily, cheaply and frequently.

All participating teachers in this study were offered a choice of using either paper or electronic formats for their diary entries. In the case of those who indicated a preference for the electronic format, advice on the setting up and use of *Google docs* was emailed (Appendix D). For those using paper format, notepads and stamped addressed envelopes were supplied.

### **Participants**

Ideally, the study would cover each of the eleven categories of Low Incidence outlined in the guidelines issued by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2009a, p.7). Time constraints both for myself and potential participants precluded any form of stratified sample, which might be representative of all forms of inclusive education by classroom teachers in different types of schools. I decided to recruit potential participants through the use of a

convenience, but purposive, sample. My daily work and my attendance at various professional development courses have generated personal contacts among resource teachers. The cooperation of such a group of contacts also led to a form of snowball sampling, “a process of reference from one person to the next” (Denscombe, 2003, p. 17). A significant number of contacts was needed to ensure that a variety of Low Incidence categories would be covered in the interview research. The purpose of identifying and contacting such a group was four-fold: (a) identify classroom teachers who are providing inclusive education for pupils with a significant SEN (b) ascertain if those teachers would be willing to participate in this study (c) effect an introduction to such teachers (d) broach this proposed study with the school principal, prior to seeking formal, written permission, should an interview on the school premises be requested. Although a convenience sample was used in the study, a conscious attempt was made to seek teachers of both genders, teachers with differing lengths of teaching experience, teachers with differing ITE experiences, a variety of school types, differing SEN categories and differing ages of children with SEN. The recruitment of male participants proved more difficult than I had expected. Most of the more experienced male teachers that I contacted were now in Learning Support / Resource Teaching (LS / RT) posts rather than in the role of classroom teachers. A few male teachers initially agreed, informally, to take part in the study but subsequently withdrew. At the conclusion of the study I had succeeded in recruiting two young, early career, male teachers.

My original intention was to interview ten classroom teachers who were endeavouring to provide inclusive education for a pupil with a significant special educational need. This number later expanded to twelve, as I felt one category at, perhaps, the less challenging end of the SEN spectrum had not been covered and I was also anxious to have some male participants. At the conclusion of this study, twelve teachers had participated (Table 3).

**Table 3****Profile of Participating Teachers in Study**

(In the alphanumeric code identifying each teacher, the letters CT denote *Classroom Teacher* – the number allocated to each teacher indicates the serial order in which teachers were interviewed)

<b>Teacher ID no.</b>	<b>Teacher Gender</b>	<b>ITE</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>School Type</b>
CT 1	Female	*U/G (IRL)	2 Years	Urban/JNS/Mixed
CT 2	Female	U/G (IRL)	10 Years	Urban/JNS/Mixed
CT 3	Female	U/G (IRL)	6 Years	Urban/Vertical/Single Sex
CT 4	Female	U/G (IRL)	8 Years	Rural/Vertical/Mixed
CT 5	Female	U/G (IRL)	10 Years	Urban/JNS/Mixed
CT 6	Female	U/G (IRL)	35 Years	Urban/JNS/Mixed
CT 7	Female	U/G (IRL)	5 Years	Rural/Vertical/Single Sex
CT 8	Female	U/G (IRL)	25 Years	Urban/SNS/Mixed
CT 9	Female	U/G (IRL)	3 Years	Urban/Vertical/Single Sex
CT 10	Female	#PGCE (IRL)	2 Years	Urban/JNS/Mixed
CT 11	Male	PGCE (UK)	1 Year	Urban/SNS/Mixed
CT 12	Male	PGCE (IRL)	3 Years	Urban/SNS/Mixed

\*Undergraduate 3 Year Degree Course      # Post Graduate Certificate in Education

JNS = Junior National School    SNS = Senior National School    Vertical = Junior Infants to 6<sup>th</sup> Class

The researcher also made a conscious attempt to seek children with a variety of significant SEN categories and a mix of ages/class groupings and school types (Table 4)

**Table 4**

Profiles of Children with Significant SEN in the Study

Teacher	Gender of Child	Class Group	Child's SEN Category	Class Size	SNA
CT1	Male	1 <sup>st</sup>	Severe EBD	23	No
CT2	Male	Jn. Infant	Down Syndrome (Mod)+ Lang. Disorder	25	Yes
CT3	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Sensory / Intellectual Difficulties	27	Yes
CT4	Male	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup>	EBD + SLD	32	Yes
CT5	Female	Jn. Infant	Down Syndrome (Mod)+ Hearing Impairment	25	Yes
CT6	Male	1 <sup>st</sup>	ASD	26	No
CT7	Female	Sr. Infant	Physical / Sensory / SLD	28	Yes
CT8	Males	4 <sup>th</sup>	ASD / Asperger	29	Yes
CT9	Female	4 <sup>th</sup>	ASD	24	Yes
CT10	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>	EBD + Muscular Dystrophy	26	Yes
CT11	Male	5 <sup>th</sup>	EBD	28	Yes
CT12	Female	4 <sup>th</sup>	Specific Language Disorder	31	No

Mod = Moderate General Learning Disability    ASD = Autistic Spectrum Disorder    EBD = Emotional Behavioural Disturbance

While it was not possible to cover all discrete categories of Low Incidence needs, a judicious mixture was sought which covered the four areas viewed by the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004) as being causal factors of SEN: physical, sensory, mental health and learning disabilities.

Although the SEN categories above were those designated for which the child was granted Resource Teaching hours, some children also had a co-morbid, or secondary, difficulty. The child in CT2's classroom had a moderate intellectual impairment but also had a language disorder. In the case of CT4, the child suffered from Emotional Behavioural Disturbance but had also been diagnosed with Specific Learning Difficulty. CT5 was catering for a child with Down Syndrome, who was within the moderate intellectual impairment range but who also had hearing difficulties to a degree that warranted attention by the Visiting Teacher for the Deaf. The child under the care of CT 7 had both learning difficulties and physical / sensory impairments. While CT 10's Child X was granted support under the category of EBD, she also suffered from muscular dystrophy.

Although this is quite a small number of participating teachers, Howard and Johnson (2004) point out that, "it is not the purpose of qualitative research to produce generalisable findings applicable to whole populations" (p. 415) but rather to "flesh out" (in their study as in my study) aspects of teachers' lives. This viewpoint is also endorsed by Brantlinger et al. (2005) who consider that, "qualitative research is not done for purposes of generalization, but rather to produce evidence based on the exploration of specific context and particular individuals" (p. 203). Qualitative researchers argue that no direct relationship exists between the numbers of participants and the quality of the study (Hatch, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994), give comfort to the small-scale researcher when they comment, "you cannot study everyone,

everywhere doing everything” (p. 27) and advocate that the researcher in his or her sampling decisions might adopt the attitude, “I will look only at *some* actors in *some* contexts dealing with *some* issues (p. 23, original authors’ italics).

## Phase 1 of the Study

### *Pilot Studies*

Prior to the implementation of the main study, a pilot study was carried out, of both the interview schedule (Appendix A, Appendix B) and the teacher diary entries. Three classroom teachers, not involved in the main study participated in this pilot study. The participants in this pilot study, as in the main study, were offered a choice of venue e.g. school premises (after official end of school day) participant’s home or neutral public venue.

Each teacher was involved in the provision of inclusive education, having a child with significant SEN within their classroom. Sapsford and Jupp (1996) counsel that piloting is essential to assess the adequacy of the design and the instruments used. Irrespective of careful planning, “inevitable problems of converting the design into reality will be identified” in the pilot study (Robson, 2002, p. 383).

Reflection on the pilot phase resulted in changes to the interview schedules. Much of both initial interview schedules (Appendix A, Appendix B) tended to be covered in the first interview, as teachers spontaneously discussed items that were scheduled later in Appendix A or were to be covered in Appendix B. This frequently led a very truncated second interview. The original 31 questions to be asked over two interviews were now reduced to 29. Two questions were omitted; one seeking feedback on questions on the original first interview schedule and the

other aimed at getting the participant to reflect on topics to be probed in the second intended interview. The transcriptions of the pilot interviews indicated that at times a question might be either overlooked or not fully explored at the time of the interview. In the main study, therefore, I sought, and was granted permission from all participants for a follow-up interview, either in person or by telephone.

The pilot phase also revealed the need for more explicit instructions for participating teachers in the area of diary entries. Originally, teachers in the pilot study had been asked to record their observations of happenings in the inclusive classroom in which they taught. The teachers tended to give a timetabled account of their day rather than offering any insights into how they, in a personal way, experienced the provision of inclusive education in a mainstream classroom. Attention also tended to be focused on the child with significant SEN as an individual, with less emphasis on his / her social interaction with class peers. Measures to address this difficulty are outlined in section titled *Phase 3 of Study*, below.

## **Phase 2 of Study**

### *Meeting with Participating Teachers*

Throughout the months of September and October, 2009, I arranged short meetings with the participating teachers. The purpose of such meetings was to:

- (a) Introduce myself, in person, to each participant and hence increase familiarity. This “ice-breaking” meeting tended to put the participating teachers more at ease when it came to the interview stage.
- (b) To explain what my research project entailed.



- (c) Give some advice and guidance about the completion of diary entries.
- (d) Assure the participants that I was not meeting them in an “inspectorial” or supervisory role, but rather to elicit from them their true feelings about inclusive education.
- (e) To answer any question they might have about any aspect of my research.

### Phase 3 of Study

#### *Gathering of Diary Entries*

The participating teachers were requested to make diary entries three times a week (more if they wished) in the month leading up to the interview. Each participating teacher was spoken to either in person or by telephone call to discuss what the researcher was looking for in the diary entries. The researcher drew up a list of guidelines for the participating teachers as an *aide-mémoire*, rather than a list of instructions (Appendix E). This advice was not sent in printed form but discussed with the teacher, either in person, or by telephone call, in order to give an opportunity for questions and clarifications.

After long consideration about whether or not I should respond to the teachers' journal writings on an ongoing basis, I decided that I would not comment on the entries but would respond to direct questions. In the few cases where this arose, the writer was usually looking for confirmation that the type of entries were in line with what I required. Where a direct question was asked of me (CT 9), I contacted the participant by email and indicated that we could discuss that topic on the day of our interview session (Appendix F).

Of the twelve teachers who participated in the study, ten completed diary entries. One teacher (CT 1) explained that her school day with Child X was so distressing that she felt unable to relive her experiences after school. Another teacher (CT 12) was preparing for his Diploma (State certification of teaching competence) and so was unable to find time to make entries.

The first diary entry was received on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The final diary entry was completed on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Three of the diaries were in handwritten form, while seven of the participants utilized *Google Docs*, an email based means of communicating.

#### **Phase 4 of Study**

##### *Interview with Participating Teachers*

A semi-structured format (Appendix C) was used for each of the interviews conducted. This allowed me to change the order of questions, ask questions in more than one way, facilitated extra probe questions, and allowed the participant to spontaneously address issues that were further down the written / typed schedule. Keeping the advice of Hatch (2002), I kept a copy of the interview schedule in front of me and ticked off each item as it arose (Appendix C). This sheet also had a space set out for comments on aspects such as non-verbal gestures and silences (Seidman, 2006). At the end of each interview it was then possible to check that no question, or probe, had been omitted. In many cases, question topics overlapped in spontaneous responses from the participants. A research log of each interview was kept, outlining where, when and with whom and for how long the interview was held. A research journal (Appendix G), containing field notes, was also established in order to record my subjective view of that particular

interview, noting my, “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions and prejudices” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The fieldwork in this phase of the study was initiated on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and completed on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The majority of interviews were conducted in the months of November and December, 2009.

After examination of the raw data, I decided to address what I felt were omissions in the data set. Information supplied by the NCSE (Tables 1 and 2) indicate that that children diagnosed with a specific speech and language disorder constitute the second highest category granted specific support, at 20.28% of the primary school population in receipt of Low Incidence support. Although some other children referred to in this study had such a disorder, it was usually comorbid with another condition. I felt that such a discrete disorder, with a high prevalence within the Low Incidence categories should be examined through the lens of the classroom teacher providing inclusive education. In the month of October, 2010, I encountered a teacher who was catering for a pupil with the above disorder. This teacher (CT 12) had also been able to avail of the Induction Phase of CPD, another area not covered in my study. The teacher agreed to conduct an interview but cautioned that he might not have time for the diary entries. The interview was conducted on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

A follow-up interview was carried out in one case (CT 1) where the child in question was subsequently placed in a specialized setting. On receiving this information, I sought, and was granted, a second interview to probe the teacher’s view of the classroom in the absence of the child with significant SEN. Telephone follow-up interviews were conducted with four of the participating teachers, with a view to clarifying details such as number of pupils in class, years of

teaching experience and clarification of whether Pupil X or Pupil Y was being referred to, where there was more than one pupil with SEN in the classroom. In one instance (CT 4) a more intensive follow-up was required (see Interpretation Validity section below).

### *Recording of Interview Data*

With the permission of the participants, each interview was audio-taped. Each interview began with a preamble that reminded the participants of what they had agreed to and what the interview was about (Drever, 1995). They were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they did not have to proceed with the interview if they so wished. Two recording devices were used, a digital voice recorder and an analogue microcassette recorder. Audio files of each interview were downloaded on my personal PC, originally in a format determined by the software of the digital recorder. These files were subsequently converted to Windows Media Audio (WMA) files, transferred to both an external hard disc, a USB memory stick and encrypted using TrueCrypt™. Interview audio files were also converted into MP3 format, to enable downloading to my personal iPod. The portability of this audio source, as opposed to listening on my PC, enabled me to immerse myself in the interview data. When not in use, the iPod was locked in a secure location.

Each audio file was then transcribed into Word 2007™ word processing programme. The page layout was set in two columns, the left column of the page for the words spoken by the participant and the researcher, the right hand column for subsequent comments or memos (Appendix H). Hard copies of each interview transcript were locked securely in the researcher's home.

## Field Notes

Field notes were written immediately after each interview session, on leaving the teacher's classroom, or other interview venue. The notes were usually handwritten in the "cloistered rigour" (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 64) of the researcher's car, immediately after field contact. Such recording was carried out to record as much as possible about the physical, social and temporal context of the interview. Such notes allowed me to construct a permanent record of my interpretation of what was said, or my personal perception on what was observed. Keeping in mind the frailty of human memory, Glesne & Peshkin (1992) advise that notes should be to a degree of accuracy that they will, "enable you a year later, to visualize the moment, the person, the setting, the day" (p. 47). Along with the purely descriptive, field notes also have an analytic function. Ongoing recording of notes promotes reflection on the research and implies an open-minded and critical approach to the research (Coffey, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These notes were initially handwritten in jotted form but later expanded in the researcher's home. Upon completion, the notes were recorded in typewritten form, with a blank right column to allow for comments (Appendix I), which could later be converted into analytical memos and used at the data analysis stage.

## Data Analysis Process

### *Justification for Chosen Analysis Procedure*

Qualitative data are usually generated in the form of words, rather than numbers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, the verbal / audio data were also converted into text documents,

as were the researcher's thoughts and reflections on aspects of the study. This process generated a relatively large number of text documents. The use of a content analysis approach seemed most appropriate in this instance, as it is, "one of the classical procedures for analyzing textual material, no matter where this material comes from" (Flick, 2002, p. 190). It is suitable for investigating a broad array of questions in which the content of communication serves as a basis for inference (Cohen et al., 2000). Researchers with an interpretative orientation, such as symbolic interaction, frequently utilize content analysis, as it allows social actions and human activity to be explored in the form of text (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### *Informal, Unstructured Analysis of Interview Data*

Kvale (2007) does not view the processes of data recording and data analysis as two discrete operations, but rather as parts of a continuum, positing that if considerable parts of the analysis are pushed forward into the interview situation itself, "the later analysis is then on more secure ground" (p. 102). With this in mind, each audio-recorded interview was listened to on three occasions from beginning to end, prior to transcription. On the third listening, handwritten notes were generated (Appendix J), encapsulating what I considered to be key comments by the participants and memos to myself about what might be further probed in the next interview. Such precursory monitoring also enabled me to check that rich thick descriptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) of teachers' experiences in an inclusive classroom were being generated by the ongoing interviewing process.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend the use of a "start list" of key codes prior to the commencement of any fieldwork. Such key codes determined on an *a priori* basis are also strongly commended by Robson (2002) as they create strong links to the research question, play

a major part in shaping the interview guide (Fielding & Thomas, 2008), and in Saldana's (2009) view allow the researcher to, "harmonize (coding) with your study's conceptual framework or paradigm, and to enable answers that directly answer your research question and goals" (p. 49). In this study the key codes or "start lists" were the themes indicated in the literature and were confirmed by unprompted responses by the participants in the study as being of central importance to the teachers' experience. It is important to stress at this point that such initial data processing did not preclude the emergence of new and unexpected themes in the later, more structured analysis. However, to bring transparency and trustworthiness to my study, I take inspiration from Wolcott (1982, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 17), "it is impossible to embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit".

### **Structured Analysis of All Textual Data Generated by Fieldwork Stage of Study**

Upon the completion of the transcription process, each interview and diary entry was read by me on a number of occasions, in order to immerse myself in the data prior to any detailed analysis. At the inception of this study, I had intended to hand-code texts with a system of colour coding identifying topic and themes as endorsed by Creswell (2003). When all sources of text from the study: interviews, diaries, field notes, analytic memos, were entered in the word processing programme, the word-count was in excess of 70,000. This presented considerable logistical difficulties. I decided to utilize Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) to aid in the analysis of data. The specific software chosen was NVivo (Version 8) produced by QSR International. Such a programme appeared to hold out the promise of being able to, "facilitate data management chores which are tedious and subject to error when done

manually" (Fielding, 2002). Where large volumes of text are involved, discovery by reading and re-reading may become impracticable without software to locate words or phrases that, "signal particular topics of interest" (Lewins, 2008, p. 204). Use of CAQDAS programmes help to ease the physical difficulties of storing, moving, reviewing, re-arranging and copying data stored in paper format. However, there are some caveats pertaining to the use of such software programmes. They are extremely time consuming and labour-intensive to master, on an even rudimentary basis. NVivo 8, however, enables the researcher to work directly with, or to import, all data generated in the research study. Data sources relating to each participant can then be collated and stored in a single folder, termed a "SET" in the NVivo programme. This factor allows a high level of coherence in the analysis of all data sources from a particular participant in the study.

### **Stages of Analysis**

#### ***Phase 1***

##### ***Immersion in Data***

Each SET, containing all audio and textual data linked to individual participants was opened up and all documents read and re-read. This procedure was carried out in an attempt to gain a more holistic picture of the individual participant, through reflection on verbal data (interview audio file), non-verbal (captured in field notes and memos) and written (diary entries) (Appendix K). Even some of the leading proponents of the use of NVivo (Bazeley, 2009; Richards, 2002, 2005) caution that researchers cannot rely on software, alone, for the coding process. Familiarity with the data is vital, as only the human researcher can develop an,



“appreciation of subtle differences” (Bazeley, 2007, p. 8) that do not reside explicitly in the printed word, but rather in the inferences that can be drawn from the context by someone who is familiar with the world of the participant. Qualitative research is a complex undertaking, observe Glesne and Peshkin (1992) and qualitative researchers, “immerse themselves in the setting or lives of others and they use multiple means to gather the data” (p. 7).

### *Application of Themes / Nodes*

Prior to the structured analysis of the data, a coding framework was developed. The guidelines for this coding methodology were drawn both from what might be considered to be the more “traditional” authorities (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Moorehouse, 1994, Miles & Huberman, 1994) and also from writers and researchers who have expertise in the use of computer software in data analysis (Bazeley, 2007; Gibbs, 2002; Kelle, 1996; Richards, 2002; Saldana, 2009; Tesch, 1990).

## *Phase 2*

### *Open Coding / Broad Coding*

Coding is a crucial stage in content analysis (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; David & Sutton, 2004), the central process by which theories are built from data (Flick, 2002). It is at this stage that the raw data are broken down, conceptualized and put back together in new ways. Miles and Huberman (1994) view codes as, “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study”, and are, “usually attached to “chunks” of varying size – words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (p. 56).

The open (or broad) phase of coding is coding by category / question. As noted earlier in this section, some codes may have been generated *a priori* from the research questions and / or the interview schedule, while others emerged from broad participant driven categories. Importing the Literature Review data into NVivo enabled the use of the “See Also Link” in relating primary data from the research study to the literature review (Appendix L). In this cycle of analysis, as in the other phases, the researcher utilized the constant comparative model (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Such an approach, observes Denscombe (2003), “entails a commitment to comparing and contrasting new codes, categories and concepts as they emerge – constantly seeking to check them out against existing versions” (p. 120). In addition to identifying themes anticipated from the literature research, the researcher consciously sought out disconfirming, negative and discrepant cases (Cohen et al., 2000; Flick, 2002). Such an approach was in alignment with the theoretical structure of this study in that it allowed, not only for the expression of the multiple realities of the individual actors / participants in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), but also took into account contradictory statements emanating from any individual participating teacher (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

A line-by-line analysis of both interview and diary transcripts was undertaken and the data were coded into meaningful analytical units (Creswell, 1998). In the NVivo programme, data are stored in “nodes” which act as repositories for categories/ themes / concepts. These nodes are developed into a folder hierarchy as the analysis proceeds. At this first pass of coding (Fielding, 2008), all emerging themes are recorded but without an attempt to link them or establish relationships between them. To ensure transparency, each node was given a description, or definition, stored in the properties of that node. The precise definitions of categories, points out Silverman (2000), are crucial in a content analysis approach so that, “coders arrive at the

same results, when the same body of material is examined” (p. 129). These definitions were attached to the sections of text from which they had been derived (Appendix M). Themes identified in isolation are stored in “Free Nodes” in NVivo. In total, forty individual nodes were identified (Appendix N).

### *Phase 3*

#### *Cross coding / Coding to Many*

When first drawing up code, the concept of mutual exclusivity for each unit of code is strongly emphasized, and indeed was used by the researcher. However, close reading of the pieces of text identified by a particular node definition indicated that sections of text could be coded to more than one category. For example, a person talking about the free node *Guilt* made a comment which also related to the free node *Time Constraints*. Overlap was also observed between the free nodes *Availability of CPD* and *Principal*. In some instances more than one node was identified for the same idea e.g. *Promotion of Tolerance* and *Peers' Reactions*. These two nodes were then merged. Thus, any comments offered in interviews or diary entries were systematically considered against each of other identified nodes / themes for relevance, during this phase of the analysis. This process allowed participant responses to be coded to more than one category. Identified links between categories / nodes were then recorded in the folder *Relationship* (Appendix O).

### *Phase 4*

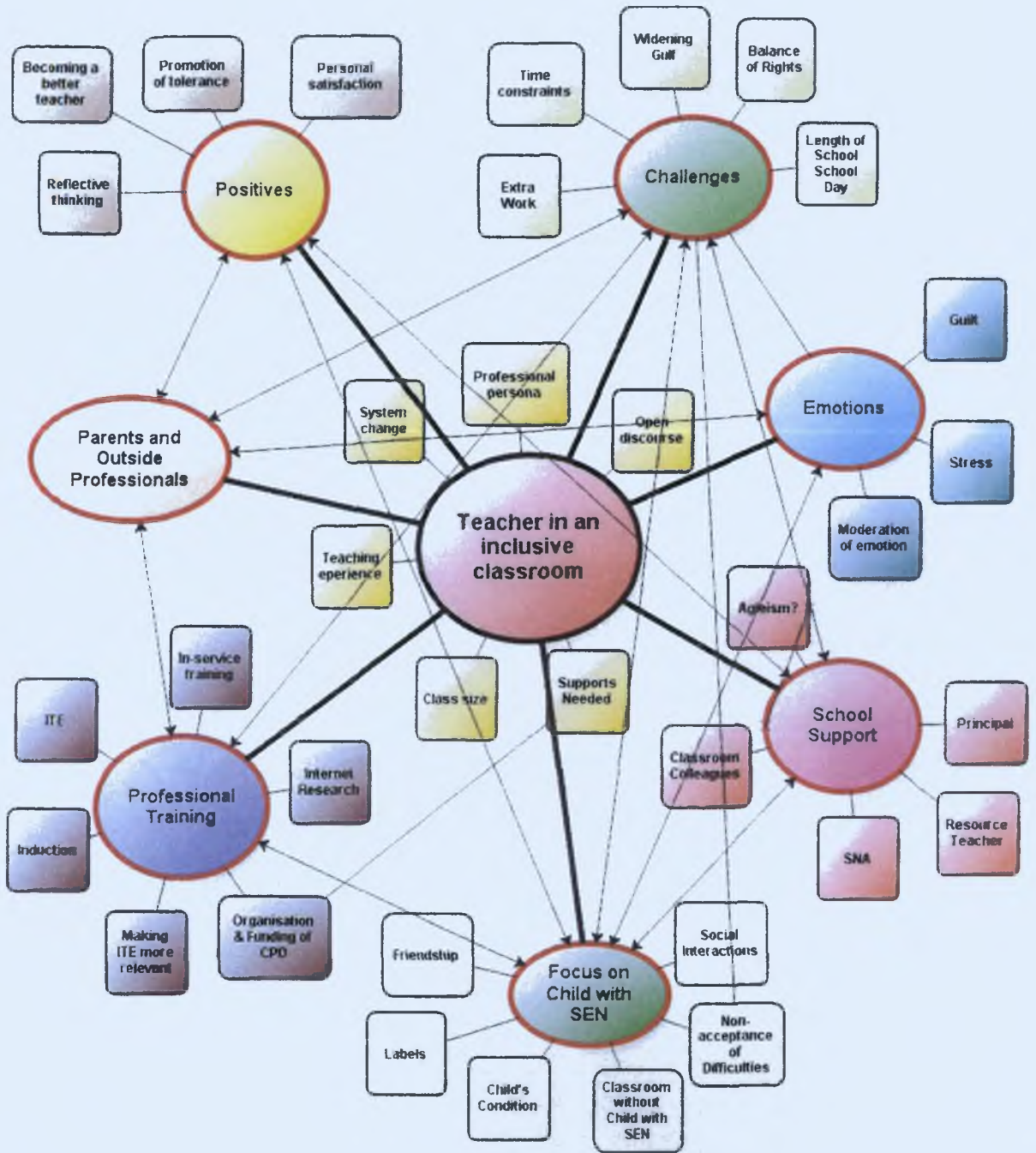
#### *Axial Coding / Coding-on*

Fielding (2002) describes axial coding as the process where, “relationships between categories and sub-categories are considered, with tentative relationships being examined against data” (p. 347). The researcher looks for categories or codes that cluster together while thinking about such things as the causes or consequences relating to the processes the data refers to, and which may inform the analysis. This phase of analysis necessitates continuously movement back and forth between inductive thinking (developing concepts, categories and relationships from the text) and deductive reasoning (testing the concepts or cases that are different from those which were developed) (Flick, 2002).

Reviewing previously identified open codes / free nodes, the researcher seeks to refine and reformulate these by comparing their suitability to different research subjects and settings (Weinberg, 2002). In the NVivo software, axial coding is termed “coding-on”, described as the, “process of reviewing and re-coding the passages from earlier coding at a node...used to create finer categories, and to distinguish dimensions of a concept” (Richards, 1999, p. 206). The NVivo programme contains a tool, termed a *Modeler*, which aids the process of considering information in the form of graphics (Klanten, 2010). This tool facilitates a visual representation of how identified free nodes might be regrouped and potential relationships between such groupings. Repositioning elements of the data, in visual or conceptual form, assisted in identifying emerging relationships and different potential higher-level groupings of existing free nodes. (Figure 2)

Figure 2

Visual Representation of Potential Relationships between Identified Nodes



Consideration of potential groupings, along with a re-reading of the literature pertaining to the research questions, resulted in the researcher arranging the codes / free nodes into broad

grouping of themes. In the NVivo programme, repositories of such broad groupings are termed “Tree Nodes”, grouping nodes that have a clear, logical relationship with each other. Designing such tree nodes is, “A clarifying experience, alerting the researcher not only to where things “go” but also to areas that are muddy, unclear” (Richards, 1999, p. 134). There are a number of benefits in organizing data in this way. The tree structure promotes organization, conceptual clarity and identification of patterns (Bazeley, 2007). Such an approach also prompts the researcher to code richly and ensures thoroughness in the coding process. In this study, the forty identified Free Nodes were then “collapsed” into eight Tree Nodes (Appendix P). Each Tree Node was assigned a definition with rules for inclusion, enabling a reader to track why certain Free Nodes had been selected for each Tree Node (Appendix Q).

### *Phase 5*

#### *Generating Proposition Statements*

This phase consisted of the analysis procedure, generating statements (or *memos* in NVivo) which summarized, at this part of the analytical process, what the researcher believed was his understanding of the attitudes of the participating teachers in the study on the eight major themes identified in the study. Memos, which were written at a lower (Free Node) level in the folder hierarchy tree were used as summary statements for those particular nodes. Such memos were then tracked and synthesized into “master” memos at the top of the tree (Appendix R). The process of re-examining and synthesizing lower-level coding into master memos, and thence into a series of proposition statements assisted the researcher in his attempt to, “formalize and systemize the researcher’s thinking into a coherent set of explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 75). The formulation of proposition statements provides a framework for the researcher

to both ask questions of their study and to discuss preliminary findings (Glesne & Peshin, 1992). This process also supports the overall theoretical framework of the study in that it facilitates numerous interpretations of participants' responses, allowing for multiple views of the reality of teachers' worlds. At this point in the analysis cycle, any understandings derived were still tentative. As pointed out by Dey (1993), "memos should be suggestive, they need not be conclusive" (p. 89).

### *Phase 6*

#### *Testing Summary Statements*

This phase of the research involved testing the summary statements in Phase 5 against the data for supporting evidence recoded in the master memos. The retrieval facility of NVivo enabled the easy and rapid harvesting of text coded to any particular node. Whilst these elements of coded text existed since Phase 2 of the data analysis procedure, the researcher now sought to probe some of the data complexities. As this study, in essence, examined social relationships within a school setting, the researcher was aware of the need to tease out, "the complexity, the contradictions and the sensibility of social interactions" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 7) within that context. The coded sections of each participating teacher's interview were then compared to, and contrasted with, those of the diary entry, to ascertain if consistent or discrepant views arose within the data (Appendix S).

## Ethical considerations of study

### *Informed Consent*

An explicit ethical framework is now a sine qua non for any research involving humans. A key factor in such a framework is acquiring the informed consent of participants in any piece of research. Homan (2001) considers the phrase “informed consent” in terms of its two constituent words. He defines the term *informed* as:

1. That all pertinent aspects of what is to occur and what might occur are disclosed to the subject.
2. That the subject should be able to comprehend this information.

The term *consent* is defined as:

3. That the subject is competent to make rational and mature judgment.
4. That the agreement to participate should be voluntary, free from coercion and undue influence. (pp. 331 – 332).

All aspects of informed consent / assent, confidentiality and voluntarism in the research project proposed to, and accepted by the Research Ethics Committee of St. Patrick’s College / Dublin City University were adhered to rigorously. Teachers who expressed an informal interest in participating in the study were provided with an initial verbal explanation of what the study entailed, followed by a printed copy of the Plain Language Statement (Appendix T). Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their disclosures, in that the researcher would not reveal what was said during the interview to the school principal or any colleagues. The researcher was cognisant that studies in which one is an “insider” may generate, “dangerous knowledge”



(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 23). The assurance of confidentiality was particularly important, as in many cases the participants were aware of the acquaintance between the researcher and either the principal or Learning Support / Resource Teacher.

In the research findings, teachers are identified by pseudonyms. They were cautioned, however, that anonymity could not be guaranteed (even with the use of pseudonyms) as work settings, job descriptions etc. may identify persons in the study. In the case of one participant (CT 2), the brand name of a particular piece of machinery / technology had to be masked in the interview transcript, as its rarity could help to identify the school. Participating teachers were further advised that some of the findings **may** be published in journal papers, and thus be more publicly available than in the finished thesis. Participants were assured that they would receive a copy of the interview transcripts to check for accuracy prior to their use in the published thesis. This process provided an opportunity to raise any difficulties that they might have in regards to confidentiality and anonymity.

A brief individual meeting was arranged with all prospective participants prior to the actual research interview. This meeting was held to restate the purpose and boundaries of the interview (Creswell, 1998). Such a meeting also provided an opportunity to establish a social contact prior to my meeting them in my research capacity. At the end of this meeting, the participants were presented with a typed consent form (Appendix U). They were assured, however, that such a consent form was not any kind of legally binding document and that they might withdraw at any time from the research process, without the need to offer any explanation. I viewed the nature of the relationship between interviewer and informant as being, "the key to collecting the data" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 3). All informants were treated with dignity and

respect (Hatch, 2002; Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 2006) and made feel that they are co-creators of the data rather than objects of research.

Where the participant cited the school premises as the chosen venue for the interview process, entry was negotiated through the relevant gatekeeper. When, following a meeting or phone call to the school principal, verbal permission to enter the school was granted, a formal consent letter was presented (Appendix V). Principals were assured that no individual schools would be identified by name but rather by a generic tag such as "School A" (Cohen et al., 2000).

### *Data Storage*

All data generated during the research process was stored in accordance with protocol outlined by the Research Ethics Committee. Audio recordings (microcassette) were locked in a secure location in the researcher's house and destroyed at the completion of the transcription process. Digital recordings of interviews and text documents with transcriptions and diary entries, stored on the researcher's PC and laptop were encrypted for security purposes.

### **Trustworthiness of Study**

Establishing the integrity of any study is crucial. Cohen et al. (2000) point out that if a piece of research lacks such integrity, the findings are worthless. Classical quantitative research takes a positivistic approach to the nature of knowledge, defining the integrity of a study in terms of *internal validity*, *external validity*, *reliability* and *objectivity* (Creswell, 2003). In the naturalistic paradigm, Lincoln and Guba (1985), propose alternative terms such as, *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. They view a study as trustworthy if, "an

enquirer can persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (Lincoln & Guba, p. 290).

Although researchers in both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms would like to see themselves as being objective in both their data gathering and data analysis, such a view is illusory. As pointed out by Peshkin (1988), "one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed" (p. 18). Despite all controls implemented in a study, the findings are unavoidably influenced by the interests and social and cultural backgrounds of both researchers and participants (Corbett, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Rather than deny the potential for subjectivity, it may be better to accept potential bias. Acknowledging the danger of bias while consciously adopting an attitude of self-reflection, comments Creswell (2003), creates an open and honest narrative. Within the qualitative paradigm, "researchers accept the value-laden implications of their positions but seek to understand and conceptualise it by adopting reflective stances" (Scott, 1997, p. 172). The stance of qualitative researchers is not to deny the possibility of subjectivity but rather concentrate on reflexively applying their own subjectivities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Use of "reflexive bracketing" (Ahern, 1999, in Robson, p. 172) helps to counteract potential bias. While the attempt to put aside (or at least be aware of) one's personal feelings and preconceptions is laudable, Pels (2000), however, cautions against the, "romance of reflexivity" (p. 2) which has the potential to create a vicious circularity between the representer and represented, precluding the belief of the establishment of an objective body of material which can be presented for scrutiny.

The aim of a reflexive stance has been defined by Adkins (2002) as the attempt, "to make visible the relationship between the knower and the known and hence redress the problem of the concealment of normatively constituted speaking positions" (p. 332). In researchers, however, as

in all human beings, there exist inherent but unrecognised biases. No matter how much a researcher strives for impartiality in the course of a study, any data produced is marked by, “selective perception and presentation” (Flick, 2002, p. 196). How, then, can this “interpretative crisis” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 501) be resolved?

### *Audit Trail*

One way, perhaps to strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of a study whilst countering accusations of subjectivity on the part of the researcher, is to demonstrate how the research process was carried out from start to finish. Such transparency has become a key issue in regard to the trustworthiness of research studies (Cousins & McIntosh, 2005). In this research study, it is utilized to demonstrate to the reader the rigour applied by the researcher to the data analysis. The use of qualitative software packages such as NVivo 8 is particularly useful in making the research process visible to the reader (Ryan, M., 2009), establishing, in effect, an audit trail. The transparency of the data analysis process is much strengthened by the ability to demonstrate, and therefore track, each stage of the analytic process through the use of screen shots of the NVivo coding process. All research journal notes, field notes, interview transcripts and diary entries were retained. The establishment of such an audit trail of the data analysis, in conjunction with supporting documentation enables the researcher to verify findings, if challenged to do so.

### *Interpretation Validity*

Verification has been described as, “process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain” (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002, p. 17), an integral element of conveying the validity of study to external reviewers. As the data generated in this study consisted primarily of words, uttered or written by the participating teachers, it was important for the integrity of the study to verify that such utterances were accurately recorded. This “member checking” (Stake, 1995, 2010) looks to the participants for “verification statements” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or “communicative validation” (Flick, 2002). For this purpose, copies of the interview transcriptions and diary entries were either emailed or posted to all participants. The majority of the participants did not request any changes be made. Two of the participants returned them with minor changes. In one particular instance (CT 4) surrounding noises in the public venue made some of the audio recording difficult to decipher. A digital copy of both the audio recording and the incomplete transcript were emailed to the teacher. The researcher then went through the transcript line-by-line in two telephone calls with the teacher, to ensure that a correct transcription of the conversation had been rendered.

### *Triangulation*

The findings of a study are further validated if the researcher is not reliant on a single source of data generation. Triangulation, “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study” (Cohen et al. 2000, p. 112) reduces the threat to data validity (Robson, 2002) and demonstrates to a reviewer an attempt, “to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 4). Interviews, which allowed further probes but with a risk of generating socially acceptable answers in a face-to-face meetings, were complemented by

dairies, which allowed for more private thoughts. A participating teacher's diary sometimes informed the later interview schedule, thus giving viewpoints on certain themes from two sources.

### *External Assessors*

Bearing in mind the potential danger of inherent, but unrecognised bias, on the part of the researcher, I also sought external views throughout the research process. Much of the above writing on the methodological aspects of the study has placed strong emphasis on the concept of an "audit trail" of the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) view an external assessor in a piece of qualitative research as analogous to that of an independent auditor in the context of accountancy, thus adding to the credibility of a study. The researcher actively sought comment and advice from his supervisory research committee. A teaching colleague, who had completed the Masters in Special Educational Needs (MSEN) with the researcher, agreed to be another "critical friend". Four teachers, two in mainstream classrooms and two in the area of special education were consulted frequently in an effort to verify that the experiences of the teachers participating in this study, replicated, on a general basis, what was happening in the daily world of mainstream primary school teaching in Ireland.

### *Chapter Summary*

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences, and through them, the attitudes of mainstream classroom teachers providing inclusive education. In this chapter, the researcher outlined the overall theoretical framework of the study and justified the chosen methodology. A description of the process of participant recruitment and data collection was presented. Ethical

considerations of the study were considered in detail. Strong emphasis was placed on the creation of an “audit trail” in the data analysis process. Actions taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study were cited. In the following two chapters, the preliminary findings arrived at in the data analysis process are discussed in detail and commented upon. Chapter 5 focuses on within-teacher factors that might affect teacher attitude formation, while Chapter 6 considers the influence of the wider school environment on the attitudes, beliefs and feelings of the classroom teacher in relation to the provision of inclusive education.

## Chapter 5

### Findings and Discussion of Findings Within-Teacher Focus

*The rhetoric of special educational needs gives the impression of neatly sequential procedures, with uncomplicated interprofessional cooperation, happy parental participation and available support. The reality is quite different: procedures are not tidily applied, professionals squabble in power struggles and vested interests, parents are thought to be interfering nuisances, and support is not available on request. (Freeman, 1989, p. 50)*

#### Chapter Introduction

Cultural shifts in parental and educators' expectations, in tandem with legislative imperatives, have led to increased enrolment in mainstream schools of a cohort of young persons who may previously have been educated in separate, or specialised, settings (MacGiolla Phádraig, 2007; Meegan & McPhail, 2006). Virtually every mainstream primary school teacher in the developed world can expect to meet a child with significant special educational needs in his or her classroom at some stage in their working lives (Winter, 2006). The central aim of this thesis is to explore the attitudes of classroom teachers working in an inclusive classroom, in Irish primary schools. The researcher has attempted to gain insight into teachers' attitudes regarding the *reality* of working in an inclusive classroom, rather than examine the *rhetoric*, or interrogate the official *policy* which surrounds it. The term "inclusive classroom" in this context is understood as a mainstream classroom in which there is a pupil or pupils with significant educational needs present for the duration of the official school day. That such pupils have a significant special educational need is denoted by the granting by the NCSE of Low Incidence Resource Teaching hours and / or the services of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) to that pupil. The aim of this study is to obtain an insight into how inclusive education is being experienced by



classroom teachers, and through exploration of that experience, gain some insight into the attitudes of those teachers to the inclusion process.

### **Researcher's Stance within This Study**

Prior to reporting and discussing any findings arising from this study, the researcher situates himself within his world of inclusive education. Corbett (1998) makes the astute observation that, "special educators and related professionals are as prone to prejudice as anyone else, even if they feel that their work affords them a special insight" (p. 36). As I, too, am an actor in an inclusive education process, it must be borne in mind that, "actors always perceive the world through a lens consisting of their pre-existing beliefs" (Sabatier, 1998, p. 109). Therefore in order to alert the reader to any potential bias on the part of the researcher, I will identify some factors which may have influenced my view on the topic chosen for this research study.

For a little over fourteen years, I have been working in the area of special education within a mainstream school as a learning support or resource teacher. Due to the official designation of my teaching post by the DES, I have been able to avail of very high quality professional development, without charge and with official release during the school day. Such professional development progressed from diploma level to a Master's degree, giving me a strong vocational and academic knowledge of special education, primarily in the inclusive concept. Although this level of professional development is clearly a great advantage in giving me a robust practice and research base, it may also give rise to potential drawbacks. The completion of professional training courses can also promote Vlachou's (2004) "ideology of expertism", potentially causing the "expert" to think that s/he knows better than the class teacher how to implement inclusive strategies.

The level of professional development in the area of special education described above was not, and is not yet, generally available to classroom teachers. When supporting pupils with resource teaching hours granted by the NCSE, I meet with the children for forty five minute periods, either by daily withdrawal from the classroom or by in-class support. Personal reflection on this situation brought about the gradual realization that the professional educator who deals with the pupil with SEN for most of the day may have least access to professional training and other professional supports. I began to develop a strong personal interest in how inclusive education was “playing out” for the teacher in the classroom. This research project originated in my personal quest to find out: “What’s going on out there in the classrooms? How do the classroom teachers feel about inclusive education?”

I am a strong advocate of inclusion, agreeing with Corbett’s (1998) stance that, “How we treat the most vulnerable members of our society defines the extent to which we can call ourselves a civilized culture” (p. 2). In the debate on whether inclusive education can be adjudged as “successful” or not, I concur with Lipsky and Gartner (1996) that, “inclusive education not only provides benefits for all students but also serves as an exemplar for an inclusive society, one that is diverse and democratic” (p. 792). I am, however, also aware that it is not a process without its complexities and difficulties. With current increases in class numbers and more emphasis on formal planning, recording and accountability, the day-to-day work of the classroom teacher is an increasingly demanding task. The inclusion of a child with significant SEN in the classroom, may, for some teachers, significantly add to the workload (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Heung, 2006; Talmor et al., 2005) and also challenge the teacher’s professional efficacy (Forlin & Hattie, 1996; Forlin, 2001; Lopes et al. 2004; Rose, 2001; Williams & Gersch, 2004). This consideration gave rise to the formulation of

the central aspect of this study. My conversations with both classroom teachers and special education teachers over the last ten years or so, leads me to believe that the concept of inclusive education may have become something of a *shibboleth*. To critically question such a concept may potentially place oneself in the “immoral” camp of segregationists. A certain element of polarization has crept into the debate, leaving little room for what Norwich (1996, 2002) terms the concept of “connective specialisation”, which would recognise the distinctiveness of children’s additional need while striving to maintain an inherent connectedness with other areas of education. The connective specialisation model would propose that pupils with SEN be placed in mainstream settings but with special support and provision arrangements. This study is intended to give the participating teachers a platform for expressing and teasing out the more complex issues involved in inclusive education.

### **Researcher’s Approach to Deriving Findings Based Upon the Data Generated in the Course of the Study**

Bazeley (2009) cautions against, “a garden path analysis” within the qualitative researcher paradigm. Such an approach produces shallow reporting, in which themes are presented with brief summaries, with quotes scattered along the pathway as evidence. Although description is a very necessary and valuable component of reporting the findings of a study, it is not enough. As Bazeley observes, “The data must be challenged, extended, supported and linked in order to reveal their full value” (p. 8). Categories identified in the analysis process must, perforce, be discussed and commented on, and arising therefrom, higher, abstract concepts will also be developed by the author. As described in the previous chapter, the more-than 40 themes

identified from the analysis of interviews and diaries were further distilled into eight major categories:

- Preparation for inclusive education
- Positive experiences of the inclusive classroom
- Challenges posed by the inclusive classroom
- Emotions generated by experiences when providing inclusive education
- Focus on the condition and experiences of pupils with SEN
- School environment influence
- Teachers' attitudes towards parents of children with SEN and towards outside professionals working with those children
- Exploration of teachers' beliefs about the openness of discourse on the concept of inclusion.

Due to the word limit of this thesis, it is not possible to carry out an in-depth description of all eight categories listed above. Emphasis will instead be focused on findings that appear to have greater significance; those that bring forth new knowledge or have implications for current practice and policy. A number of themes have strong interrelationships. Challenges posed by providing inclusive education frequently result in affective or emotional reaction on the part of the teacher, and therefore may be covered jointly under one heading. Data on the *School Environment Influence* interweaves with that on Teachers' *Beliefs and Feelings Related to Work in the Inclusive Classroom*.

This chapter examines attitudes and beliefs, with the internal life of the classroom teacher, both cognitive and emotional, as the major focus. The following chapter investigates how the wider school environment influences attitudes of the classroom teacher in regard to the inclusive classroom. The findings are reported in the sequence outlined in the sub-elements of the research question of this study. This chapter will report of teachers' attitudes to: professional developments/ resources, personal impact / personal experiences, and teachers' emotional reactions. In the following chapter, the study findings on the influence of the wider school environment on teachers' attitudes to the inclusion process and their beliefs about the openness of discourse on the concept on inclusive education will be discussed.

## **Professional Development / Resources**

### **Teacher Education for Inclusive Education of Children with SEN**

#### ***Initial Teacher Education***

The findings of this study indicate that teachers more recently graduated from Colleges of Education express a greater degree of confidence in their preparation for the inclusive classroom during their initial teacher education than teachers in later career stages. A significant finding is that all participants, irrespective of their career stage, viewed supervised placement in an inclusive classroom during ITE as something they considered would have strengthened their confidence when initially encountering the inclusion process as a classroom teacher.

The ITE phase of a teacher's career, as preparation for his / her future professional life is of critical importance. Pearson (2009) views this phase as, "a cornerstone in the development of inclusive education" (p. 559). In addition to learning teaching strategies, much of their

philosophical framework about the values and purposes of education are informed and moulded during their initial teacher education (Garmon, 2004). Preservice education, through elements such as lectures, workshops and teaching practicum, exert a strong influence on the formation of professional teacher identity (Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010). Teacher identities, when formed, become central to their beliefs and values, while also guiding their practices and actions in the classroom (Walkington, 2005).

Pre-service training may be the optimal time to address educators' concerns and alter any negative attitudes about inclusive education (Sharma et al., 2006), giving teacher educators an opportunity to counter the charity / medical model of disability with that of a social model (Mullen, 2001; Pearson, 2005, 2009; Singal, 2008). At that stage, as the students may have had little previous need to seriously consider the concept of SEN / disability in a theoretical or practical realm, their attitudes are still fluid and subject to change (Mintz, 2007).

Any conceptual framework is, in itself, shaped and changed by the wider social, cultural and economic contexts in which both students and teacher educators live. For some teachers in this study, those who underwent their ITE several decades ago, contact with a child having special education needs was a somewhat esoteric concept, generally encountered within the realm of aberrant educational psychology. More recently qualified teachers, however, have encountered the concepts of student diversity, and differentiation to address such diversity, throughout their teacher education. One would expect, therefore, to encounter quite differing views about the value of ITE in preparation for inclusive education, relative to how contemporary their attendance at a College of Education has been.

The classroom teacher who completed her ITE over 35 years ago, now catering for one pupil with Autism and one with Asperger's Syndrome gave her view on the adequacy of her

preparation for children with SEN, *“Oh no. We only heard it mentioned. And I did special ed as my elective so I even got more than most”* (CT 6). Another very experienced teacher with over 25 years teaching also felt that her professional education at ITE for the inclusion of children with SEN was inadequate, *“Oh, absolutely not! We got nothing. And I remember in my first year of teaching the shock I got when I was teaching a little boy in my class who couldn't read – I just couldn't work out what to do* (CT 8). Given that perhaps the more easily implementable concept of integration, rather than the more complex issue of inclusion, was still at the early stages of development at the time of ITE for the above teachers, their comments are not surprising.

For a number of teachers in receipt of ITE within the past 10 years, there still exists a level of dissatisfaction with the preparation for working in an inclusive classroom. A teacher now in her eighth year of working in the classroom expressed strong views on her ITE:

*No! (emphatic) I didn't (feel that I was well prepared for inclusive education). I found that in college you were well trained for the ideal classroom and they didn't really do much on special education. You might have heard the terms, you know, ADHD – but they didn't give you any guidelines. So I literally had to come out of college and read up extra.* (CT 4)

In the study it became noticeable that the more recently a teacher had completed their ITE, the more positive they felt about its value in preparing them for the inclusive classroom.

Looking back six years to her experience of ITE, a teacher observed:

*Oh yes. We had very good lecturers and we had modules as well. Some of the modules had to do with special education. The lecturer was very good. She gave us lots of ideas.* (CT 9)

Teachers at the beginning of their careers held a very positive attitude towards their ITE:

*Yes. (I did feel well prepared for inclusive education) I'd have to say the course very much stressed the concept of inclusion – very much stressed adapting to the needs of that*

*child. It didn't set you the task of doing A,B or C. It was very much oriented to the idea that you can do anything that works. (CT 10)*

*Yes, I think it did... all of those lectures in special needs (CT 1). Yes, it was good. There was a module on special educational needs. There was a module of taught classes and assignments on special educational needs. (CT 11)*

### ***Supervised Teaching Experience During ITE With Children Who Have Significant SEN***

A recurring theme which emerged throughout this probe in the interview schedule was that of planned, supervised teaching experience, within the duration of ITE, with children who have significant SEN. A teacher, now in her tenth year of classroom work, commented on her own ITE in comparison to that of her friends in other colleges:

*Some of my friends went to Froebel or Mary Immaculate (Colleges of Education) and got a week in a special school. I think I was the only one who didn't get a place for a week in a special school or with kids who had special needs. I mean not for teaching practice. So, no (laughs) I wasn't prepared at all. (CT 2)*

A more recently qualified teacher (CT 1) praised her ITE for organising such contact,

*We did a three weeks placement in special ed – in a special class. It was **brilliant** because, you know, it was “hands-on” and then we were given a lot of literature about it.*

Visiting a special school was also noted by another teacher,

*We got to go to (named) reading school, which was very good – to get to see a school like that. (CT 9).*

Some teachers, however, while seeing the benefits of visiting special schools, were quite aware that this would probably not be the setting in which they would work. On reflection, they considered that a mainstream classroom in which there is a child with SEN, more closely replicated what would be encountered by the majority of teachers:

*Well, looking back it would have made more sense to have sent us to a mainstream class that had a child in it with special needs. You know it was a great experience (to go to a special school) and see the work that goes on in it. But in the sense of teaching in mainstream schools it might have been better (to have gone there). (CT 5)*



*It would be much better to have sent them to a mainstream school that has a child with special needs. That would be much more beneficial because that's the reality of it, really.*  
(CT 2)

Prospective teachers need to have early and continuous exposure to children with SEN (Avramadis et al., 2000; Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Silverman, 2007). Such contact, point out Butler and Shevlin, (2001) has more influence on attitude formation than lectures on the subject. The quality of that student contact with pupils with SEN is paramount, if negative stereotypes are not to be reinforced. A student teacher's most affirming experiences arises from a supported framework at classroom level in conjunction with an opportunity for feedback from tutors to aid the processing of the situations they have encountered (Angelides, 2000; Sugrue, 2002).

It appears from the data generated in the interviews that more recently qualified teachers have a more positive attitude about their ITE preparation for the inclusive classroom. Even amongst those, however, who expressed a level of satisfaction with the quality of tutoring, there appears to be a desire for planned, supervised placement in a "realistic" site of inclusive education. Seeing an experienced classroom teacher, still struggling, but coping with the needs of a child with SEN, is very important for attitude formation for ITE students (Boling, 2007). In this setting they may gain what Bandura (1997) termed *vicarious mastery experiences*, "experiences mediated through modelled attainments which include either seeing or visualizing" (p. 86) providing competence information through comparison with the accomplishments of experienced practitioners.

### ***Induction Phase***

*But I don't think that you can really understand it until you come into the classroom. I've learned more as a teacher than I did in the three years in college* (CT 9).

*In fairness to them, they did as much as they could until you're put in the deep end. But until you come into the real world... Then you discover all the problems – you nearly learn on the job. (CT5)*

As only one participant had been able to avail of the Induction phase of teacher education, any finding derived from the research data must be very tentative. Nevertheless, as this phase holds the potential to strongly influence the attitudes of NQTs to the inclusion process, the researcher will make some observations.

It is at the induction phase, where a teacher has gained enough experience to link theory taught in the College of Education with his / her own teaching practices in the classroom that would appear to be the optimum moment for further professional development. The teacher has discovered both their strengths and areas in which they need to gain more expertise. Although working in a school setting, they may not yet have become socialised into the prevailing attitudes and beliefs of the staff and may also still view themselves as in transition between student-teachers and fully qualified (and therefore autonomous) professionals. Due to the fact that the Induction process is a relatively new procedure in the Irish context, and had been previously implemented on a restricted basis, only one of the participating teachers had been able to avail of it. He found the process very helpful in dealing with children who had significant SEN:

*I have to say now that the lecturers were very good. They didn't go into great detail on special needs. I suppose they assumed it was covered when you were in College. Personally, I found that the most helpful part was the Mentor – and that could be expanded. She (Mentor) organised for us to go in and see older teachers with a special needs child (in their classroom). She also set up meeting with the Resource Teacher – to observe. But you know, it was even better when we could ask them (Resource Teachers) questions about what to do with the kids (with SEN). I would have liked more of that. (Interview CT 12)*

That the Induction process was perceived as a valuable experience can be gauged from the remarks of a teacher who, due to changed admission criteria, was ineligible for admission to the programme:

*Yeah, it hinders my development. So basically I felt that because I was trained outside of the State. I don't know for what reason or for what good it does not to let me train in the NQT modules. I'm really annoyed about that. The other lads (on the course) say it's great. (CT 11)*

A nation-wide induction programme for NQTs commenced in September, with newly qualified teachers being, “strongly encouraged to enrol”, 2010 (DES, 2010b, p. 4). From September 2011, completion of the Induction phase becomes a necessary requirement for teacher registration and certification (DES, 2010a). The Teaching Council, the statutory body with responsibility for the registration of teachers in Ireland, has signalled that for those commencing ITE outside of Ireland and within the European Economic Area (EEA) from January 2011, induction and probation must be undertaken in the jurisdiction in which the ITE was provided.

### ***Continuous Professional Development (CPD) / In-Service Training (INSET)***

The participants in this study appeared to be unable to identify any cohesive national policy framework for professional teacher development in the area of inclusive education. Some of the teachers considered access to CPD in this area to be quite limited. A small number of participants expressed the belief that further development was widely available, if one searched for it. The school principal emerged as an important factor in facilitating attendance on courses of further teacher education for those teaching children with significant SEN.

ITE is but the first step in teacher education. Factors such as the increasing diversity of the student body, new technologies applicable to pedagogy and shifts in cultural expectations of educational outcomes, indicate that teachers require ongoing education for an ever-changing working environment (Kellaghan, 2004; O’Gorman, 2007). Historically, in the Irish context, a teacher’s CPD was very much a matter of personal choice. Major initiatives in educational policy, such as the Revised Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) resulted in compulsory

CPD for teachers on a nation-wide scale, organised on a central basis by the DES. In the intervening periods between such initiatives, however, no requirement existed for teachers to engage in any further professional education. The very provision of large-scale compulsory CPD by the DES may have contributed to an entrenched “dependency culture” (Sugrue & Uí Thuama, 1997), where teachers do not exercise personal autonomy in this area, but wait for the DES to organise CPD for teachers. The Literature Review chapter has examined, in some depth, the importance of CPD for teachers in an inclusive classroom.

In this study the participating teachers were probed about their perceptions on the availability of CPD in the area of inclusive education and the attitudes in regard to the organising and funding of such further education. There was considerable variation in teachers’ responses. Much appeared to depend on an individual’s sense of agency and autonomy. In this context, the term *agency* denotes a teacher’s level of personal motivation in seeking what they perceive as being needed, rather than waiting on official bodies to provide the necessary services, a concept Bandura (1995) describes as, “the individual’s convictions of the self as an outcome controlling agent independent of means” (p. 116). Some looked towards the more traditional “Summer Course” where CPD is undertaken during school holidays with the inducement of Extra Personal Vacation days (EPV).

*I’m not aware of any (CPD in special needs) but I’m sure in our summer courses there must be. That’s the only area I can think of. (CT 6)*

It appeared, from this very small sample, that the more recently qualified a teacher was, the more enthusiastic and enterprising s/he was in sourcing CPD:

*I think it’s easy. I’m going on a course about autism later this month. (CT 9)*

*Yes I do. (think I have ready access to CPD) The Drumcondra Education Centre sends out lists of their courses every term. There was one on Asperger’s recently. There’s loads of stuff available. (CT 10)*

In a number of schools the Principal appeared to be very important in bringing available courses of CPD to attention of relevant teachers or actively seeking out pertinent training for staff:

*Our principal is very good at organising places for us on courses. (CT 10)*

*Well, I'd go to the principal and ask – actually I've asked her to keep an eye out for things like that. Now I haven't really looked into it but I would ask the principal. There are always things going on that I just never hear about and that I would love to do. (CT 3)*

*My principal has signed me up for the course this month. (CT 9)*

### ***Online CPD***

Data generated during the study indicate that while most participants were comfortable with the use of information technology, some doubts were expressed about the quality of web sites available for CPD in the area of inclusive education. Participants also commented on the value they place on learning opportunities provided by face-to-face meeting with other teachers. Many of the participating teachers in the study were less than thirty years of age and thus had grown up with the Internet as the backdrop of information sources. For some, it was the first port of call when encountering the unfamiliar:

*I mean I'd Google it but I don't know if there's a good place to look. (CT 3)*

*I use the Web – particularly English sites. The Irish sites weren't very good. (CT 7)*

Such use of information technology holds forth both promise and peril. The lure of Internet use for seeking information is understandable. It is quick, easy and can be done from home or classroom, rather than travelling to, perhaps, a distant library or college. There is an inherent flexibility in such an information channel in contrast to the fixed times and locations of face-to-face contact with teacher educators or traditional library usage. Generic use of the internet for information on disabilities, however, must be treated with some caution. Certain websites may be

hosted by groups who have a particular (but not overtly stated) agenda. There is also evidence of growing disquiet at the tendency of an increasing number of internet users who fail to differentiate between the concepts of information and knowledge (Carr, 2009; Keen, 2007). Whereas information may present facts on a particular issue, knowledge suggests a deeper involvement with those facts, a familiarity with the context, allowing the querent to make his/her own judgement from an experiential basis. However, in a world increasingly reliant on digital information technology, such a ubiquitous means of communication with teachers cannot, and is not being ignored by teacher educators.

A blended online model of CPD would involve some form of interpersonal communication among teachers participating on an instructional course. Using the Internet, where a teacher interacts only with what is on the screen, as opposed to being a member of an interactive group excludes, or at the least diminishes, the potential for constructivist learning.

Opportunities to learn from other teachers were mentioned by a number of participants:

*I'd prefer to be interactive with other people. It would stick in my mind more. I honestly think that you need "hands-on" for those kinds of things. I mean I could go on the computer and Google it for some information. It wouldn't be a problem - but it wouldn't mean anything - I'd rather face-to-face. (CT6 )*

In response to emergence of the internet as a means of information / training cited by participants at the beginning of the field work in this investigation, I added a probe question to some of the later interviews in an attempt to gauge teachers' opinions and beliefs in relation to the usefulness of online forums in supporting their teaching of children with SEN. Teachers were asked if they felt that the establishment of online courses of CPD, or discussion forums might be a helpful enterprise in which the DES or Colleges of Education, might become involved:

*Yes, I would be interested because I have used other forums for in day-to-day things. And they're very interesting, particularly when someone writes in: "Does anyone have*

*anything on..?” You can share your experiences – you know if you’ve had a bad day or whatever (CT 2).*

For teachers in isolated geographic areas of Ireland, this model might provide a very useful level of support and advice. There are some caveats around web-based teacher professional development, however. Unlike face-to-face tuition, there may be no independent validation of such courses, leading to very variable quality (Signer, 2008). Online presence has the advantage of being more accessible and more cost-effective than the face-to-face approach (Jung, 2005) but is, itself, dependent on access to developed infrastructure. Two teachers, one living in an urban setting and the other in a rural area, pointed out:

*Oh yes. I certainly would – but that said you’d have to have reliable internet connections. People often forget that. Where I’m living there’s very weak connections, when you can get it at all. (Interview CT 7)*

*But certainly if it was the case that there was a course and it was available only online and if it was quite worthwhile then I would have no problem with that. The problem might be that I don’t have great access to the internet at the moment in my flat. (Interview CT 3)*

### ***Beliefs of Participating Teachers on the Funding and Organisation of CPD***

The findings of the study indicate that the majority of the participants believe that the DES should organise and fund CPD in the area of inclusive education. A small number of teachers accepted personal responsibility for their own continuing professional education.

In the interview phase of the study, probe questions, on a surface level, sought teachers’ views on administrative details surrounding CPD. The teachers were asked: “*Who should organise professional development for teachers?*” and, “*Who should fund any such CPD?*” These two questions probed many aspects of the teachers’ attitudes and concerns not only around the area of inclusive education, but also drew responses which gave insights into individual teacher’s perceptions of educational policy and teacher professionalism. Some teachers viewed

the DES as having responsibility for any further CPD needed by teachers in the area of special education / inclusive education:

*Oh, the Department of Education, I'd say. (CT 3)*

Three other teachers were also in agreement with this viewpoint but also added a rider which gave an indication of their beliefs on the universal “embrace” of inclusive education:

*Oh, I think it should be the Department of Education, since they're responsible for us having those kids in mainstream. So I would put it down to the Department of Education. They should be offering the services if you want to avail of them – yes. Even if times are hard it should still be the Department, since it's part of your job. (CT 6)*

The above comments indicate that some teachers view the concept and reality of inclusive education as being imposed on them, rather than being an inherent part of their working lives.

This has implications for the quality of education provided for children with SEN. The commitment of a class teacher to the concept of catering for diverse pupils is a critical determinant in the successful provision of effective inclusive education (Florian & Rouse, 2009; Pearson, 2009). Having positive beliefs about the need for, and value of, inclusive education is key to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Avramadis & Norwich, 2002; Forlin, 2001). Viewing the inclusion process as being forced upon the school by an outside agency, suggests that a teacher might continue to view a pupil as a Foucauldian “outsider”, rather than simply another member of a diverse pupil cohort.

However, there were also contrasting views. Some teachers viewed accessing CPD as their own responsibility – albeit with some overarching support from the DES. Their beliefs about the funding of any CPD also differed from the previously quoted teachers. I perceived a sense of “ownership” of their professionalism, as opposed to expecting the DES to provide all future professional development:



*I think it's up to the individual teacher to decide if they should do a course but I think that the Department (of Education) should let the principals know what courses are available and then the principal should let the teacher know. Well, I wouldn't mind paying for it myself because I think it's furthering my knowledge. Having a child with autism in your class is having a big influence on your daily life in the classroom so you should really get more knowledge about that. (CT 9)*

*I think you have to be motivated yourself to look for stuff – to be interested enough in your kids to research stuff. And it's quite cheap – the courses in Drumcondra (Education Centre) only cost ten euro. (CT 1)*

The above teachers, in both their interviews and diary entries showed a very positive attitude towards inclusive education, even in the case of one teacher (CT 1) who faced an extremely challenging classroom situation. Participants who viewed their provision of inclusive education in terms of compliance with a policy thrust upon them by the DES, and therefore requiring funding by the DES, demonstrated a somewhat less positive attitude to the inclusion process.

Hansen and Simonsen (2001) propose that a major function of basic teacher education should be to raise the understanding of their students of teachers' continuous responsibility for their own lifelong in-career professional development. Sugrue (2002) argues for a shift from teachers dependency on a "paternalistic" provider of CPD by central agencies such as the DES, and favours linking the word *personal* with the term *professional development*. This envisages development as not only refining a teacher's trade craft but also encompassing an individual's personal identity. Differentiating between surface-level strategies and deeply-held beliefs is an important issue. Teachers who seek only, "what I can use on a Monday morning" (Dirkx, 2006, p. 274) tend not to look at underlying causes of difficulty in their interaction with children in their class. Perceiving the locus of responsibility for adapting to a child's needs within the self, rather than being imposed by an outside agency, predicts a deeper commitment and a more

flexible response. Thus, the inculcation of values, rather than the provision of strategies, may have a stronger impact on how a teacher views the provision of inclusive education. If ITE and CPD courses concentrate on the technician element of SEN provision, the development of the teacher persona may not be to the foreground. The formulation of a teacher's persona holds implications for their view and treatment of pupils (Mullen, 2001; O'Brien & Schillaci, 2002). Weiss (2002) cited in Pearson (2005, p. 17) states the point elegantly, "these (teachers') personal autobiographies create templates that shape their views of, and interactions with, pupils".

## **Personal Impact / Personal Experiences**

### **Positive Experiences of Teachers in the Inclusive Classroom**

Teachers participating in the study reported feelings of joy and satisfaction on discovering academic and social progress made by the child with significant SEN in their classrooms. Promotion of tolerance of diversity by that child's class peers was also noted. A significant finding of the study was that participants viewed the experience of teaching in an inclusive classroom as something which enhanced and advanced their general teaching repertoires.

This study sought to explore the attitudes of teachers working in the inclusive classroom. The interview phase explicitly probed for responses to these issues but unprompted views were also gleaned from the teachers' diary entries. Seeing a child with a moderate intellectual disability / impairment make progress in curricular areas was a source of great satisfaction:

*Child A (Pupil with Asperger's syndrome) completed the maths lesson, totally completed it. He did all of it including putting out the bricks. And I was **amazed** – he had ten triangles drawn with number one, two, three, and so on put in into each within about three minutes..After two years with these two particular children. I feel that I've achieved*

*something. Because I enjoy them, even though they're hard work And the kids all love them too. (Diary Entry CT 6)*

*This morning I was doing a phonics lesson with the children while Child X (Child with Down Syndrome) was engaged in an activity involving a small chalk-board and chalk. Halfway through the lesson I noticed that Child X had his hand up in order to grab my attention. He beckoned me over and said "Two" and showed me the almost perfect number "2" on the chalk board. Up until now the child had not been writing numbers at all and was clearly delighted with himself. I had to say I was really taken by surprise and delighted with him...I found this amazing and I was chuffed for him...I have to hand it to Child X – he gave me a good laugh for the day. (Diary Entry CT 2)*

One of the principal aims of the inclusive school is the achievement of social acceptance as well as cognitive progress for the student with significant SEN. Some writers believe that one of the main purposes of education for those with intellectual disabilities should look beyond the classroom and seek to equip them to establish a community presence, to allow them to share the ordinary places that define community (O'Brien, 2003; Yalon-Chamovitz et al., 2006). The vast majority of participating teachers viewed the positive experiences of the inclusive classroom as being in the realm of social experiences, not just for the child with SEN, but also for the other children in the class, and, indeed also for the class teacher. Acceptance of children with SEN by their typically developing peers is viewed as one of the most positive outcomes of inclusive education (Leatherman, 2007; Naaken & Pilj, 2002):

*When I was growing up maybe..but they don't see a difference in her. They don't say: "Oh look at that person with cerebral palsy". They just say: "She's one of us". Whereas when I was growing up we never had that. We didn't see people like that. I mean they were there but they were left to themselves. So it is good. (Interview CT 7)*

Class teachers holding a positive attitude towards inclusive education, expressed the belief that working in an inclusive classroom improved their teaching skills. This issue was probed by asking the teachers if, given a choice, would they willingly accept a class in which there was a child with significant SEN in the following school year:

*Probably the class with special needs. That probably sounds mental, but as I said, it's more of a challenge. I feel that my teaching has improved and my differentiation – like looking after everybody, I'm far better at it now... (Interview CT 3)*

*And this year I'm just learning so much in the classroom – different methodologies to use, different ways of calming down somebody. (Interview CT 9)*

While much of this positive attitude could be attributed to the personal resilience of the individual teacher, the severity and complexity of the condition of the SEN also exerted a large influence. Two of the teachers in the study were catering for two very young children in the moderate range of intellectual impairment. One of the children also had no language and was not toilet trained. The other child in addition to his intellectual impairment also had hearing and behavioural difficulties. These teachers, although obviously very committed to their work, expressed a wish for a “standard” class:

*Oh I'd go for the one without special needs. I'll tell you, just yesterday – and you know you forget – you know I actually thought I was used to this class and you'd say: “It's ok now” and it seems to be getting easier. But yesterday he was absent for the first time since the first of September – but I'd forgotten – and I actually had a fantastic day yesterday. (Interview CT 2)*

*I'd probably pick the mainstream standard class. After coming out of two years with this child. Last year was my ninth year of teaching and it was my toughest year ever. And maybe your first or second should be the toughest, but my ninth year was my toughest. So I'd probably say: “Look, is there any way that I could get even a two year break? And then I'd go back into it more refreshed because sometimes you're prepared to take on a challenge and say: “I'll give it my best go”. (Interview CT 5)*

When the question was put to the teacher, who in the researcher's opinion encountered the most challenging child in the study, this personal resilience was evident:

*Well, I suppose I would be a bit apprehensive but I'd never say: “I don't want that class”. But I realise now that he (Child X) is an extreme case and really, it can never get any worse than that. It's given me a huge interest into bereavement and how it affects children's behaviour - and things like ODD. That's one thing that I never really came across before. (Interview CT 1)*

### *Interim Summary*

As a group, the teachers in this study proffered numerous examples of positive experiences of the inclusive classroom. In many cases, they shared in the joy of the successful achievements of the child with SEN. They also felt that having such a child in the classroom promoted tolerance of difference. For me as an educator, the most significant belief that emerged was that teachers viewed the experience of teaching a child with SEN as enriching their teaching skills in general. Even those teachers faced with a child who had complex or challenging needs could look back on the experience with a positive view. The possibility of teachers giving socially acceptable answers; telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, must be borne in mind when interpreting the findings of the study.

### **Challenges Posed by the Inclusive Classroom**

A notable finding of the study was the level of concern surrounding the balance of rights between the child with significant SEN and those of his / her classroom peers. Much of this concern centred on perceived time constraints. Teachers expressed feelings of guilt at not being able to give sufficient teaching time to either group of children. While a number of teachers reported increased levels of stress, the majority of participants did not view the inclusive classroom as a challenge to their professional persona.

Although the concept of inclusive education for all children is a very laudable aim, it should not be forgotten that inclusion, “significantly complicates an already complex task” (Wigle & Wilcox, 1996, p. 32). As pointed out by one teacher: “*There’s really no such thing as a normal class*” (Interview CT 8). Most teachers, however, have probably developed certain expectations of their pupil cohort based on their previous experiences in the classroom. Children

with significant SEN challenge existing procedures and routines. Researching new or alternative teaching strategies and the sourcing of new materials imposes extra burdens on the teachers. For some teachers, well established and dependable classroom management routines may need to be reassessed. O'Donaghue and Chalmers (2000) report the comments of a teacher who has been asked to accept a child with SEN into his class, "I found it difficult to reconcile "inclusion" with my life at this time. Until the start of this year I had my career on track and knew where I was heading" (p. 385). Every teacher in this study expressed the view that providing inclusive education demanded extra effort on the part of the teacher:

*There are challenges every day - every day. It is challenging, there's no question about it. And it's hard to have a child with special educational needs in your class. I mean I'd be lying to you if I said anything else. (Interview CT 10)*

### *Time Constraints*

One of the major challenges identified by teachers in catering fully for the child with significant SEN, centred around time constraints. Having a child in the classroom who requires extra tuition, extra supervision, individualised teaching strategies, differentiated materials or specialised equipment, will of necessity make extra demands on the teacher's time.

*When I was in a class without a child with special educational needs, I was able to do some planning and organisation of work for the kids in my few spare moments – but now there are no spare moments. Every spare minute – in fact I have no spare minute - goes to organising stuff for the child with SEN. (Interview CT 4)*

*Finding time to deal with everything that is happening in the class is difficult and to document it all is almost impossible. I find this most frustrating. (Diary CT 6)*

This concern with lack of time to fully cater for the needs of the children with SEN is not unique to the Irish setting. Rose (2001) describes 25% of teachers interviewed as having a perception that, "the management of pupils with SEN took an inordinate amount of time when

compared to their peers” (p. 153). Concerns about inadequate time also affect teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion process in the United States (Leatherman & Niemeier, 2005). Similarly, in the Australian setting, pressure on the teacher’s time is viewed as a major stressor in the inclusive classroom (Forlin et al., 2008). One teacher in another Australian study remarked, “I spend a huge percentage of my time dealing with a small percentage of my students” (Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou, 2007, p. 138). The presence of a child with a severe emotional or behavioural disorder (as was the case of teacher CT 1) can consume huge amounts of the teacher’s time (Horne & Timmons, 2009). In a review of the literature on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, Avramadis and Norwich, (2002) noted that insufficient time was identified as a factor influencing a negative attitude towards inclusion. A dissenting voice is raised by Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond (2009), who point to studies that show that effective teachers in an inclusive classroom are able to create more instructional time for all students.

With the problem of time pressures in the inclusive classroom being identified by teachers in many jurisdictions, it is worth noting, as Rose (2001) points out that, “The inclusion literature rarely considers that pupils with SEN may require more of teachers’ time”. Is Rose suggesting that inconvenient truths are ignored? Could it be that Mock and Kauffman (2002) had a valid argument when they contend that advocates of inclusion, understood as full-time placement of a child with significant SEN in a mainstream class had, “neglected to reveal the fine print” (p. 203)? If inclusive education is viewed in terms of not simply a moral right but also a human right, it may be difficult to take a critical stance without appearing segregationist. If most educational researchers envision inclusion as a moral imperative rather than one worthy of empirical investigation (Lopez et al. 2004), then perhaps to investigate perceived difficulties around the inclusion process could be regarded as “immoral”. That teaching is strongly linked to

a sense of morality cannot be disputed. Hegarty (2001) offers the opinion, “Education is a moral enterprise, defined in terms of, and driven by values” (p. 246). Teachers have a strong sense of morality and justice in providing education for children in their classroom. With the presence of a child with SEN in the classroom, competing agendas may arise. Time spent with the child with SEN means less time for other children. This presents the teacher with a dilemma.

### *Balance of Rights*

*A struggle to get any work done with him. I feel I am spending a lot of time with him – finishing off work etc. and so the other children lose out on teaching time. (Diary CT 6)*

*Sometimes I do feel that the rest of the class is suffering and that these boys have nearly become my priority at present. (Diary CT 8)*

While the participating teachers demonstrated strong commitment to giving the best possible education to the child with SEN, they also felt a strong sense of responsibility for maintaining the academic progress of the other children. Inclusive education poses challenges in trying to maintain a balance of rights between the needs of the pupil with SEN and those of his / her typically developing peers. Teachers may question if the inclusive process is fair to typically developing children (Berry, 2007; McLeskey et al., 2001; Zambelli and Bonni, 2004).

*I do think it would be a great idea to limit the number of these kids in a classroom – as much for their needs as the others, so that the person working with them (Children with SEN) can get the time **they** need and that so the other kids in the class can get the time **they** need as well. Because quite often we might be doing work – something intense, but I might not be getting around to see how they’re doing. And you know, for the kids it’s everything - to see their work. (Interview CT 3)*

*And despite having great SNAs and great resource help, you’re **still** giving more – I have twenty five children in the class - and I’m still giving her more than one twenty fifth of my time, definitely... (Interview CT 5)*



Worry about the division of the teacher's time was not centred solely on the needs of the typically developing children, Meeting the needs of the child with significant SEN in the inclusive classroom was also a concern to teachers:

*Again I found it difficult to give her the specific help she needed whilst trying to help others in the class. I hope that as the year progresses I will be able to find a balance and that Pupil X will become more adept at doing independent work. (Diary CT 3)*

*Because she soaks up so much of your time and energy, you know, really... Sometimes I worry that I might be doing an injustice to her – that I might not always be catering to her needs properly. That's a confession that I'm making – that I mightn't always be catering to her needs as best as I can. And that's due to the demands of trying to provide the best education for every other child. (Interview CT 10)*

Inclusive education, in its broadest conception, does not lay stress on providing a good education in a mainstream classroom for children with disabilities but rather providing a good education for the entire diverse cohort of children in the class (Booth, Nes & Strømstad; Dyson & Millward, 2000; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). Some of the above comments indicate that a number of the participating teachers felt that neither objective was possible in certain circumstances due to difficulties with class numbers, class organisation, time management and available levels of support. This complex issue will be further explored in the final chapter.

For the teachers in the study, this balance of rights was an issue that caused great concern and much self-questioning. It could be said that achieving such a balance is, or should be, a major point of debate in the movement towards inclusive education. While the inclusion of all children in their local schools does have the moral imperative of a human rights concept, Barrow (2001) offers the opinion, "the practice of inclusion may clearly offend against the principles of fairness" (p. 235). Strong advocates of inclusive education, Sebba and Ainscow (1996) point to the need to consider the effects of inclusion on all children. A number of the participating teachers wondered if the rights of any children were being fully served in that particular

classroom. It must be noted that these teachers were catering for children with the more challenging and complex needs in the study. Achieving a balance of rights for all pupils in the inclusive classroom remains a much contested issue (Berry, 2007; Corbett, 1998; Forlin et al., 2008; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1999).

*There was a real big divide. And I felt like if I was ignoring him – he was losing out but if I was ignoring the rest of them then they were completely losing out – so it was kind of a case, does majority rule? (Follow – up Interview CT 1)*

*Now inclusive education is working for her but it can be tough on the other kids... Well, the truth is that it is working very well for the little girl. She's doing fine here. From the teacher's perspective, it can be very hard to juggle everything. (CT 5 Interview)*

### **Teacher Persona and Self-efficacy**

The literature suggests that some teachers who had traditionally been teaching the “typical” class might begin to experience some initial doubts about their professional ability when faced with an “atypical” child (Hanko, 2002; James & Freeze, 2006; Kelchtermans, 1996; Marshall, Ralph & Palmer, 2002). This conjecture was borne out in a number of cases:

*Yeah – I would question a lot: “Am I dealing with this situation properly?” You know, according to the criteria set out by psychiatrists and psychologists – maybe this isn't the way to approach it. (Interview CT 4)*

*Well, at the start I was thinking “What am I doing wrong?” because last year seemed to be a breeze and the year went by. There were some challenges but when Child X came to the classroom I began seriously doubting, wonder what I was doing wrong. (Initial Interview CT 1)*

While the personality of any professional must influence his or her daily work, in teaching the professional and personal lives are strongly intertwined (Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 1994; Huberman, 1999). A long-time observer of the teaching profession, Nias (1989), views the personal and private domains of the teacher as being bound in, “a double sense” (p. 17) in that their work draws upon interests and capacities that might be reserved for non-work activities in

other areas of work e.g. voluntary after-school sport or music activities. The teachers in this study who admitted to initial self-doubts about their ability to cope with the demands of an inclusive classroom also demonstrated that necessary condition for effectiveness - resilience (Gu & Day, 2007; Howard & Johnston, 2004):

*At the very, very, very beginning of junior infants – week one I think it was (laughs) I was saying to myself: “How am I going to do this for two years?” I did think that. But I have to say, not so bad now this year, because I say to myself: I’m giving my best, what more can I do?” (Interview CT 2)*

*But then I remind myself: “I know the child better “and I go with my gut instinct. I say: “No, it’s OK, I’m doing this right. – I know better than the book”. I suppose that I have confidence in my own ability. (Interview CT 4)*

## **Emotional Reactions Generated by Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom**

### *Sense of Guilt*

Teachers, as a group, are strongly committed to the achievement of success in their work (Roll-Pettersen, 2008; Soodak, 2003). Perceived failure in that endeavour frequently results in self-directed anger (Friedman, 2003; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) and feelings of guilt (Isenbarger & Zembylas). Inclusive education, at its heart, seeks to address the needs of all pupils. In his philosophical analysis of special needs, Vehmas (2009) views schools as organisations that serve not only the needs of its pupils, but also the needs and interests of the wider society, making pupils the kinds of persons who will contribute to its social and commercial life. Ensuring that young persons reach certain levels of academic competence to meet the requirements of that wider society results in the construction of a normative framework of acceptable achievements, within the curriculum valued by that society (Avisar, 2003). Teachers, as a result become normative-centred (Fielding, 1999; James & Simmons, 2007), particularly in an increasingly

standards-driven agenda (Grieve, 2009; Nind & Wearmouth, 2006). Commenting on education in the U.K. Smyth (2007) complains of the, “managerial and marketising agenda that have been allowed to intrude on schools” (p. 222).

In the international inclusive education context, there has been much debate around the contradictory pressures on schools that seek to include children with SEN in a competitive educational climate which still leans towards economic and social pressures which devalue such pupils (Booth, Ainscow & Dyson, 1998; Shearman, 2003). While in the context of Irish primary schools, there may not exist the same intensity on reaching required achievement scores, nevertheless, there has been a greater scrutiny of pupil achievement in recent times. The administration of standardized tests at certain class levels is now mandatory (DES, 2006). Much national media coverage has been given to the achievements of Irish pupils in international reports such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). In the General Election of 2011, one party, now in Government, had the examination of literacy achievements as one of its election promises. In such a culture, teachers tend to become ever more concerned about the academic achievements of their pupils, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Trying to satisfy a standards-driven agenda, while also attempting to cater adequately for children who may always remain outside peer norm achievement, may lead not only to a sense of frustration, but also a sense of guilt (Forrester, 2005). Hargreaves (1994) contends that, “guilt is a central preoccupation for teachers” (p. 142). While members of any particular profession may experience a sense of guilt at times, Hargreaves (1994) views teachers’ sense of guilt as being “bound up with overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety” (p. 142). These feelings were evident in a number of the participating teachers:

*I’m inclined to say that my guilt is towards the other kids. I **know** that I’m doing my very best for her, whether that’s good enough or not, but I do my best for her. But I feel that*

*after that you're trying to "pipe" as much information as you can into the other kids and give them as much as you can. It's a huge divide of your time really, and the guilt for me would be more for the other kids, really. (Interview CT 5)*

*It makes me feel a bit guilty sometime.. Oh yes. Absolutely (creates sense of guilt). It does mean that more of my time is taken up and some things have to be sacrificed... You do feel; "Ah sure I know, but I should be doing something else as well". It's a bit ridiculous, isn't it? (Interview CT 3)*

Within the teaching profession, there is an inherent emphasis on the concept of *caring*.

The ethic of care has become a central concern in the profession of teaching (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). A leading teacher educator in the United States, Cochran-Smith, (2003) observes, "teaching involves caring deeply about students as human beings" (p. 372). This is not surprising, in that the teacher, *in loco parentis*, is charged with looking after young and still-dependent members of society. Catering for the needs of a child who is all the more more vulnerable, because of their SEN, is likely to generate even stronger feelings of guilt, if the teacher feels that he / she is not providing adequate care. Many factors contribute to the teacher's sense of guilt in this context.

Teachers often feel that they have insufficient time for planning differentiated work and also for coordinating work with other school personnel who work with the child (Sookak, 2003). Another cause of concern is the provision of what the teachers consider as suitable learning materials for that child (Gale, 2001). The almost impossibility of fair division of time, alluded to above, appears to be the major factor in causation of teacher guilt in providing inclusive education. It is difficult to address what appear to be almost irreconcilable conflicts. Tensions arising from competing requirements – advancing or maintaining normative academic standards of the majority of pupils, whilst catering for the more demanding and consuming needs of a child with SEN, may cause the teacher to question their professional identity.

### *Interim Summary*

The inclusive classroom brings rewards for the teacher but also poses many challenges. Materials previously not needed by teacher may now have to be sourced or created. New teaching strategies or approaches may need to be developed. Time constraint, however, was the difficulty mentioned by virtually all teachers. If the child with SEN had complex cognitive, social, or emotional needs, teachers needed to spend far more time dealing with the needs of that child in comparison to his/her class peers. Were the child with SEN to be enrolled in a specialised setting, he or she would be in a class containing perhaps less than one third of pupils usually to be expected in a mainstream class. In a specialised class, suitable teaching materials and professional supports such as speech therapy, occupational therapy may be more accessible.

These statements must be viewed neither as an *apologia* for segregated settings, nor as a criticism of inclusive education. They are put forward simply to contextualize the position of a mainstream classroom teacher catering for a child with significant SEN. The participating teachers in this study, while admitting to experiencing challenges in their work, did not feel that their over-arching teacher persona was, in any way weakened. After the initial shock of coping with “atypical” pupils, most teachers not only regained their confidence but also viewed the experiences as enriching their teaching skills. For those teachers with the most challenging children, respite periods were viewed as necessary. Teachers frequently report that they feel that they are unable to devote enough time both to the child with SEN and to his / her typically developing peers. While the vulnerable child with SEN elicits their inherent sense of caring, they also feel responsible for the academic progress of the non-SEN pupils in their classroom. These sometimes irreconcilable difficulties can lead to feelings of anger, frustration and guilt even for

the most committed teacher. The researcher's thoughts on these matters will be expanded upon in the final chapter of the thesis.

The competing agendas of pastoral care and effective teaching for the child with SEN and school improvement for the typically developing class peers generated levels of stress, frustration and guilt. The concept of inclusive education is founded on the active welcome of a diverse student population. Care of the more vulnerable members of the school community may impinge on teaching time that can be given to the "normative" class group. As mentioned previously, in this thesis, word limits preclude any deep philosophical discussion of what "successful" inclusive education means. Society would appear to ask schools to be both caring and academically successful. In a perfect world, this would be so. In the imperfect world of current day Irish primary schools, tension between these agendas may result in a huge level of frustration.

### **Teachers' Views on Emotions Generated When Working in the Inclusive Classroom**

Although the participating teachers were probed on their perceptions of the relevance of emotions, in general, in their professional work, they tended to concentrate on the area of stress.

A number of writers have remarked on the paucity of research on how teachers experience and regulate emotions in the classroom (Griffith, Steptoe & Cropley, 1999; Jackson, 2002; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). This is somewhat surprising as the feeling and expressing of emotions are a central part of daily work. As noted by Hargreaves (1998), "emotions are at the heart of teaching" (p. 835). Teaching has been described as, "emotionally draining and mentally tiring" (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 308). Teaching in general is viewed as a stressful occupation. The arrival of a child with SEN may pose further demands on the teacher, thus potentially adding to

the stress. The participating teachers in this study were asked if they believed if teaching, in general was a stressful job, and if they believed that the inclusive classroom added to that stress.

*Oh yes. I really feel that people don't understand how stressful it is. Especially the large numbers now. For me the greatest stress is the fact that I'm dealing with three classes. I have thirty two this year. I would also have a parent-teacher meeting every month. There might also be a parent-teacher meeting over the phone – which means leaving the class. (Interview CT 4)*

*Absolutely. I do. Yes – because even it's something they (Child X) did you might be able to say "special needs" but because you got five minutes sidetracked over here with him (Child X) you turn around and nearly kill the child here – which you wouldn't normally because you get stuck for time and start panicking because you're not getting something finished. Definitely, things like that. (Interview CT 2)*

Hargreaves (2005) discusses the emotional geography of a teacher's career. Although early career teachers experience their work with intensity and emotion, they also display more flexibility and adaptability to educational changes. It's not surprising therefore, that they also demonstrate more positive attitudes towards inclusive education. More experienced teachers who have become accustomed to catering for a more "normative" class, may find the presence of an atypical child more demanding and frustrating. The participating teacher with twenty five years teaching experience, pointed out that it was her knowledge of, and practice in SEN, that led to her level of confidence in dealing with "different" children and that enabled her to view the challenges with equanimity:

*But then again, I would have the confidence to deal with them – but I know that others would find it difficult. (Interview CT 8)*

### **Teachers' Attitude Regarding the Display / Moderation of Emotions Generated in the Inclusive Classroom.**

The majority of participants expressed the belief that all teachers need to moderate their display of emotions in the classroom in order to carry out their duties in a professional manner. A



small number of teachers reported that they need to make a deliberate, conscious effort to moderate their emotional response to the child with significant SEN. One teacher describes how she had been specifically advised by outside professionals supporting the child with significant SEN not to demonstrate any negative emotions towards him.

In any career that involves daily interaction with not only one's colleagues but also a wider community, it is inevitable that emotional responses are generated (Hochschild, 2003). In teaching, there are inherent elements that may amplify emotional responses. Teaching, at its heart is a caring profession, where teachers' perceptions of their emotional responses form part of their teacher identity (Reio, 2005). This professional identity is not only an internal construct but also involves, "how teachers present themselves to others" (Lasky, 2005, p. 901). Teachers therefore monitor not only their interior emotions but also their external expressions of those emotions (Kletchtermans, 2005). Openly displaying negative emotions may be in conflict with their perception of a caring role.

It could be said that in the school setting, there is a coercive component involved, in that offered the choice, many or most children would choose not to be there. In addition to caring for the children, the teacher is also expected to encourage the best possible academic performance from their pupils, in accordance with their ability. In some cases, pupils may not always be cooperative in this venture. All of these factors suggest the generation of emotional reactions on the part of the teacher throughout the day. The presence of a child with needs and demands beyond those of the normative class group is likely to produce additional strains. Participating teachers were asked about their beliefs about the expression of such emotions. Again, a variety of responses emerged. Some teachers felt that experiencing emotional reactions was part of

everyday teaching life. The teacher with longest experience in the classroom and who had previous experience of a child with SEN commented:

*Well, I think you have to do that with any class – not just a class with special needs. I don't get annoyed by it – it doesn't annoy me. I find it very tiring at times – so I just sit down and rest for a minute. (Interview CT 6)*

A teacher in the second year of her career dealing with a highly disruptive child experienced very strong emotional reactions:

*There was a day when he had just the worst day when he was just running up and down the corridor and wouldn't come in. In the end we had to call his Mam. She ended up crying because of what he was saying to her and He was crying – it was all a mess. I was shook from just trying to keep him in the classroom. So one of the other teachers said are you ok? And I just burst into tears. Yeah – there are days when you go home really upset -- because of the things that are said to you. You're thinking "I don't deserve that. (Initial interview CT 1)*

This teacher, however, was able to moderate her emotions in order to better cope with the child, rather than express her true feelings:

*Well I think that I get so frustrated with him – but it's better just to ignore him if you can. You'd feel like saying something but it would just turn into a big battle. He's inclined to stop a bit if he doesn't get attention, he calms down after a while. But there are times when I just want to scream and let a roar but you can't do that. You just have to focus on the rest of them. They're your priority. (Interview CT 1)*

In addition to the above quoted teacher, two of the participating teachers spoke of their need to moderate their expression of feelings within the classroom. One teacher felt that she had to do this in order not let herself become overwrought in the classroom. The other teacher was dealing with a very young pupil with a moderate intellectual impairment, who had no speech and who was not toilet trained. While other teachers in the study may have used their own personal reflection to consider how to deal with emotional response, this particular teacher also received outside advice:

*Well, I was advised by the psychologist not to show my annoyance – particularly about toileting difficulties, in case it made him hide what he was doing instead of putting his*

*hand up to tell us what he was doing. I'd just like him to go to the toilets rather than putting up his hand. But you know you have to hold back the whole time with any class... Oh yes, definitely. I do have to remind myself straight away. I might be thinking; "He did that on purpose. He did it on purpose". But then I'd think: "Well maybe he didn't mean it" And then I'd feel guilty (laughs). So you do have to think twice. But I've got better at doing what the psychologist asked me to do – not showing my emotions. (Interview CT 2)*

Gross (1998) views emotional regulation as, “the process by which individuals influence emotions they have, when they have them and how they experience and express these emotions” (p. 275). Nias (1997) has pointed out that teachers are required to maintain the facade of “professional pleasantness” even when faced with crowded working conditions and demanding pupils, factors which might generate negative emotions. Attempting to reconcile such “professional pleasantness” with perhaps “unallowable” feelings of frustration and anger may be both stressful and alienating from the pupils/s who stimulate the unwanted emotions in the teacher (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Teachers who feel ill-equipped to deal with pupils with SEN or who have had negative experiences with such pupils tend to become fearful of working in the future with such children (Zambelli & Bonni, 2004).

It has been pointed out that teachers and teacher educators may not devote sufficient time to considering the importance of emotions in teacher’s everyday lives and in the formation of their professional identity (Hargreaves 1998, 2000; Isebarger & Zembylas, 2006; Jackson, 2002). Teachers may need advice not only on teaching strategies for pupils with SEN but also learn to accept the place of emotions in their work. Teachers catering for children with significant SEN may need ongoing support to satisfactorily deal with the emotional experiences encountered in the inclusive classroom. Fredrickson (1998) points out that a person can learn to increase the amount and depth of experiences of positive emotions in their daily lives. Such positive emotions are not only beneficial to the health of the individual but also broaden their thought-action repertoire and foster interest in exploring novel situations; attributes that would be very helpful

to a teacher in an inclusive classroom. Shoffner (2009), a teacher educator herself, believes that emotions and emotional states play an important role in learning to teach and therefore those preparing new teachers for the classroom should explicitly address the issues of the affective domain in preservice teacher education. Experienced teachers also, perhaps, need to be assured that emotions are part of the professionalism of teachers that need to be accepted and utilised rather than being denied.

### *Assumptions Underpinning Participating Teachers' Beliefs*

Following consideration of the comments of the participating teachers, the researcher sought to identify assumptions which might underpin the attitudes and beliefs expressed. It appears that not all teachers fully subscribed to the acceptance of the child in the classroom with significant SEN as a welcome, fundamental human right. Some teachers viewed catering for the inclusion of a child with significant SEN as fulfilling an obligation imposed upon them by policy makers rather, than an opportunity to create a more equitable and inclusive society. Comments by participating teachers indicated a number of differing views in relation to models of disability. Some viewed the child with significant SEN through the lens of the medical / disability model. A small number reflected on the child's wider socio-ecosystem, implying their belief in a social model of disability. The majority of teachers viewed disability through the lens of a blended model, with some emphasis on the child's deficits, but also taking into account how the school environment and wider society respond to the child's needs.

Although teachers were aware of policies and directives in the area of special / inclusive education, their comments implied their assumption of the lack of a "grand plan" for teacher support in inclusive education. There was no perception of a cohesive framework to best support

both the child with significant SEN and his/her classroom teacher. Organisations, such as the SESS, specifically founded to support the inclusion process, were not cited by any participant. The above mentioned assumptions, and implications drawn from them by the researcher, will be again considered in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

### *Chapter Summary*

Teachers expressed differing views on their perceptions of professional preparation for working in the inclusive classroom. Those teachers most recently qualified from colleges of education appeared to be most positive about their ITE preparation for the inclusion process. One thread that emerged in virtually every interview, however, was the desire to have a supported (but not assessed) placement in a realistic inclusion setting – a mainstream classroom catering for a child with significant SEN.

Availability of, and access to, CPD, was considered as important by all participants. Much depended on the sense of agency and autonomy of individual teachers. Some believed that a central body in the field of education, the DES, should organise and fund continuing teacher education. Others considered that it was the responsibility of individual teachers to further their own professional education. The school principal emerged as a powerful factor in accessing CPD. Due to the limited sample group of the study, it was not possible to gain much insight into teachers' views on the induction process.

Teachers described many positive experiences, both for themselves and class pupils arising from the inclusive education process. When probed about their beliefs on the challenging aspects of inclusion, two interrelated topics emerged on a consistent basis, time constraints and concerns about the balance of rights between pupils with SEN and their typically developing

peers. Although not viewing the inclusion process as affecting their sense of teacher efficacy, even teachers with the most positive attitude towards inclusion spoke of the time constraints experienced when trying to give the best possible service to a child with significant SEN in a classroom with quite a large number of other children. As a corollary to extra time given to the child with SEN, there was a perception that less time was available for his / her class peers. This was a source of both frustration and guilt for the class teacher. Most teachers expressed the view that moderation of emotions was simply an inherent part of the teachers professional work.

The following chapter investigates how the wider school environment influences the attitudes of the classroom teacher in relation to the provision of inclusive education.

## Chapter 6

### Findings and Discussion of Findings

#### The Wider School Environment

*Systems designed specially to promote inclusion and which provide all involved staff with training that enhances both skills and positive attitudes are seen as having positive benefits for schools. Ownership by the whole school community, including parents, is viewed as critical. (Rose, 2001, p. 148)*

#### Introduction

The classroom teacher does not carry out his or her teaching duties in isolation. In addition to daily contact with pupils, the teacher encounters the school principal, colleagues, teaching support staff, administrative staff and parents of children. For those classroom teachers catering for a child with significant SEN, there may be an increased level of adult contact. Many children with significant SEN may be entitled to the support of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) and may also be receiving ongoing support from outside professionals. All of these actors influence the conceptual framework, knowledge and language surrounding inclusive education within the school (Pather, 2007). The classroom teacher frequently acts as the *de facto* coordinator for managing any additional support.

This chapter investigates the attitudes of classroom teachers about how the wider school environment impacts on their work in the inclusive classroom and also teachers' beliefs about the openness of discourse on the topic of inclusive education. It first examines teachers' perception on the role of the SNA, their views on support offered by the school principal and experiences of working with the Resource Teacher. The chapter then goes on to consider teachers' attitudes towards contact with the parents of children who have significant SEN and their experiences of working with outside professionals supporting the child with significant SEN. The study findings

on teachers' views on the openness of discourse on the topic of inclusion are then discussed. The chapter concludes by considering the potential limitations of this piece of research.

## **Influence of Wider School Environment on Teacher Attitude to Inclusion Process**

Recognising that the presence of a student with significant SEN in the inclusive classroom added greatly to the workload of the classroom teacher and required additional support, the Minister for Education and Science announced a major new policy initiative in the delivery of special education services (DES, 1998). In what could be interpreted as policy inducements for mainstream schools faced with accepting an atypical student cohort, the child with significant SEN would have access to a Resource Teacher for periods of time. The purpose of this allocation was to allow for more intense individual, or small group, tuition. Another form of inducement was the presence of a Special Needs Assistant, for assisting with the physical care or safety needs of the child. In the vast majority of cases, teachers also needed to liaise with other members of school staff such Learning Support staff and the principal. The presence of a child with significant SEN brings the teacher of the inclusive classroom into contact with more school personnel than a teacher with no such child.

### *Special Needs Assistant (SNA)*

A significant finding of the study was teachers' need for education in managerial skills when supervising another adult working in the inclusive classroom. Although the vast majority of participants were very grateful for support of the SNA, some were unsure of how they should



deal with SNA practices they felt were inimical to the best interests of the child with significant SEN.

Prior to the announcement of the Minister of Education and Science in 1998 of automatic entitlement to resources to meet the needs of children with SEN in the mainstream school setting, only a small number of SNAs were employed, 300 in total, and those primarily as child care assistants in special schools (Logan, 2006). In 2002, a circular was issued by the DES, outlining the procedure for submitting applications for the appointment of an SNA. Schools were invited to apply for the support of an SNA, where there were pupils, “with a significant medical need for such assistance, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or other pupils” (DES, 2002, p. 2). The appointment of an SNA was sanctioned by the DES based on the assessment outcomes and recommendation of professionals in the relevant areas. The role of the SNA was child-specific, rather than overall classroom assistance.

The passing of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Ireland, 2004a) had as part of its provision, the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). A number of functions, in the area of special education, previously under the remit of the DES were transferred to the NCSE, one of which was the processing of applications for, and the granting of, SNA support for schools. Although some SNAs were still sanctioned in a child-specific role, in a case where he or she had very significant and complex needs, the NCSE latterly began to sanction the appointment of SNAs as a shared resource among a number of children with SEN. As the number of children diagnosed as having significant SEN increased over the years, so did the volume of applications for SNA support. At the time of

writing, the NCSE has announced a cap on the existing number of existing SNAs, at 10, 575 (DES, 2011).

The vast majority of the teachers participating in this study had access to the services of an SNA. In most cases the SNA was present in the classroom for the entire school day. A number of teachers had access to the services of an SNA for part, or parts, of the school day. For some teachers, this was the first time that they had worked with another adult present in the classroom. Others had some previous experience in this area and were able to make comparisons. Virtually every teacher was appreciative of the assistance of the SNA:

*Oh yes. She's brilliant. She is fantastic. I have a very good relationship with her. I had her when I had the child with dyspraxia a few years ago. And I requested if at all possible that I have that SNA. (Interview CT 5)*

The presence of another adult in the classroom requires a level of adjustment on the part of the teacher. Much depended on the quality of the interpersonal relationship between teacher and SNA. Some teachers appeared to be very comfortable in their daily interchanges with their assistant.

*I asked the principal (for specific SNA) because I had a good personal relationship with her (SNA) and it's so important that you get on together. I mean for me to carry on as normal to be myself as much as I can with another adult in the room. It isn't easy. You feel a bit more self-conscious... I suppose that I'm very fortunate with my SNA – we get on so well. And you know it's like someone coming in to your house. (Interview CT 8)*

A small number of teachers expressed some concerns about their perception of the SNA's function within the classroom. The role of the SNA was first defined in a circular issued by the Department of Education and Science in 2002 (DES, 2002). Emphasis was placed on assisting with care needs of the children, assisting with supervision of pupils with SEN and assisting with preparation and tidying of the class. The supervision of SNAs was placed under the direction the school principal. The circular repeatedly stated (in bold print) that the SNA was not to be

involved in tasks of a teaching nature. Such a stance is in marked contrast to the duties set out for his or her equivalent in the UK context, termed *Teaching Assistant* (O'Brien, 2010). In many, if not most Irish primary schools, this stricture against teaching duties was largely ignored (Logan, 2006). Caring duties towards a child sometimes meant that the child needed overlearning or further explanation of a concept:

*Child Y and Z were in need of much support during a comprehension task this week. They were unable to decipher (sic) much of the text independently. I have moved them to the same table so as to ensure they are receiving support from the Special Needs' Assistant. (Diary CT 11)*

Duties of SNA tended to vary from school to school, and even from teacher to teacher. The role of the SNA was unclear to some teachers. In a number of classrooms, the SNA may have been working longer in the school than the class teacher and therefore may have known the children better. These factors left some teachers unclear about their professional role in relation to working with an SNA. One teacher remarked:

*I think more guidelines or ideas on how to work with your SNA. What kind of planning can be done. Because I wasn't sure and I'm still not entirely sure of what I should be doing with my SNA. I'm sure the INTO have guidelines and I've asked (teacher's name) who had them last year. (Interview CT 9)*

The nature of teacher-SNA supervisory relationship also troubled a number of teachers.

Although the school principal is nominally the supervisor of SNAs within a school, on a day-to-day level it is the classroom teacher who frequently directs the activities of the SNA. Lack of training for teachers in the area of directing the work of other adults frequently arises in the international literature (Lacey, 2001; Rueda & Monzo, 2005; Takala, 2007). At times, uncertainty surrounding the function of the SNA can lead to a blurring of roles:

*Exactly (blurring of roles between class teacher and SNA) – especially when it comes to (mentions child to whom SNA is assigned). With the rest of the class it's very clear that I'm teacher. But I know there are times when I'm working with (names child to whom*

SNA is assigned) and she will look to her SNA for assurance – and that's something I've had to think about... (Interview CT 3)

Although the class teacher retains responsibility for the overall management of the classroom, s/he now has to share some of that responsibility with another adult. There were differing views on the supervisory relationship between teacher and SNA. One teacher was rather diffident, being unsure how to deal with what she felt was not best practice on the part of the SNA:

*And that's one thing that I notice – I'm not saying anything against her but sometimes the SNA gets very impatient with her if she's not doing something right. And that's counterproductive with Child X. She just can't handle it... Sometimes it's very awkward for me. So what I do is I go over and say: "Is there anything I can do to help with over here?" But I don't know if that's undermining the SNA or not. (Interview CT 9).*

For other teachers, there was no such hesitation. They believed that the teacher, as the professional educator, had primacy as decision maker in the classroom. Even strong-willed and confident teachers, however, expressed some unease about directing SNAs:

*I'd kind of have ideas about what I want. And I'm the teacher so at the end of the day I get to decide. And that can be a bit awkward because then I have to say to the SNA: "This is what I want you to do".. (Interview CT 4)*

One teacher who had much previous experience with SNAs espoused more parity of esteem between class teacher and SNA:

*Well I've worked with an SNA for years and I would always invite them to IEP meetings and so on. I'd also be very careful not to seem that I'm the boss here. I'm not the boss of that person or anything. But it's always worked extremely well for me. Like my SNA – she is my right hand woman here. (Interview CT 8)*

However, this view was qualified somewhat in a later comment from this teacher, echoing a comment by a teacher in the Moran and Abbot (2002) study:

*And you have an SNA in your classroom. They're all wonderful but you have to learn how to deal with another adult in your room. Because you're a kind of a manager in the room.*

The comments of the participating teachers on their working relationship with SNA's, indicates a need for explicit, structured training for both parties on working co-operatively in the classroom. The nature of the relationship between the teacher and SNA goes beyond simply social comfort; it is central to the success of the educational experience of the child with SEN (Thomas, 1992). Whilst it must be admitted that there is a paucity of research in the area of teacher-SNA interaction (O'Brien, 2010), those studies that have been published all point towards the need for clarification, not so much of the individual roles of teacher and SNA but rather on their roles within the framework of a cooperative team (Logan, 2001; O'Neill, 2008). Strategies to promote a more cohesive framework which would facilitate a team approach between SNA and class teacher will be considered in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The SNA has been viewed as having a key role in the implementation of inclusive education (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Moran & Abbot, 2002; Takala, 2007). The presence of an SNA (or paraeducator) was for some parents, what made inclusive education work (Werts et al. 2004). The word limit of this thesis does not allow for in-depth discussion on the counterintuitive; that the presence of an SNA may, in fact, hinder a child's development by over-protection (Lacey, 2001; Logan, 2006; Scanlon & McGilloway, 2006). Friction between teacher and SNA is an inhibitory factor in attempting to provide inclusive education for a child with SEN (Cobb, 2005; Ruedo & Monzo, 2002). Such friction may arise from what the teacher perceives as an SNA dealing inappropriately with a child:

*And instead of calmly explaining what the right thing was, the SNA began shouting at her and she got her so angry that Child X went out in floods of tears. And I was the one who had to go over to the parents and explain what happened. It was really hard on me – I felt awful all that weekend, even though it wasn't really my fault. (Interview CT 9)*

Due to the close level of contact between an SNA and the child s/he cares for, a more intimate and warmer relationship may develop in comparison to that of the teacher with the class group as

a whole (Werts et al., 2004). For one teacher, a level of friction developed from the SNA's focus on the child with SEN, without consideration of the teacher's responsibility for the class as a whole:

*But I have to be honest – sometimes we'll say at the end of the day, she might have something to tell me or come over to ask something, but she seems to forget that I have a lot of other children in the class that I need to get out home. She's very much focused on him because that her job. He is *her* day but he's not *mine* – because I have all these other children to care for too. She's fantastic but some days I have to say: "You can tell me later, I have all these kids to get out". (Interview CT 2)*

### *Interim Summary*

Almost all of teachers participating in this study were very appreciative of the support of an SNA in the classroom. Some expressed the view that inclusive education could not happen without such support. Even with very positive attitudes, teachers expressed some concerns. The professional roles of both teacher and SNA, as members of a cooperative team, lacked clarity. The duties prescribed by the NCSE and those actually happening in the schools were frequently at variance. Teachers expressed a wish for some training in acting as the role of a manager in the classroom, some being unsure of the supervisory relationship between teacher and SNA. The success of a team approach to inclusive education was largely dependent on the personalities and interpersonal skills of both parties, rather than any established framework of professional education. Lawlor and Cregan (2003) view the role of SNA as holding the potential to be, "a stifling threat or a very valuable resource" (p. 91). These two contrasting models were identified by different participating teachers in the study.

### ***Influence of Principal on the Formation of Teachers' Attitudes to Inclusive Education***

The study findings point to the principal as being a major influence on attitude formation of teachers towards the inclusive process. The motivational power of personal affirmation of teachers working in the inclusive classroom by the principal is commented upon by a number of participants. Teachers differentiate between principals' administrative support for the policy framework of inclusion and their personal interest in how a teacher is coping in the inclusive classroom.

The school principal holds ultimate responsibility for the effective running of his or her school. Not only must they manage the administrative routines of the school but, perhaps, more importantly also provide educational leadership for the staff. This role, *inter alia*, involves the overseeing of policy development and delivery of any prescribed curriculum. The perceived attitudes and beliefs of a principal teacher, however, may be more influential than their actions. In a review of the literature on inclusive education, Avramadis and Norwich (2002) observe that a principal's attitudes towards inclusive education exert a very strong influence on the staff's acceptance of the inclusion process. The role of the principal encompasses not only leadership, organisation of support structures and administrative duties but more importantly, from the viewpoint of the classroom teacher teaching a pupil with SEN; providing personal affirmation. The interview question probing teachers' perceptions of support received from their principals produced differing viewpoints. Some teachers appreciated the provision of necessary materials:

*Well, the principal is really supportive – if I ask for anything, she'll get it for me. (Initial interview CT 1)*

The majority of teachers in the study focused on what they considered was the principal's understanding and appreciation of the extra work load placed on the teacher by the presence in

their class of a child with significant SEN. In some cases that aspect of understanding and affirmation was very evident to the teacher:

*Oh, extremely so. My principal is fantastic. And she's also very appreciative of the fact that inclusion is not easy and that with the class you have is not as easy as the standard class. This is a tough class. So she'll ask how you're getting on and take up any issues that you have. (Interview CT 10)*

In many cases, teachers believed that the principal was supportive of the inclusion process but that he or she was not explicitly forthcoming in affirming the class teacher. Some expressed the opinion that because they were relatively experienced teachers, perhaps the principal did not feel that they needed overtly stated support:

*Oh yeah she is. But eh..I don't know what else to say to that. I suppose that maybe because I'm here a few years she thinks I'm alright. Whereas now, there's a little girl in junior infants with special needs and she seems to more supportive. Maybe because she's (class teacher) new, she says to her: "How are you getting on?" But unless I went to the principal because my child was misbehaving - she probably would come in. But she hasn't said: "How are you getting on?" (Interview CT 7)*

A number of teachers expressed the view that although they believed that their principal was broadly supportive of inclusive education, direct approaches were not made to them in case problems or difficulties surrounding the inclusion of the child with SEN were disclosed:

*(Laughs) Well if I went up to her office and fell on the floor crying, I'm sure that she would do something for me – but if I don't, I won't be asked. I mean I went and asked: "Help me out", she would, definitely but it's like when she's walking past, it's "Don't see that (classroom) door, just keep walking past" unless I kind of ask .. You won't be asked unless you are doing the asking. I would say that the principal understands that it's tough but maybe is afraid, like to come in case I start asking for things or telling her things. (Interview CT 2)*

Only one teacher expressed the view that she lacked the support of the principal in attempting to provide effective inclusive education, believing that he had no understanding or appreciation of the concept of catering for a diverse cohort of pupils:



*And then there's the issue of staff in the school. For example, I feel that I'm not getting support from the principal. That's happened a few times. And you know, if I'm after doing some good work improving Child X's self esteem and then the principal makes some comment at a football match about him (Child X) not doing something right – which sets him back. And you're so annoyed. If he (principal) had been into the class to see the work I'd done and just in one word he's ruined it. Well, he's very old school. He doesn't really believe in the idea of differentiation. (Interview CT 4)*

The above quotes indicate the spectrum of perceived support from the principal for inclusive education, ranging from the explicitly affirming, to near indifference. Organisational procedures which support inclusion are usually coordinated by the principal in the Irish context, in which as yet no position of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) exists. Planning time, allocation of teaching assistant support, meetings with the special education team, class supervision cover for meetings with parents of child with SEN and meetings with outside professionals all require the active support of the school principal (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Werts et al., 1996). In a review of the literature on inclusive practices over the past two decades, Jordan et al. (2009) confirm that the belief and attitude of the school principal toward inclusive education are the most influential variables in the model of effective inclusion.

A differentiation may need to be made between a principal's support for the policy of inclusive education, and teachers' perceptions of a principal's personal support for staff members implementing that policy. As indicated previously, even the most enthusiastic teachers expressed the view that providing inclusive education is hard work. While the majority of them would view the organisational structure of the school as being supportive of the inclusion process, many longed for a sign of personal affirmation from the principal – *a pat on the back*. The principal frequently acts as the link between the policy and the person. Teachers perceive the principal as being more in touch with the reality of the teaching work than members of policy formulation bodies (Lopes et al., 2004; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Werts et al., 2006). A level of personal

support from the principal for the teacher in an inclusive classroom is one factor in preventing teacher burnout (Talmor et al., 2005). Teacher perception of such support also leads them to be more relaxed about, and supportive of, the inclusion process (O'Donaghue & Chalmers, 2000). This aspect is important, in that teachers who have experienced the greatest challenges in providing inclusive education will have developed very valuable skills in this area. Of the three teachers with the most challenging children in this survey, two would opt for the "standard" class in the next school year, if given the choice. The teacher who was catering for a child with severe emotional disturbance, while a little hesitant about encountering a child with similar difficulties, nevertheless remained enthusiastic about inclusion. The former indicated their perception of "passive" support on the part of the principal for the providers of inclusive education. In the latter case, the teacher was fulsome in her praise for the personal support of the principal;

*She's come into the class herself to see what's going on. On bad days, she's told me to go to the staffroom to have a cup of coffee and a break. (Initial Interview CT 1)*

This level of perceived support enhances the belief of staff members that not alone is the policy of inclusion endorsed in the school but also that teachers who operationalize this policy, which may require extra effort, are valued and affirmed by the principal. The explicit validation of the role of the teacher in the inclusive classroom increases a teacher's sense of self-efficacy (Friedman, 2000, 2003) and also increases the likelihood of a teacher wishing to re-engage with a child with significant SEN (Lupart, 1998; Garmon, 2004).

In addition to providing logistic and emotional support for the teacher in the inclusive classroom, the attitude of the principal frequently affects the developing of professional skills of the classroom teacher in the area of SEN. The principal may be the first person to receive promotional literature on potential CPD courses and may also be aware of professional courses which teachers may not have previously needed. Chapter 5 has indicated the important role of

the principal in bringing available courses of inclusive education CPD to the attention of relevant teachers.

### **Beliefs and Concerns about Working with Learning Support and Resources Teachers who Support Child with Significant SEN**

Examination of data generated in the study suggests that while most participants valued the assistance of additional school support staff in supporting the child with significant SEN, such support, unless well planned and well managed, could lead to unwanted disruption of classroom routines. There was some suggestion of potential communication difficulty arising for beginning career teachers where support staff members were drawn exclusively, or predominantly, from later career teachers.

Children with significant SEN in this study are assessed as having a disability or impairment of such a degree, that extra services, or levels of support, are required to enable them to achieve their full potential in an inclusive classroom. One teacher talked of the *entourage* that came with the pupil with significant SEN. While all such services are generally welcomed by the classroom teacher, they can, at times, generate their own complexities. One of the main extra-classroom supports for the child with SEN sanctioned by the NCSE is the provision of teaching hours by the Learning Support / Resource Teacher (LS/ RT). A child may be withdrawn from the classroom to the LS / RT room for individual or small group tuition, but the LS / RT may also provide in-class support; assisting the child with SEN as an individual, or within a small group of his / her peers (NCSE, 2006) within the classroom. The LS / RT and class teacher may also co-teach or team teach the entire class of pupils; at times with other LS / RTs present if a large scale

literacy or numeracy initiative is undertaken in the school. The SNA assigned to a child also has to be allocated a role within such frameworks. A high level of collaboration is needed to make all levels of teaching support run smoothly. A key factor in this enterprise would appear to be good communication between class teacher and LS / RT along with flexibility on the part of both in response to the needs of the target child and to the perceived efficacy of any previously existing framework of support.

Most teachers in this study were very positive in their attitude about the support provided by the LS / RT:

*I work very closely with the resource teacher and we get on very well. We chat a lot about her progress and see if there's different things we can do. For example instead of Child X using different readers, she's using the exact same reader as the other children because then it can be reinforced in class and she can participate in the same activities as the others – like the drama and role play of the stories. And even in creative writing the resource teacher will help her and get her to type up her story. She's give her one-to-one support and then Child X will come and read her story to the class like everyone else. And that's one thing that's working really well. (Interview CT 9)*

The *entourage* accompanying the child with SEN, however, caused some difficulties. Interacting with a number of adults caused disruption to the classroom teachers' routines. Simply placing more adults in the classroom does not necessarily improve the service (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006).

*There simply is not enough space in the class for 2 teachers and an SNA... However, while our plans seemed good in Sept., the actual working of them is proving difficult and I am left feeling frustrated a lot of the time as I never seem to get anything done without some interruption. (Diary CT 8).*

One aspect of the professional and personal relationships between the class teacher and the LS / RT that had not occurred to this researcher was the effect of the potential age gap. In most schools in this study, the LS / RTs were drawn from the senior members of staff, while many of the participating teachers regarded themselves as still being in the more junior ranks. A teacher at

an early career stage believed that her opinions would not get full consideration by her more senior colleagues:

*I'd kind of have ideas about what I want. I have to say to (mention's Resource Teacher's name): "This is what I want you to do. I want you to do ABC" but they might say: "But I want to do this or that". Because I am younger, you'd sometimes say: "I'm not going to force it" and you'd just pull back.. Maybe it's an age thing (laughs). Having said that, they're OK if I go to them but if it's an idea that I have and that they disagree with, they override me, because they feel they have more experience and I suppose that's an understandable thing. (Interview CT 4)*

The teacher with the greatest length of teaching experience in this study remarked:

*But do you know, I'm the only, the oldest, one in the classroom. So all of my colleagues are resource, learning support or teaching English to newcomers – so I'm the only one still in the classroom at my table at lunch time in the staffroom. (Interview CT 6)*

### ***Teachers' Attitudes in Relation to Parents of Child with Significant SEN***

Although the researcher expected to find a greater level of face-to-face parent-teacher contact between parents of children with significant SEN than with those of typically developing peers, this expectation held true in only a few cases. A number of teachers noted that written communication, through a communication notebook, was demanding of their time. Two teachers discuss both the potential ambiguities of written communication with parents, and tensions arising from differing views by parents and teachers of the abilities and learning needs of the child with significant SEN.

In addition to the *entourage* of school personnel generated by the presence of a child with SEN in the classroom, it is also more likely that the teacher in the inclusive classroom will have increased contact with persons outside of the school staff. Parents are viewed, in Article 42 of the

Irish Constitution (Ireland, 1937) as the, “primary and natural educator of the child” (S.1).

Sections 3 and 8 of the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004a) mandate that parents of a child with significant SEN must be consulted about an education plan for their child, must be facilitated to be involved in the preparation of a plan, be advised of any significant changes in that plan and receive a report of any review of the education plan. Meetings between parents and teacher are also promoted as a means of early intervention for any difficulties arising with a child. It is not surprising therefore, that the literature suggests that the parents of a child with significant SEN will have more frequent contact, of longer duration, with the class teacher than parents of typically developing children (Forlin, 2001; Gale, 2001; Shearman, 2003; Soodak, 2003).

The data from this study do not fully support that hypothesis. Teachers report varying levels of contact with the parents of a child with SEN. This contact could be in the form of personal meetings or through a *communication note book*. For parents of a very young child with complex needs, it is quite understandable that they would have many concerns about issues such as cognitive development, development of social skills, establishment of friendships and self-management skills. Personal meeting could be incidental or part of a planned regime:

*Also there's more parental interaction. I would also have a parent-teacher meeting every month. There might also be a parent-teacher meeting over the phone – which means leaving the class. (Interview CT 4)*

*They seem to think that it's just them and no one else. Oh you definitely see more of them. I mean even at the time of the parent-teacher meeting, you'd feel like saying: "I don't need to see you because I talk to you everyday" but ..no, they came anyway and stayed longer than anyone else. (Interview CT 2)*

In some cases, there was no more contact than would be expected with the parents of a typically developing child:

*That's a very interesting question because I have two of my children **diagnosed** with special needs. One (set of parents) that I never see. Either myself or the SNA would hand over the child to them and off they'd go. I wouldn't see them from one end of the year to*

*the next - apart from planning meetings, the IEP and development meetings. The other I would talk to every day and would give a report on every single day. And they would come up and tell me any kind of development – shape, make or space- that happened with the child. This happens every day – so I have the two extremes. (Interview CT 8)*

While the use of a communication notebook facilitated ongoing contact between parents and teachers, it also added to the workload of the teacher, in an already busy class. That words were written, rather than spoken, raised concerns for a number of teachers. Written words are “fixed” and are not subject to the instant qualification or clarification that is possible in verbal exchanges.

*Today I was quite annoyed by the response to my note by Child Xs mother. She replied that Child X was in good form that evening and completed all the homework activities well. I felt that implied that she clearly could manage Child Xs behaviour better than I could and that she could settle her down to the tasks. Maybe I’m “reading” into the reply too much and it was meant in good faith. I just felt that it implied somehow that I was incapable of settling Child X to task. (Diary CT 5)*

Lasky (2000) has commented that interactions between teachers and parents, “can be emotionally loaded” (p. 843). Positive comments by parents can validate the work of the teacher, but, equally, negative interactions can cause self-doubt and frustration in the teacher (Lohrmann et al., 2006):

*Does she think I’m making it all up? I get the feeling that she is paranoid about us trying to get rid of him out of the class, and sick or not sick she is determined to have him in school - or is it that she sees his time in school as her break. Either way, Child X needed a day at home resting as he clearly wasn’t fit for school. (Diary CT 2)*

Data from the study indicated that a level of tension between parents of children with significant SEN and the class teacher arose due to differing views as to the child’s abilities and potential achievements. All parents wish for the best possible outcome for their children. Parents of children with significant SEN, while wishing to remain optimistic about their child’s potential achievements, frequently, “wrestle with private understandings of their child’s abilities and

needs” (Grove & Fisher, 1999, p. 124). The lenses chosen by parents to view their child may differ to the lenses chosen by school personnel (Duncan, 2003; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). In some cases parents’ expectation may not be realistic and may be in contention with the views of professional educators (Palmer et al., 2003). Levels of tension can occur when differences of opinion arise between the views of teachers and parents as to the learning targets set out for the child (Farrell, 2000; Gale, 2001)

*However while speaking to Child Xs mother, I found that she is quite unwilling to accept that Child Xs homework be different to that of the other children in the class. She is clearly in denial about Child X’s ability. (Diary CT 2)*

The concept of partnership is frequently set forth in the literature as a panacea, a mechanism by which not only educational, but also societal concerns can be addressed (Pinkus, 2003). Although parents are acknowledged as key actors in the education of their children, an authentic model of partnership between school and parent can be difficult to achieve (Laluvein, 2010; Gross, 1996; Werts et al., 2004). In the relationship between parents of a child with SEN and the school, there may be added complications. Parents of a child with SEN may view themselves as advocates for their child, but may also view their role as *consumer*, seeking services to which they feel they, or their child have entitlement (Corbett, 1998; Norris & Lloyd, 2000). Lack of “judgemental knowledge” (Lake & Billingsley, 2000), where a parent knows enough to make a good judgement about educational evaluations and constraints on service delivery can lead to unrealistic expectations of what the school can offer. When such views are in sharp contrast with those of the class teacher, tensions arise (Pinkus, 2003).

Perhaps for some parents of children with SEN, the inclusion of their child in a classroom with typically developing peers may affect their expectations; that s/he is, “just another kid” (Meyer, 2001, p.16). In the study findings reported by Lake and Billingsley (2000), parents of



children with SEN complained bitterly about the school's tendency to view their children through the lens of a deficit-model, stressing what the child could not do, rather than what he or she was able to do. Although this is very understandable, it does not take into account that the child may not be able to advance academically at the same pace as their peers:

*I suppose it's her child and she wants the best for her and her heart is in it that she's going to read. And I suppose by sending her to mainstream are you hoping that deep down that's she's going to join in just like the rest? (Interview CT 5)*

It must be noted that the teachers quoted above were catering for very young children, with a moderate intellectual disability, enrolled in schools with very high achievements in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Nevertheless, a level of coherence between the expectations of parents and that of classroom teachers would seem desirable for the optimum outcome of inclusive education. In the following chapter the researcher will outline his ideas on how parents and teachers might reach a better level of mutual understanding of the potential outcomes for a child with significant SEN.

### **Teachers' Attitudes Towards External Professionals and Agencies Supporting the Child with Significant SEN**

The study findings indicated a level of unevenness in teachers' beliefs about the quality of their working relationships with professionals outside of the school setting who also provide support for the child with significant SEN. Both ends of the spectrum are represented; ranging from teachers who express a wish for more contact with, and more advice from, outside professionals, to those teachers who consider that strategies proposed by outside professionals are over-focused on the child with significant SEN, indicating a lack of understanding of the work load of the teacher and the complexities of the working classroom.

The implementation of an inclusive classroom requires additional supports in comparison to a classroom without a child with significant SEN (Avramadis & Norwich, 2002; Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Kalambourka al., 2007). This need was envisaged by the Irish Government when formulating the EPSEN Act (Ireland, 2004). Section 7 (3) states, in relation to a child with SEN: “The Council...shall ensure that there are provided to him or her, such of the services identified in the education plan prepared in relation to the child”. Section 8 of the same Act outlined the composition of a *team* to be involved in the drawing up of a child Educational Plan. The convenor of such a team, the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO), is empowered to seek the services of a psychologist employed by National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) but also:

any other person whom the parents or special educational needs organiser considers appropriate and nominate to be a member of the team, being a person holding a qualification granted or awarded by a professional body (Section 8 (4) (c))

For children under the age of five years, responsibility for assessment and provision of support lay with the local health authority. For children aged six to eighteen, services were the responsibility of the NCSE, envisaged as being rolled out on a phased basis (NCSE, 2008). Such a level of support would have ensured that all identified needs of a child with SEN would be addressed. This idyllic vision of coordinated and cohesive support for inclusive education never came to fruition due to the financial downturn in the country. One of the measures in the Financial Budget of 2008 was the deferral of the full implementation of the EPSEN Act, with children’s needs consequently being addressed on a non-statutory basis. A number of teachers in this study commented on the lack either of support for the child, or the poor lines of communication between specialist and class teacher. One teacher looked towards the utopian

ideal envisaged by the EPSEN Act, where a requisite *team* would be assembled to cater for the needs of the child with SEN:

*Well, whoever has been dealing with the child (should provide professional development). I mean my child this year has been attending the speech and language therapist and the occupational therapist. I think we should have a meeting at the start of the year. Then they could say to you: "I've been doing this is speech and language" or "I've been doing this in occupational therapy and this is what you could do in class to help". When I had a child with Down Syndrome, a person from Down Syndrome (Ireland) came in and gave us a few ideas, but again, nothing concrete that would keep you going year-long. (CT 7)*

The teacher quoted above alluded to the involvement of specific advocacy groups on behalf of a child. For some of the younger children, identification of needs and provision of requisite services were provided by a multi-disciplinary team under the auspices of advocacy groups. Such professional or advocacy groups, however, may focus on the child with whom they are working, without taking into consideration the dynamics and complexities of the classroom:

*I don't find them very realistic at all. We met a speech therapist at the [Names type of voice synthesiser] demonstration and she wanted it pushed into the classroom straight away and ..I sounded like I wasn't interested in him (Child X) or the machine but she didn't get it that it wouldn't work in the classroom – that in a senior infant classroom they'd all be looking at a machine that makes noise. She thought he was the only boy here. You see, they're not teachers and they don't know what it's like in the classroom. (CT 2).*

She went on to point out another example of what she considered a most impractical strategy:

*And one of the girls on his (Child X's) team says to me: "Do you know (says teacher's name) what might be good for his movement? - a tricycle in the school yard or a rope for swinging from one side of the hall to the other" and I'm looking at her and going... (Teacher mimes being dumbstruck and then laughs).*

As in the case of the parents of the child with SEN, perhaps a level of shared understanding also needs to be fostered in the case of advocacy groups involved with the child. Teachers look for support and advice from relevant professionals, but such support needs to be understood in the context of a classroom environment. What may be possible in individual or

small group setting may prove impractical for a teacher who has to care for more than twenty pupils. Again, some level of inter-group training, or observation of the child in the different settings may be of benefit for all of those holding the best interests of the child at heart.

### **Teachers' Attitudes about the Possibility of Open Discourse Around the Topic of Inclusion**

A diverse range of teacher opinions on the concept of the openness of discourse surrounding the inclusion process emerged in the study findings. Some participants considered that they would not experience any difficulty in expressing their personal views about inclusion. Others reported that they would be loath to express their unexpurgated beliefs to either parents of the child with significant SEN, or to those outside of the teaching profession. A notable finding, however, is that a number of teachers feel that even within their own school setting, critical comments relating to inclusive education must be constrained, in order not to confirm (or strengthen) existing negative beliefs about the inclusion process held by some members of staff.

A number of respondents in the study by Lopes et al. (2004) discussed their perception of the openness of discourse surrounding the topic of inclusion. Although inclusive education takes place in the school setting and requires the involvement of the educationalists therein, it could be said that in many ways inclusion transcends the previously accepted pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings of the traditional view of the aims of education. Inclusive education not only implies improvement and progress in areas of the curriculum but also harbours moral and human rights imperatives (Mittler, 1999; Florian, 1998, 2002). Such socially approved

changes in favour of equality and belonging might lead to difficulties in openly debating the value of inclusive education. To offer any form of questioning or negative comment might brand one as discriminatory and segregationist. To question such an orthodoxy is, “to invite scorn or even vilification” (O’Brien, 2003. P. 17) and possibly to be suspected of, “an intellectual or moral bankruptcy (or both)” (Kavale & Forness, 2000, p. 280). The participating teachers in this study were asked if they felt that they could openly express any opinion they held around the overall concept of inclusive education. This question was spontaneously raised by one of the teachers in the study:

*I wonder if you (Researcher) would have anybody who would admit to being against inclusion?*

(Interview CT 3)

Two of the teachers in study felt that they would have no difficulty in expressing their views on inclusive education:

*Well, I consider myself to be an honest person, so I'd have no difficulty saying what I thought. I mean if the facilities weren't here for them or the support form – then I might say that it mightn't be the best place for them. I wouldn't have any issue myself but I think it could be construed by some people as being segregationist. But I think you have to draw a line somewhere – if a child has massive, massive needs and the school can't cope with those needs, then it constitutes more of an abuse to have the child in that school. I think you'd be adding to this child's problems if you didn't come out and openly say that. (Interview CT 11)*

*But in terms of - well, you can try anything. We're very good about that here. With the parents we've tried ideas and said to them if this doesn't work we'll meet again and see what other way we can approach it. And then you've got that open space to be realistic about it. I mean you can say to Child X's parents: “Child X will not be going to mainstream secondary school. She may go a special needs secondary school”. I think that if she gets past second class in a mainstream school, she will have done really well. (Interview CT 10)*

Other teachers gave a more qualified response. One of the major influencing factors for some teachers was the composition of the audience to whom they were speaking. Sensitivity to the feelings of parents was evident, particularly in the case of a teacher who was, herself, a parent:

*Because again I'd put myself in the position of a parent – would I like to be told?... I mean, these children are coming to the mainstream at the request of their parents and the psychologists, or whatever are telling them: "Yes, they're fine to go". Those parents want their children to be treated as normal. So I'd think it would be very difficult. I'd find it very difficult to turn around and say: "Lookit (sic), this wrong". (Interview CT 6)*

As might be anticipated, a number of teachers felt more comfortable expressing their beliefs to fellow-teachers, who, working in the same setting, might have a shared understanding of the difficulties and complexities surrounding inclusive education:

*Well, when talking to other teachers I am honest. I can tell them honestly and some of them just can't believe the stuff that happens – but in settings where they're not teachers, I'm afraid that I'm not very honest. With people who might be parents of kids, I watch what I say but I'm very honest with teachers. I suppose it's the same thing with other occupations... We met a speech therapist as well and they're all – you kind of get the impression that they're all against you as well because they – well I couldn't be as open with them as I am with you because they'd think I'm horrendous – a monster. (Interview CT 2)*

Comments from certain teachers, however, indicated that even within the grouping of teachers, a level of caution was exercised as to which particular teachers might be party to any confidences. Inferences drawn from these comments suggest that within some school staffs there may be a level of lukewarm acceptance of, if not hostility towards, the inclusion in mainstream classrooms of children with significant SEN:

*I think with the staff you can. I you feel frustrated because you've had a tough morning. You can go up and say: "This morning I feel very frustrated with Child X". There's a couple of the staff that are against inclusion anyway. So, to be honest I wouldn't say it to that certain few because you'll get the "I told you so" and it would make you feel a little bit cross. (Interview CT 5)*

*Well, there have been some negative views around here. We're an older staff here and that makes the difference. Oh yeah, there would be grumbles alright (laughs). Some people wouldn't be too happy with a class with special needs. (Interview CT 8)*

If such comments were replicated across a larger group, it would suggest that there is much work still to be done to engender positive attitudes in mainstream class teachers towards the philosophy of inclusive education. As noted at the beginning of this thesis, the classroom

teacher is the key actor in the implementation of the inclusive classroom, the arena for major aims of inclusion; not only academic progress but also social acceptance by peers in a local mainstream school (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Meyer, 2001; Nind & Wearmouth, 2006). The school contexts of the teachers supplying the above comments suggest that it may be teachers in the later stages of their career who express misgivings about the concept and practicalities of inclusive education.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study sought to explore the attitudes of classroom teachers catering for a child with significant SEN, within their pupil cohort. The term *significant SEN* was defined as children who had been granted additional support to facilitate inclusion in a mainstream class. Such children, however, range from those who present virtually no challenge to the classroom teacher, to those who may reduce their class peers and classroom teacher to tears. This sample, in itself, may be something of a strength within the study, as it encompassed a diverse student cohort and did not restrict itself to “worst-case scenario”; thus presenting a biased picture.

The sample group of teachers was both small and unstratified and therefore not representative of Irish primary teachers as a whole. Only one rural school was included in the study and no male teacher in middle or later-stage career was recruited. No school with a designation of Disadvantages Status was represented. The majority of the participating teachers were below the age of thirty years and therefore would have undergone their ITE relatively recently and consequently would have had some input on inclusive education. Teachers in later-stage careers may have had little, if any, professional education for the inclusive classroom. Only

one teacher in the study had been able to avail of the Induction process as part of CPD. The findings of the study, therefore, must be interpreted with considerable caution. Due to the word-limit of the thesis, some of the data generated in the study could not be discussed in this thesis but may be explored by the researcher in another format at a later stage.

### **Potential Sources of Bias**

In Chapter 4 the writer outlined steps taken to counteract, or at least reduce, sources of bias in this study. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that even with such measures in place, sources of potential bias in the reported piece of research may arise. There exists the possibility of a level of sampling bias. A number of teachers declined to take part in the study and therefore those who did participate may be teachers who hold a more positive attitude towards the inclusion process, thus presenting perhaps a more positive and accepting attitude towards inclusion than exists in the wider community of Irish primary school teachers. If such participants felt constrained in speaking freely about their beliefs on inclusive education, a further potential source of bias existed. Had the writer chosen the most positive responses from teacher participants and ignored the negatives responsive (or visa versa) a further element bias may have to be considered. The writer situated himself within this study as a teacher. Although this stance may have proved useful in establishing rapport with classroom teachers, it may also have resulted in providing a narrow lens through which to examine inclusive education. All of the above sources of potential bias must be taken into account when interpreting the findings of this study.

Bearing in mind all the *caveats* listed above, the study was carried out with strong methodological rigour. Data generated in this very small-scale inquiry may point toward avenues



of further research. Some of the findings may be of interest to teacher tutors; particularly in the area of planned and supervised contact between student-teachers and children with SEN.

Potential uses of online support / education might be further teased out. Should some of the data from the study be published in journal articles, fruitful debates might be engendered around some of the challenges posed by the inclusive classroom for the mainstream class teacher.

### *Chapter Summary*

All of the teachers who participated in this study were hard-working and committed professionals. Each of them also demonstrated a high level of concern (and in many cases, considerable affection) for the child with significant SEN. Although all of the children referred to in the study had been assessed by the NCSE as having a need that required extra support in the school setting, some had more complex and challenging needs than others. Teachers' responses to such needs ranged from placing all "throwable" objects in the classroom beyond reach of the child (including class library), to the need of a teacher to remind himself that the child, diagnosed with a specific speech and language disorder, needed extra support: *To be honest, I often have to remind myself that she needed a bit more explaining.* (CT 12)

Having a child in a class with SEN usually results in the class teacher having contact with more school personnel than a teacher without such a child. In the case of the majority of teachers in this study, a Special Needs Assistant was present in classroom for all, or part, of the day. Teachers were very appreciative of the support, but issues arose as to the clarification of the definitions of roles of teacher and SNA. Some concerns were also expressed about the preparation of teachers for the role of managing other adults in the classroom. The school principal is a pivotal influence in the running of a school. All but one principal was viewed as

holding a positive attitude towards inclusive education. Teachers differentiated, however, between support for policy and material provision, and personal affirmation of the teacher in the inclusive classroom by the principal. A number of teachers expressed a wish for personal validation by the principal of the extra work entailed by inclusive education. They commented that they felt that they were being taken for granted. It would appear that such affirmation and validation of teachers on the part of the principal would be a morale boost for teachers in the inclusive classroom and might encourage teachers who have gained valuable skills to be more willing to accept classes with children who have significant SEN in the future.

All of the teachers had the support of a resource teacher. Most were very positive, but in some cases they pointed to disruption caused by the coming and going of support teachers.

Although the international literature indicated that the classroom teacher might have excessive contact with the parents of a child with significant SEN, the research data in this study did not support that thesis. The level of contact replicated what might be anticipated in any classroom. In some cases, communication with the parents of a child with significant SEN through a communications notebook, did add to the teacher's workload. Some teachers believed that a small number of parents held unrealistic expectations of the child's abilities.

When probed on attitudes towards outside professionals dealing with the child with significant SEN, classroom teachers expressed a level of dissatisfaction with the collaborative framework currently available. Some teachers wished for more direct contact with, and support from the relevant professionals. A number of teachers complained that some professionals, particularly those within advocacy groups, did not understand the complexities of the mainstream classroom. There appeared to be no planned, cohesive framework for integrating the

work of the classroom teacher and outside professionals who support the inclusion of the child with significant SEN.

The study also probed teachers' perceptions about their ability to freely express their views on inclusive education. Two of the teachers felt that they could express their views in all circumstances. Three of the participants spoke of the need for sensitivity towards parents of the child with SEN. Two teachers felt that they could be open in their views about how inclusion was working, but would need the support of the resource teacher and principal to do this. One teacher stated that she could express her views to other teachers, but would be cautious in public settings where there might be parents of children with SEN. A number of other teachers also cited teachers as a group to whom they could openly express their views on inclusion; but with qualifications. On some staffs, groups of teachers were viewed as being unreceptive to inclusive education. Expressing comments critical of inclusive education was viewed as entrenching the negative attitudes of that group.

The following, and final, chapter of the thesis will reflect on the study findings, tease out the implications for classroom teachers in the Irish context and make recommendations for changes in professional teacher education and support which might help to generate an even more positive attitude in teachers already working in, or preparing for, the inclusive classroom.

## Chapter 7

### Implications, Recommendations and Reflections

*While inclusion is desirable in principle, it can be highly problematic in practice.* (Mowat, 2009, p. 159)

#### Introduction

The previous two chapters have investigated factors influencing the formation of attitudes of classroom teachers who are currently providing inclusive education for pupils with significant special educational needs. The findings were based on what was said by the participating teachers, whether in verbal or written form. This chapter will further tease out an issue arising in Chapter 5, the interrogation of assumptions underpinning some of the expressed beliefs and attitudes of the participating teachers. It seeks to look at what was not said and what was not included. Teachers in the study, unsurprisingly, focused on their immediate classroom circumstances. This, indeed, was the remit of the investigation. The researcher, however, needs to move to a level above the individual, in order to extrapolate a more cohesive picture of how inclusive education is being experienced by classroom teachers. Accepting that a small qualitative study cannot produce findings that are entirely generalizable to the larger target population, the researcher nevertheless considers that the data generated have implications for the more effective implementation of inclusive education in Irish primary school classrooms, in general.

Following deliberations on the findings of the study, the researcher draws implications from these findings, and proceeds to make recommendations in relation to addressing factors which influence the attitudes of teachers in relation to inclusive education. These

recommendations are addressed to major policy actors in the area of special / inclusive education such as the Department of Education and Skills, the Teaching Council, teacher educators, NEPS, National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) and NCSE. The Department of Finance must also be viewed as a major actor in any change process in the area of inclusive education, due to its critical role in decisions on the provision of funding required to implement such recommendations. Other changes are possible through school-cluster partnerships, or individual school initiatives, with local Education Centres acting as a nexus.

The chapter concludes with the researcher outlining his thoughts on the inclusion process in its current state and to where it might move in the future.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

A basic premise of this thesis is that the holding of positive attitudes by classroom teachers towards inclusive education is a critical factor in the successful implementation of the inclusion process. This study examined the attitudes of a number of Irish primary classroom teachers currently addressing the needs of a pupil with significant SEN. Reflecting upon the findings of the study, the researcher makes recommendations for policy makers and teacher educators, which he feels will inculcate a stronger level of confidence and teacher-efficacy in teachers currently working, or who may in future work, in the inclusive classroom.

Inclusive education is a complex undertaking, bringing with it both rewards and challenges. It may be best to view it not as a fully achievable state, but rather as an ongoing process (Sebba & Ainscow, 1996). In this section of the chapter, the researcher identifies the significant findings of the research study, draws implications for the wider Irish education context and makes recommendations for addressing factors which classroom teachers perceived

as challenges to the effective implementation of inclusive education. Teacher education, a critical factor in the formation of positive attitudes to the inclusion process is first addressed. As only one participant had experienced the induction process, the researcher considered that inadequate data had been generated from which to draw implications. The challenges posed by the inclusive classroom are then discussed at the individual teacher level, classroom level and wider school level. Elements of some challenges e.g. *suitability of the placement of child with significant SEN in the mainstream classroom* and *working cooperatively with SNA*, do not fit neatly in any one of the above areas, but run like a vein through all of them. These two topics will be discussed under the heading: *National Policy Changes Needed*.

## **Teacher Education**

### ***Initial Teacher Education (ITE)***

A teacher's ITE has a major influence on their beliefs about the purposes of education in general, his / her sense of teacher-efficacy and attitude towards student cohorts they will meet in their professional careers. A significant finding in this study relates to ITE students' contact with pupils who have significant SEN. While the data indicate that the more recently qualified teachers hold a more positive attitude to accommodating a diverse pupil cohort than later career teachers, the one consistent factor to emerge is the belief about the need to experience contact with children with significant SEN during their ITE, irrespective of when teachers graduated from their ITE college. For some of those graduating from colleges of education in the past two years, such contact was still not possible on a planned basis.

**Recommendation:**

- At ITE level, all students should be able to avail of planned, supervised teaching contact with children who have significant SEN. Ideally, the contact should occur in the context of the mainstream classroom, as this is the setting in which most teachers will spend their professional careers. This placement needs to be followed by discussions with a supervising college tutor to explore issues arising from students' observations on the inclusion process.

***Continuous Professional Development (CPD)***

It is now widely accepted that teacher education is required not only for those teachers at the beginning of their careers but also right throughout their teaching lifetimes. Factors such as changes in wider societal culture, changes in educational policy and changes in the composition of the student cohort, mean that teachers have to adapt and expand their knowledge-base, their teaching strategies and their expectations of educational outcomes continually over their working lives. The findings of this study pointed towards teachers' perception of a rather patchy and fragmented level of CPD availability. They were unable to identify any cohesive, overarching policy framework for the provision of specific professional development for teachers in the inclusive classroom. As children with more complex needs frequently present challenges to teachers, timely access to specific CPD is required.

**Recommendations:**

- For those teachers catering for children with significant SEN, immediately accessible, locally-based, sustained, and SEN specific, teacher support is required.

- Establishment of CPD on inclusive education by face-to-face, blended or online courses. The content of such courses would deal with information on particular categories of SEN, strategies for differentiation of class work and lesson objectives and strategies for optimum time management within the inclusive classroom.
- Regional, rather than centralised national control of educational provision is required. Local control would offer a more location-specific, flexible and timely response to identified needs than would a central bureaucracy mandated to provide a nation-wide, uniform strategy.
- The creation of the position of a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in each school. A framework incorporating the role of the SENCO and (newly created) SENCO post could transform CPD in inclusive education. If a course, for example, on autism was established in a local Education Centre, the SENCO could identify schools in which there are children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and directly notify the SENCO in the relevant schools to bring it to the attention of the appropriate class teachers. The NCSE already uses *school clusters* as part of its administrative framework. Such micro-groups might prove an even more manageable model than catchment area of Education Centres.

### **Individual Teacher Support**

The study findings indicate the generation of a high level of teacher guilt and anxiety around catering for the needs of both the child / children with significant SEN and their typically developing peers. Although the literature indicates that the presence of a child with significant SEN in the classroom has little impact on the academic progress of the overall class group, a



number of teachers were anxious about this issue. Teachers also expressed guilt about being unable to spend sufficient time with either the child / children with significant SEN or their typically developing peers. Such high levels of guilt and anxiety are antithetical to the development of positive attitudes to the inclusion process.

**Recommendation:**

- Development of support / counselling facilities for teachers experiencing stress, anxiety or guilt symptoms arising from challenges arising in the inclusive classroom.
- Expansion of the roles of Education Centres in the provision of support for teachers in inclusive classrooms. In addition to acting as the hub for sustained courses of CPD for classroom teachers catering for children with significant SEN, Education Centres could, as a by-product, facilitate the establishment of contact between teachers dealing with similar types of significant SEN in the classrooms. As well as providing relevant lectures and presentations, they might also offer the possibility of a mentoring centre, where over the school year mainstream teachers could pose queries, look for practical advice, or perhaps seek social and emotional support when work challenges became severe. The researcher acknowledges that the current parlous state of the Irish Government's coffers precludes any major investments in education in the near future, but recommends the establishment of the above infrastructural support be considered when the country's financial position improves.

### **Support at Classroom Level**

Much of the teacher guilt / anxiety reported, was strongly related to another significant finding from the study; teachers' perceptions on time constraints in the inclusive classrooms. Children with complex and enduring needs require more of the teacher's time and attention than class peers without significant SEN. The majority of teachers in the study had class pupil numbers approximately similar to classes in which there was no child with significant SEN. Large numbers of pupils make it difficult to provide the best quality education for students with, and without significant SEN. The researcher fully accepts the logistical difficulties in addressing this issue but, nevertheless makes the following recommendation.

#### **Recommendation:**

- To make inclusive education more effective, a policy change is needed on the pupil-teacher ratio in classroom in which there is a child with significant SEN. There needs to be a positive "weighting" given to schools when allocating pupils with the more challenging levels of SEN to mainstream classrooms. A child with complex, challenging and enduring needs could be deemed to be "worth" the enrolment of ten pupils to reduce the class pupil numbers and thus give the teacher more time to cater for the needs of all pupils in the class. Such a policy change is most critical in the reception classes of primary schools, where all children are being socialised into the culture of formal schooling and where friendships are initially formed.

## **Support Structures at School Level**

### *Whole School CPD in the Area of Special / Inclusive Education*

Providing high quality inclusive education involves more than just the class teacher or resource teacher. It also requires a coordinated response from all school personnel, parents of children with significant SEN and outside professionals offering support for those children. To achieve such a response, support structures need to be available to schools. The findings of this study indicate that a number of teachers believed that some of their colleagues are not fully supportive of the concept of inclusive education. This has implications both for the level of social / emotional support available to teachers in the inclusive classroom and also for accessibility to the experiential knowledge of colleagues.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Increased funding to allow the expansion of the role of the SESS. This would allow for ongoing CPD for all school staff in the area of inclusive education. Such CPD should be implemented on a whole school basis and include modules on the professional obligations of teachers and other school staff, moral and human rights values inherent in the inclusion process, information on different categories of SEN/ disabilities and practical strategies for dealing with challenges posed by inclusive education.

### *Promotion of Positive Relationships between Parents of Children with Significant SEN and Class Teachers*

While only two of the participants identified a level of friction with parents of children with significant SEN, two other teachers in the study expressed a wish for a

better relationship with such parents. In the latter case, teachers viewed the parents as the contact point between the teacher and outside professionals also supporting the child. In Chapter 3, the researcher commented on the importance on a level of negotiation between the parents' personal knowledge of their child with significant SEN, and the class teacher's professional pedagogical knowledge of classroom teaching/ management. Some level of education / training for parents favouring inclusive education might be beneficial in providing judgemental knowledge for parents; giving them an insight into the school's view of potential, or possible outcomes for the child. Conversely, perhaps some level of education is also needed for teachers implementing inclusive education, allowing them to gain insight into a parent's perspective; seeing the child in a holistic way rather than through the lens of a medical / deficit model.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Information meetings to be organised by SENO for parents intending to enrol their child with significant SEN in a mainstream school for the first time. In this forum the advantages and challenges of inclusive education could be discussed; the concept of a continuum of provision could also be further teased out.
- Although it might be impractical to attempt to organise group-to-group meetings between teachers and parents of children with particular categories of disability (e.g. ASD), it should be possible to have a representative group of each body meeting to exchange views. Using a venue such a local Education Centre, parents of children with significant SEN could articulate their experiences of inclusive education from their perspective, and that of their child, while classroom teachers

would have the opportunity to convey their perceptions of implementing inclusive education, not just for the child with significant SEN, but also for up to thirty or more other children.

### ***Coordination with Outside Professionals Supporting Child with Significant SEN***

The findings of the study indicated much teacher dissatisfaction with their experience of contact with professionals outside the school setting, who also provide support for the child with significant SEN. In some cases, teachers considered that professionals in advocacy groups tended to promote unrealistic expectations of what the class teacher could achieve, while in other cases, no formal lines of communication between teacher and outside professional had been established. Many children with significant SEN have complex needs, requiring a multi-disciplinary approach. Who should act as convenor for this framework of teacher / outside professionals?

### **Recommendation:**

- Expansion of the role of SENO to act as facilitator in establishing a cooperative framework encompassing classroom teachers and outside professionals also involved with the child who has significant SEN. Such a model would allow an exchange of information on the child in different settings and improve levels of cooperation between both parties. Strategies initially implemented by outside professionals could be further consolidated by the teacher in the classroom setting. Talks / lectures by professional specialists in relevant areas e.g. paediatric psychiatrist, speech and language therapist, would prove beneficial for all staff members.

### ***Role of the School Principal in Promoting Inclusive Education***

Principals play a key role in the inclusion process, not just in the administrative sense but also as leaders and motivators. The findings from this study indicate the majority of principals support the overall policy thrust of inclusive education. The research data also imply that some teachers still view SEN through the lens of the disability model, consider the implementation of inclusion as fulfilling an obligation placed upon them and hold negative views about the potential outcomes of inclusive education. To counter or ameliorate such views, a principal's leadership qualities are crucial in the creation and maintenance of positive attitudes towards inclusion. A number of teachers differentiated between a principal's compliance with policy directives, their active support of the inclusion process and their appreciation of the motivational power of personal affirmation for the class teacher catering for the needs of a child with very challenging SEN.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Although principals are invited to many of the short courses on special / inclusive education, attendance is not mandatory. At present there is a proposal that it become mandatory for principals to participate in professional development to improve their own understanding and teaching of literacy, in order to fully enable them to support their teaching staff. A similar approach is warranted in the area of inclusive education.

Principals need to be aware of how important it is to demonstrate explicit support for the inclusion process in general and affirmation for those implanting inclusive education in their classrooms in particular.

## National Policy Changes Needed

### *Classroom Teacher – SNA Working Relationship*

In an inclusive classroom, an SNA may be present for part, or all of the school day. The paucity of research data on work context of the SNA has already been noted in this thesis. Although the role of the SNA has been defined in a very narrow sense by the DES, it frequently does not accurately reflect the actual duties performed. While the school principal is the nominal supervisor of all school SNAs, it is usually the class teacher who needs to direct the day-to-day duties of the SNA. In this study, classroom teachers described their working relationship with SNAs on a prompted and unprompted basis. A significant finding of the study is that teachers may lack confidence in their managerial skills relating to other adults in the classroom. A further notable finding is the teachers' wish for more clearly defined guidelines on how the class teacher and SNA work within a cooperative framework to support the child with significant SEN. Teachers were unsure of how much supervisory "control" they could exercise over an SNA, particularly in incidents where they considered that the SNA was not acting in the best interests of the child.

#### **Recommendations:**

- At a national policy level, the role definition of the SNA needs to be revisited. A more realistic evaluation of the SNA's actual duties is necessary. An expanded role for the SNA in the classroom holds the potential for achievement one of the core aims of the inclusion process – high quality education for all pupils in the classroom, irrespective of the ability / disability. Such an expanded role needs to

be considered within the context of the SNA-teacher relationship. For the optimum outcome the class teacher and SNA need to work as a team. Is the class teacher the team leader? Does s/he feel confident in their managerial skills in supervising / directing the work of another adult?

- Such questions require not only changes in policy guidelines on the work practices of the SNA but also policy changes in teacher education / SNA education to embed the concept and skills of working cooperatively with, and supervising of, other adults in the classroom.

### ***Educational Placement of a Child with Significant SEN***

Although the suitability of placement of a child with significant SEN arose with only a small number of participating teachers, the issue has major implications for the entire inclusive process. Inclusion, in its broadest definition, would seek to place every child, irrespective of the severity of their SEN, in a classroom in their local mainstream school. From the child's human rights perspective, this is very laudable. In a mainstream classroom, however, the child's complex, challenging and enduring needs may not be best served. The class teacher may not have the specialised skills required to address the child's needs. Equipment or materials needed may not be present. Access to the services of professionals specialising in addressing the child's needs may be reduced. The rights of class peers also need to be taken into account. Children with extremely challenging SEN may impinge on the learning opportunities of their classmates.

At the time of writing this chapter, two of the children of particular interest in the study had been placed in specialised settings for their future education. In both cases, the



child's parents, school principal and class teacher were unsure of what to do when they considered that the mainstream setting was unsuitable for the child with significant SEN. The school's SENO assisted in identifying potential specialised settings for the child in question, but only after much previous consultation between parents, class teacher and principal. No framework for an independent professional review of the suitability of placement has been established. Without the agreement of the child's parents, it appears that no change of placement can occur. While the rights of both parent and child in question must be validated, the school may be placed in an invidious position of trying to persuade reluctant parents to place their child in an alternative setting, in order to provide what the school believes to be the best quality education for that child.

**Recommendations:**

- Need for development of policy on planned review of the placement of children with significant SEN in all educational settings. In the recent past, SENOs visited each school to assess the SNA needs of pupils with significant SEN. The remit of the SENO should be expanded to allow an annual visit to every school to consider the suitability of the current placement of each child with significant SEN, whether that child be in a mainstream or special school. A framework needs to be established outlining the "weighting" given to views of the child, views of the school, those of the parents of the child with SEN and outside professionals, should disagreement arise about the child's placement. The review of child's placement should also consider the necessary supports needed to maximise the

learning opportunities for the child with significant SEN, in whatever setting s/he is placed.

- The educational setting of a child with significant SEN has implications not only for the child, his / her parents and teachers, but also has ramifications for wider society. The human / civil rights of the child with significant SEN, the rights of the child's classroom peers and society's concept of ability / disability are but a number of issues that need to be widely debated in the public realm prior to the formulation of any policy framework on placement review.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This small scale study was undertaken with participating teachers recruited by means of a convenience sample. They could not be said to be representative of the overall body of Irish primary classroom teachers. Only one teacher of a multi-grade class participated and both male participants were at the very beginning of their professional careers. Nevertheless, the findings from the study suggest a number of potential research avenues which might influence the effective implementation of inclusive education. The researcher has identified the following areas as avenues of fruitful research:

- Throughout this thesis, the researcher has emphasised the importance of teachers holding positive attitudes towards the inclusion process. At present there is very little information available in this area. A large scale attitudinal study is warranted, with a fully stratified sample of teachers at varying career stages, and in differing types of schools. Such research would help to establish if teachers, in

general, hold a positive attitude to inclusive education and might also indicate if further work is needed to inculcate greater acceptance of a diverse student cohort.

- Those classroom teachers currently implementing inclusive education have gained very valuable experience of the supports that are available, and those that still need to be provided, for the effective implementation of inclusive education. More in-depth research conducted with such teachers is needed to better inform policy makers and teacher educators as to what changes are needed to more effectively equip teachers for their role in the inclusive classroom.
- The study has noted the dearth of research data on the working relationship between class teacher and SNA. Survey, interview and observational studies are needed to gain more knowledge of the actual (rather than prescribed) work of the SNA, more insight into how both teachers and SNAs view their working relationships and more information on what managerial skills teachers consider they need to develop in order to lead / supervise another adult in the classroom.
- The study findings point to the critical role of the principal in generating positive attitudes towards inclusive education in their schools. Research needs to be undertaken with principals in order to gain insights as to how they view their role in the promotion of the inclusion process and to ascertain what supports they consider are needed to aid them in fulfilling that mission.

### **Reflections**

Teachers are not simply *technicists*, dutifully implementing clearly defined procedures, with all of the necessary equipment being supplied – using only their heads and hands. Much of

the teacher's work is strongly influenced by their emotions and beliefs – what's in the teacher's heart. This study provided the researcher with an insight into the attitudes of Irish mainstream primary school teachers working in an inclusive classroom. The participating teachers shared their thoughts and experiences with me. All were committed, hard working individuals who cared deeply about the children under their stewardship. Some faced considerable challenges in their work but remained extremely enthusiastic about the inclusion process. Even when the placement of the child with significant SEN in a mainstream school was manifestly unsuitable, the class teacher felt a sense of guilt when the child moved to a specialised setting. To bring inclusion to full fruition, the extra supports recommended above need to be put in place.

Allowing inclusion to become a *shibboleth* may not best serve children who have needs beyond those of their typically developing peers. In this study, the majority of children with significant SEN were well served by their placement in mainstream classrooms.

For a small number, however, such a setting did not adequately address their complex and enduring needs. While defending the moral right of every child to attend their local school, the potential offered by a *continuum of provision* must also be borne in mind. Varying forms of inclusion should be considered: special schools, special units attached to mainstream schools with pupils having part-time placement in mainstream classroom, shorter school days for pupils with significant SEN experiencing severe challenges within the mainstream classroom. While vigilance must be maintained to avoid segregationist practices of the past, ideology must not prevail over the best interests of the child with significant SEN

This study defined the concepts of *inclusion* and *inclusive education* in quite a narrow way. The terms *inclusion* and *inclusive education* were defined as pertaining to the inclusion of a pupil with significant SEN in a mainstream classroom for the entire official school day. This

narrow definition was adopted for reasons outlined in the introductory chapter of this thesis. However, inclusion in its broadest sense is intended to remove barriers to education which arise from ability / disability, gender, language, home background, ethnicity or culture. This study has previously commented on the shifting terminology around the concept of inclusion. The descriptor SEN may soon become somewhat *passé*. The term *additional learning needs* (ALN) is being increasingly encountered. ALN refers to the needs of a young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support for learning, beyond that of their general class peers. These needs can arise from any factor which causes a barrier to learning, regardless of whether that factor relates to social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, disability, or family circumstances. Widening the concept of inclusion may reduce the intensity of the “Foucaultian gaze” (Allan, 1996) focused on the child with a diagnosis of significant SEN, thus advancing the view of such a child as simply part of a diverse group of learners. Believing that one is adequately prepared and equipped to cater for such a wide spectrum of pupil-needs predicts a motivated and confident teaching force.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

This study has explored the attitudes of mainstream classroom teachers in the Irish context, working with pupils who have been identified as having significant SEN. Many studies have indicated that it is the attitudes of teachers, rather than their technical skills that lie at the heart of making inclusive education a rewarding experience both for the teachers themselves and the children with significant SEN. A writer familiar with Irish education settings proffered the opinion that, “the inside of a teacher’s head is the key resource for inclusion” (O’ Brien, 2000, p. 5). This study probed factors that might influence attitudes of mainstream class teachers in

relation to the inclusion process in the Irish context. One of the aims of this piece of research was to provide suggestions for potential changes in approaches to inclusive education by policy makers and teacher educators, which might inculcate in student teachers, NQTs and experienced teachers, a more positive and confident attitude towards catering for pupils with significant SEN within their classrooms.

At ITE level there is a need for more planned, supervised placement with children who have a significant SEN. This type of contact is viewed as being more realistic and practical if undertaken in an inclusive classroom, rather than in a specialised setting. The Induction process is at present, in a transition state. Although currently running on a mandatory, national level, it appears that the Teaching Council envisions many changes to the programme. The Induction phase holds much potential for attitude formation in relation to inclusive education. Supervised exchange visits to other inclusive classroom by teachers who are now very self-motivated learners and who are aware of, and willing to address, perceived gaps in their skill-set could prove hugely influential.

The greatest need for change appears to be in the area of CPD for inclusive education. The participants in this study indicated their view of available CPD as short-term, fragmented and in some cases, poorly publicised. There is a lack of any national cohesive policy to support the further education of teachers in inclusive classrooms. Many of these teachers experience challenging days in the classroom. It is somewhat unreasonable to ask them to search through websites, promotional material, Education Centre notices etc. to seek out CPD for the child disabilities that they encounter. Such a situation may also lead to a level of unevenness in the quality of education provided for the children with SEN, where only those teachers with the stronger sense of motivation and agency seek out CPD.

Further teacher education not only improves a teacher's skills in pedagogy but also bolsters his / her confidence and ability to meet challenges in the classroom. Providing inclusive education makes extra demands on teachers and can also increase the stress level of their jobs. Although many educators agree with Thomas et al. (1998) that good teaching is good teaching for all children, Marshall, Ralph and Palmer (2002, p. 213) make the astute observation: "All teachers need to be confident that they can teach all children". One way of instilling that confidence and reducing stress, is by the provision of extensive opportunities for pre-service and in-service training. Ainscow (2000, p. 77) points to the fact that, "most schools know more than they use". Explicit training / education may awaken dormant skills, validate and affirm strategies already in use and motivate teachers to undertake the challenge posed by the inclusion of pupils with a more severe degree of SEN.

Although the mainstream teacher in the inclusive classroom must be prioritised for immediate and sustained CPD, inclusive education also needs to be supported at a whole school level. Colleagues of these teachers also need to be supportive of the inclusive process. Some form of shared CPD between teachers and SNAs appears to be a sine qua non for the efficient running of the inclusive classroom. All of the above suggestions have significant financial implications for a debt-burdened State. If as a society we are committed to validating the legal, educational and social rights of young persons with significant SEN, serious and far-reaching decisions have to be made. In order to make inclusive education effective, expensive investments in educational infrastructure are needed.

Dyson (2001) decries the use of the term *responsible inclusion* on the basis that it offers an opt-out clause to those inimical to the inclusion of those with more challenging needs. There is validity in his view but it must also be conceded that the concept of inclusive education, while

being a most morally just cause, is also a complex, challenging and expensive undertaking.

Viewing the inclusive process as focusing not only on persons with significant SEN but rather on developing, “classrooms that are supportive of *all* children and accepting of differences”

(LePage et al., 2010, p. 26) (original authors’ italics) demands a high level of responsibility on the part of policy makers, those funding education and teacher educators. Rhetoric must be accompanied by matching actions. A participant in research reported by Horne and Timmons (2009) complained of, “lip service support” for inclusion rather than practical measures provided to teachers. All of the participants in this study were committed and enthusiastic teachers. Some were experiencing extreme difficulty in the inclusive classroom due to lack of training and human and material support. It is unfair both to the teachers and the vulnerable children they cater for, to anticipate optimum outcomes unless there is a coherent policy around inclusive education drawn up between The Teaching Council, the DES, Colleges of Education, Education Centres, NCSE, NEPS, HSE, SNA- representative groups and parental advocacy groups. Implementing such a policy would also imply a huge financial investment. If one accepts, however, that children – all children – are the country’s future, then such an investment seems very worthwhile.

“Inclusive education is here to stay” comments Niles (2005, p. 14). The *genie* cannot be put back in the bottle. Children with significant SEN, who would previously have been placed in segregated specialist settings, are now, rightfully, with some extra support, receiving their education in a local mainstream school with their siblings and age-peers. At the time when this research study was carried out, participating teachers outlined their beliefs about what they regarded as the already inadequate professional preparation and supports being provided for the inclusion process. The present debt burden of the Irish State casts something of a cloud over the



potential future funding available for additional supports for inclusive education. At the time of writing, there appears to be a policy decision taken to restrict human resource support for children with significant SEN. Although the data-base of the NCSE indicates an increasing number of children with significant SEN in mainstream schools, the current number of SNAs has been capped and adjudication on applications for Low Incidence resources teaching hours has been “paused” until further notice.

Such statements may be viewed as the beginning of a process that erects more barriers to inclusion. The current situation, however, may also offer the opportunity of fundamentally rethinking our concept of the inclusive school, with all previous support mechanisms for inclusive education becoming open to reconsideration. While this cannot be accepted as an excuse for reduction of existing supports, it may hold the possibility of realising the radical restructuring of schools advocated by “full” inclusionists. Much depends on the response of teachers to this shifting paradigm. In a time of economic uncertainty, with foreseeable reductions in matériel and human resource support, teachers’ attitudes will remain even more crucial to the development of inclusive education. Irrespective of the eventual resolution of Ireland’s financial crisis, with its knock-on effect on educational funding, it may well emerge that it is the hearts of Irish classroom teachers, as much as their heads and hands, which will advance inclusive education in our schools.

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**Pilot Interview Schedule (First Interview)**

1. For how long have you been teaching?
2. What college of education did you attend for your initial teacher training?
3. Have you been able to avail of any form of teacher induction process?
4. What class group are you teaching at present?
5. At present you have a child with significant special educational needs – is this the first time that you have had such a child in your class?
6. Do you feel that your initial teacher education prepared you well for including children with SEN in a mainstream classroom?
7. Can you now easily avail of in-service or ongoing CPD for further training in this area?
8. Who do you think should provide such training / education?
9. In your opinion who should fund such education?
10. What supports do you feel that you need in order to feel confident about making the classroom inclusive for a pupil with SEN?
11. If you were asked by teacher educators in colleges of education how they might change their programme for preservice teachers what would you advise?
12. If you were asked by the Teacher Education Section of the DES what professional development current classroom teachers need to implement a fully inclusive classroom – what recommendations would you make?
13. If next year or at a future time your principal asked you to take a class that included a child with significant SEN, what would your response be?
14. Is there anything that I have not mentioned that you feel is important in this area? Do you feel that I could improve my approach to this research in any way?
15. In our next session I would hope to talk with you about a teacher's interior life, rather than just their daily practices – the emotions generated and the stresses involved in teaching, how teachers come to see themselves, what teachers' private views of what current policies in the areas of special education and inclusion might be. Perhaps you could have a "think" about those issues before our next meeting.



1. Can you describe any positive experiences that you have had while implementing inclusive education in your classroom?
2. Did you experience any negative or challenging experiences?
3. Do you view teaching in general as a stressful job?
4. What areas do you regard as being most stressful?
5. Can you describe the emotions you feel that have been generated during the course of your work?
6. What do you feel about experiencing those emotions / displaying those emotions in class?
7. Do you feel that implementing inclusive education with a pupil who has significant SEN adds to any stress which a teacher might feel?
8. Can you identify what you feel may be additional stressors (if any) in implementing inclusive education?
9. Do you feel that attempting to provide inclusive education challenged in any way your sense of self-efficacy or professional identity?
10. Does the child with SEN have the services of an SNA?
11. How would you describe your experience of working with an SNA?
12. Does your contact with the parents of the child with SEN differ in any respects with that of the parents of the other pupils?
13. Do you feel that you can express your true feelings about the process of inclusive education? (Why / why not?) In what settings? Where could you not do this?
14. Do you feel that you have the full support of your principal and staff when implementing an inclusive classroom?
15. Within the school, who do you view as offering the greatest level of support to in your daily work?
16. Is there any area that I haven't mentioned that you feel is important, or do you have any suggestions for me that could improve future interviews?

**Appendix C**  
**Interview Schedule for Main Study**

<b>Interview Schedule</b>	<b>Comment / Observation</b>
1. For how long have you been teaching?	
2. What college of education did you attend for your initial teacher training?	
3. What class group are you teaching at present?	
4. At present you have a child (or children) with significant special educational needs – is this the first time that you have had such a child in your class?	
5. Do you feel that your initial teacher education prepared you well for including children with SEN in a mainstream classroom?	
6. Have you been able to avail of any form of teacher induction process?	
7. Can you now easily avail of in-service or ongoing CPD for further professional education this area?	
8. Who do you think should provide such professional education?	
9. In your opinion who should fund such education?	

**Interview Schedule**

**Comment / Observation**

10. What supports do you feel that you need in order to feel confident about making the classroom inclusive for a pupil with SEN?
11. If you were asked by teacher educators in colleges of education how they might change their programme for preservice teachers what would you advise?
12. If you were asked by the Teacher Education Section of the DES what professional development current classroom teachers need to implement a fully inclusive classroom – what recommendations would you make?
13. If next year or at a future time your principal asked you to take a class that included a child with significant SEN, what would your response be?
14. Can you describe any positive experiences that you have had while implementing inclusive education in your classroom?
15. Did you experience any negative or challenging experiences?
16. Do you view teaching in general as a stressful job?
17. What areas do you regard as being most stressful?
18. Can you describe the emotions you feel that have been generated during the course of your work?

**Interview Schedule**

**Comment / Observation**

19. What do you feel about experiencing those emotions / displaying those emotions in class?

20. Do you feel that implementing inclusive education with a pupil who has significant SEN adds to any stress a teacher might feel?

21. Can you identify what you feel may be additional stressors (if any) in implementing inclusive education?

22. Do you feel that attempting to provide inclusive education challenged, in any way, your sense of efficacy or professional identity?

23. Does the child with SEN have the services of an SNA?

24. How would you describe your experience of working with an SNA?

25. Does your contact with the parents of the child with SEN differ in any respects with that of parents of the other pupils?

26. Do you feel that you can express your true feelings about the process of inclusive education? (Why / why not?) Where could you not do this?

27. Do you feel that you have the full support of your principal and staff when implementing an inclusive classroom?

**Appendix C**  
**Interview Schedule for Main Study**

**Interview Schedule**

**Comment / Observation**

- 28. Within the school, who do you view as offering the greatest level of support to in your daily work?
  
- 29. Is there any area that I haven't mentioned that you feel is important?

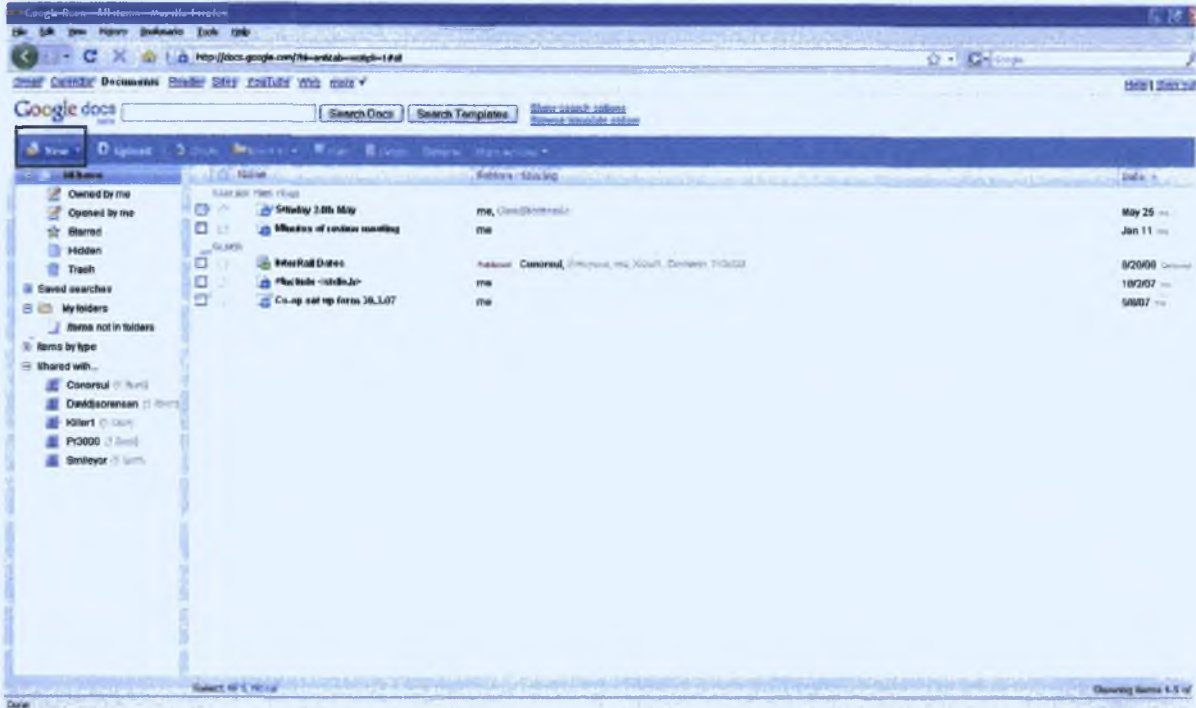
## Diary Set-up Directions

Go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) (You'll need to have a Google account. If you don't, go here: [mail.google.com/mail/signup](http://mail.google.com/mail/signup). It doesn't take very long.) In the top right-hand corner (On the line beginning with the word "Web") you'll see a link saying "more". If you click on it you will get a drop down menu. On this menu click "documents".



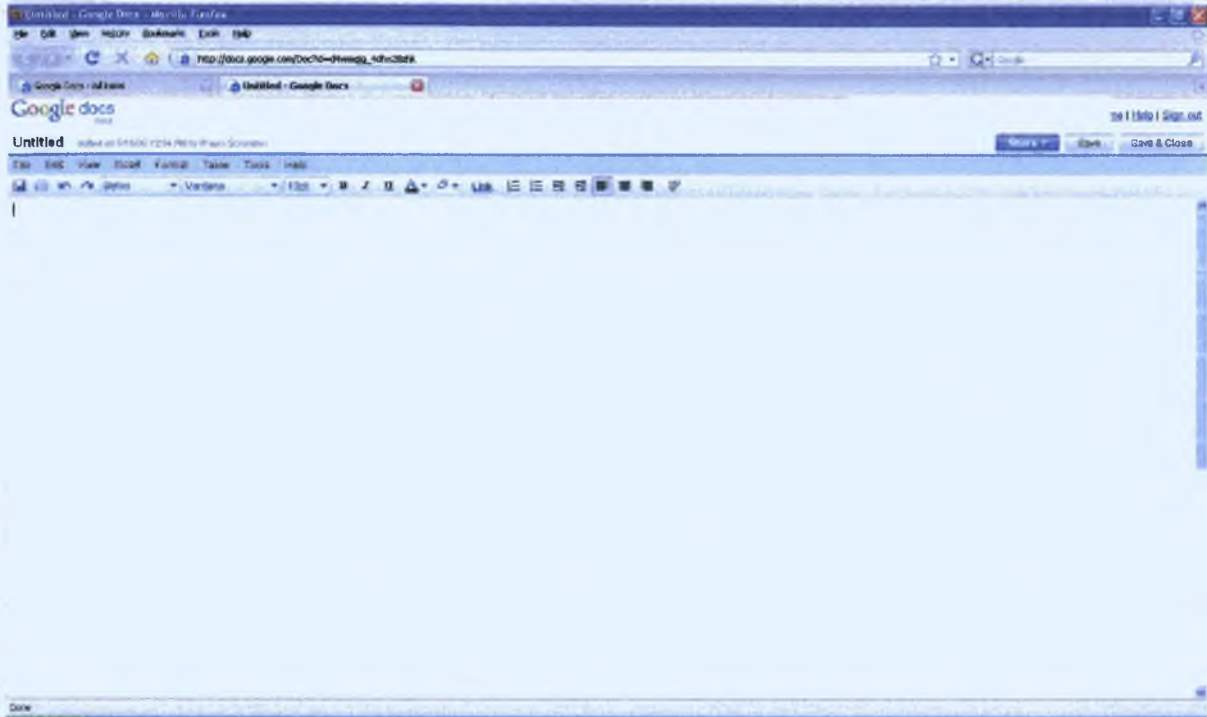
Diary Set-up Directions

This will bring you to a page like so:



## Diary Set-up Directions

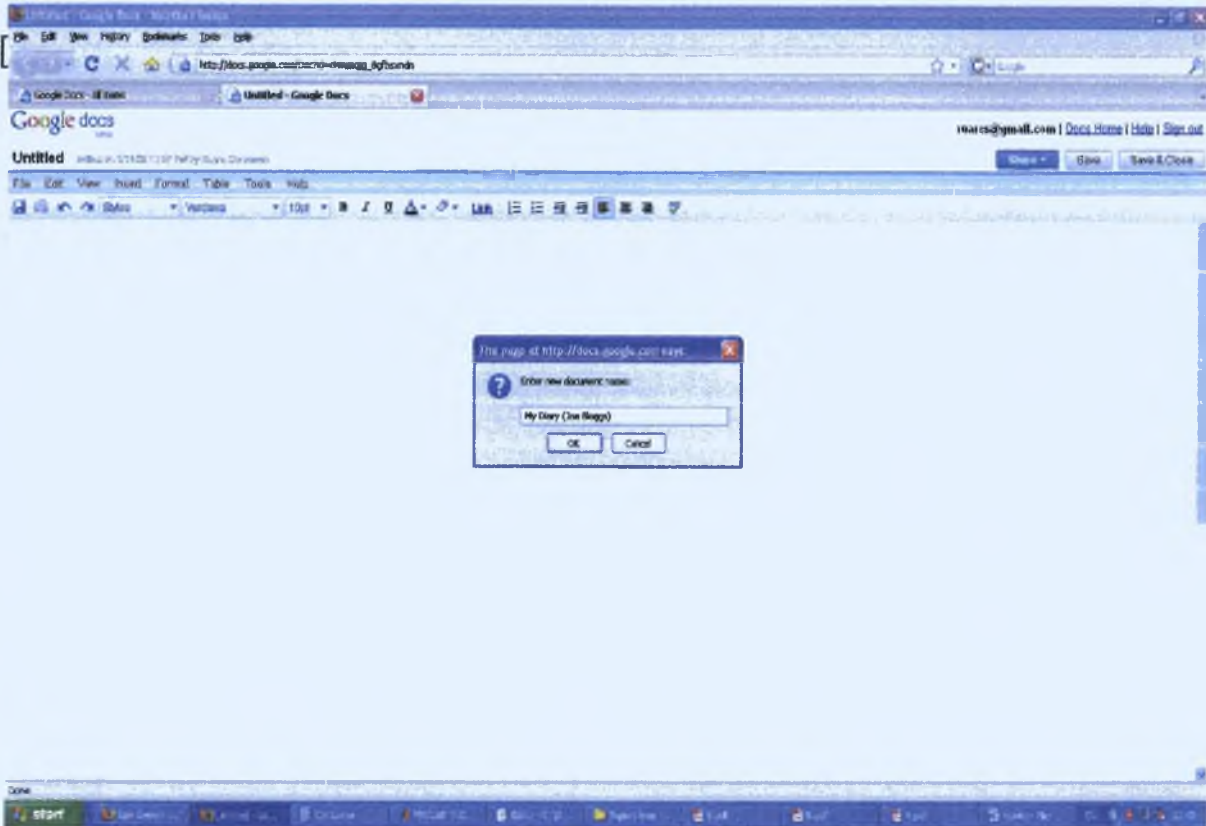
Click on the button saying “New” in the top left-hand corner, it will give you a menu. From this menu click on “Document”. A blank Google document will open up:





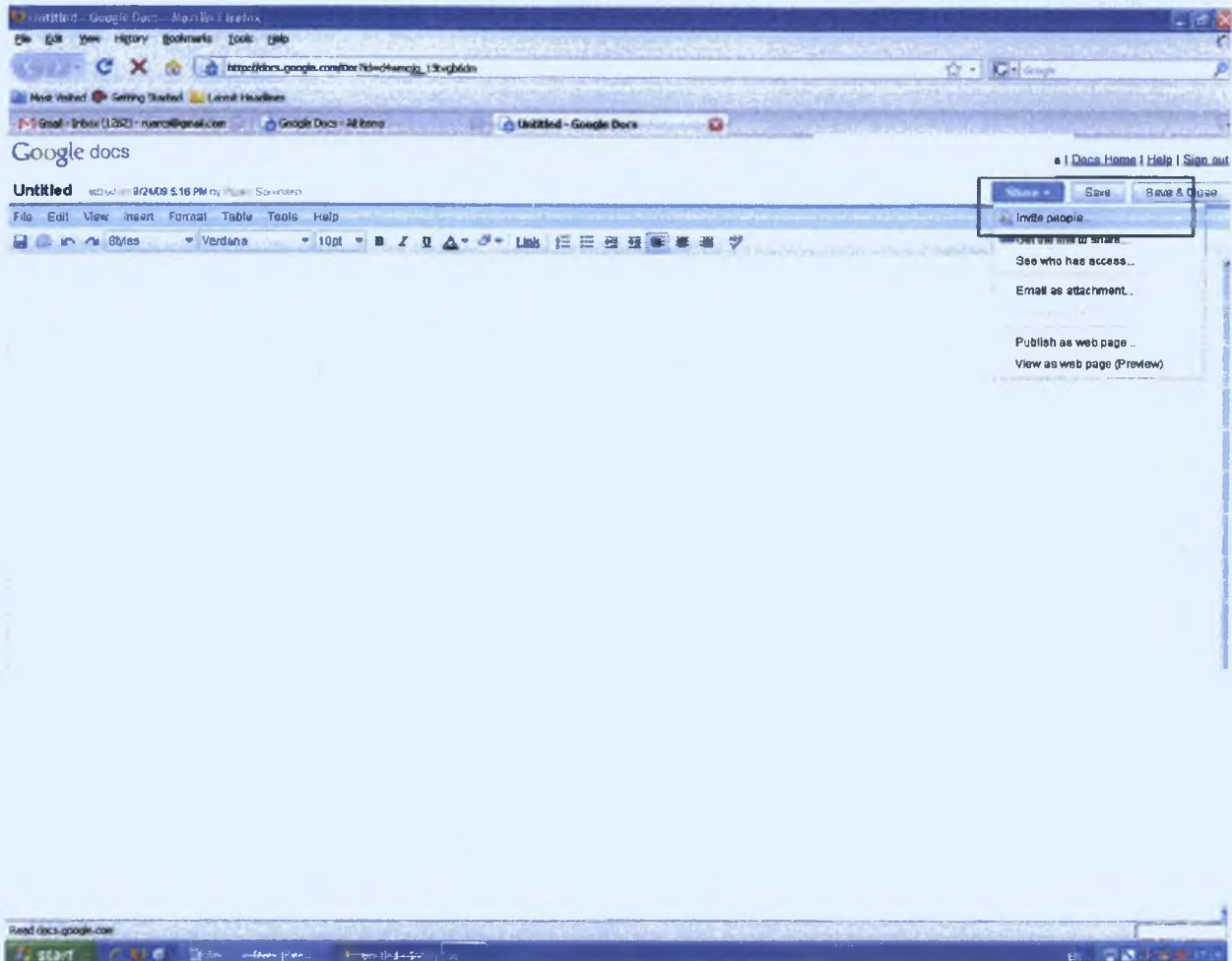
## Diary Set-up Directions

In the top left-hand corner click on “File”,  
th



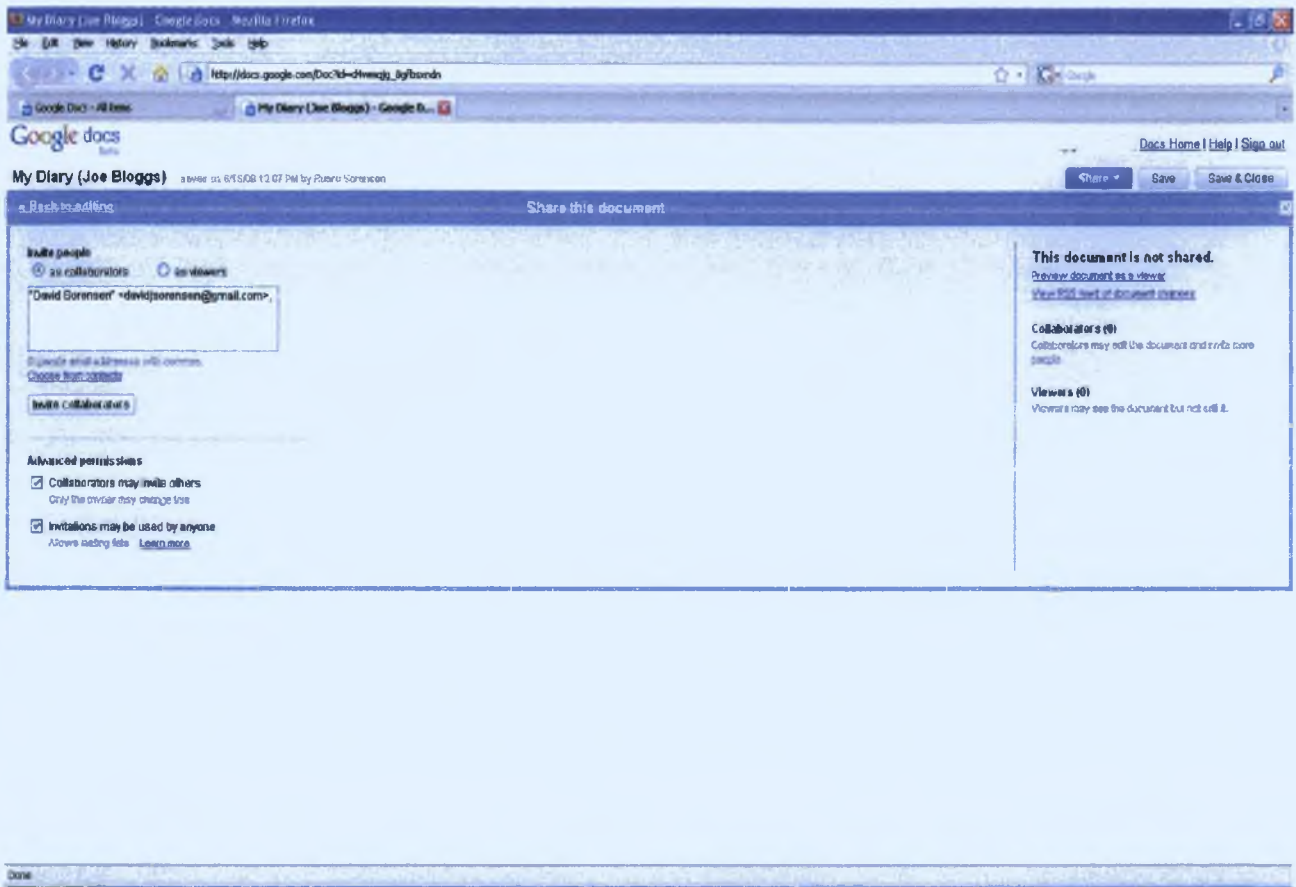
## Diary Set-up Directions

Name it something like “My Diary (*Your Name*)”.



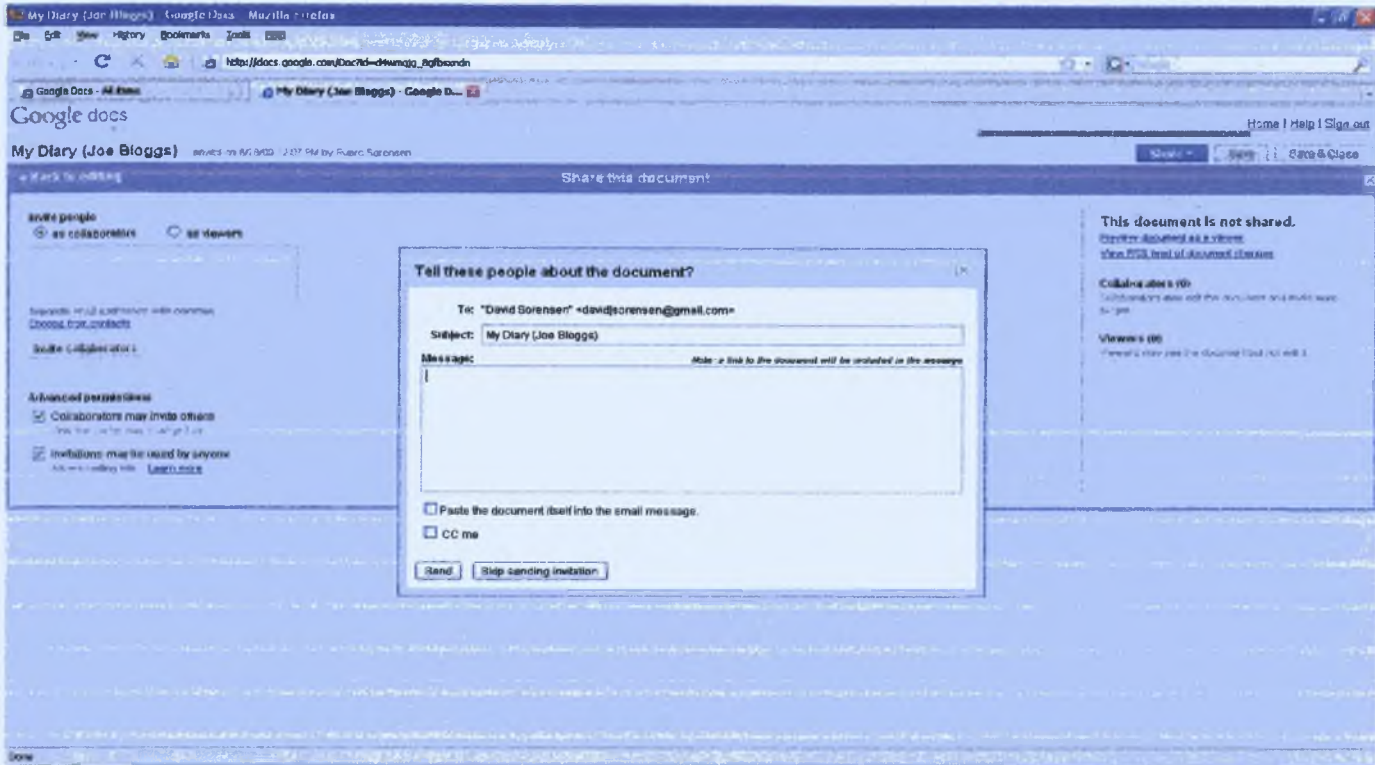
Now go to the top right corner and click on the “Share” button and then on “Invite People”:

## Diary Set-up Directions



In the “Share with Others” box, enter my e-mail address [*Researcher’s personal email address deleted*]

## Diary Set-up Directions

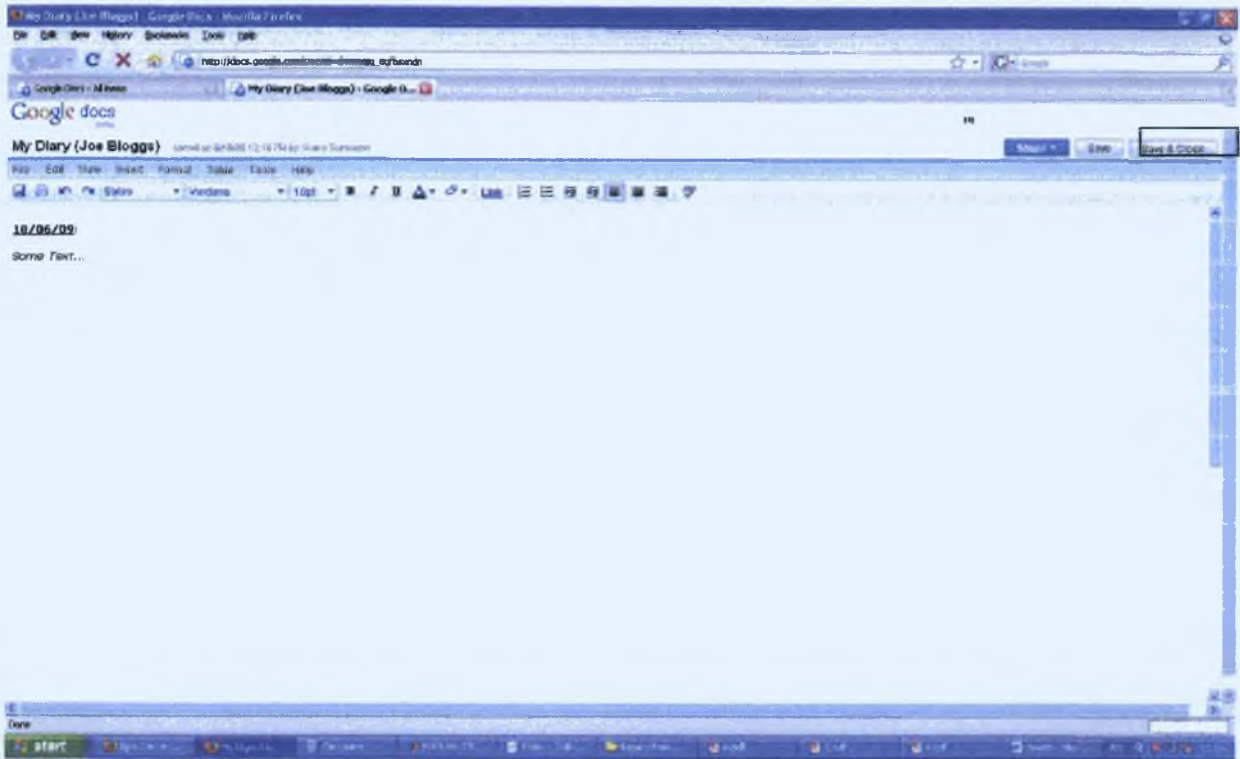


When this screen comes up press “Send” (there’s no need for a message):

Now click on “Save and Close”. This leaves a blank document. Type in your thoughts. When finished click on “Save and Close” in the top right hand corner. This will send your message. For each new entry open Google – go to “More” – click on “Documents” and you will see your named diary. Click on the document and make your next entry.

The formatting of your diary is up to you but I’d ask you to make it as neat and organised as you can:

## Diary Set-up Directions



Each time you make a new entry click on “Save and Close” in the top right corner and when I view your document it will be updated (there’s no need to “send” anything again). And that’s that!

**Aide-mémoire for Diary Instructions**

- No simply a listing of daily routine e.g. “First we did Maths, then we did Gaeilge. After little break we did English.”
- Not to focus solely on Child X e.g.” First Child X did some Maths, then he went to the Resource Teacher. In the playground he played on his own etc.”
- Look at Child X in relation to his peers – how he gets on with them in class, during P.E., play time etc.
- Try to record both positive and challenging experiences that you have with Child X.
- Record your emotional response to such positive and challenging experiences.
- Reflect on how the presence Child X influences classroom life e.g. division of time between Child X and other children in class, preparation of differentiated work etc.
- Reflect on how the presence of Child X might bring more contact with other adults e.g. SNA, Resource Teacher, SLT, OT etc and your feelings about this contact.
- Note in your diary anything you would like to discuss at greater length – we can do this at our interview.

David,

Is this too disjointed? Would you like me to focus on specific areas or are you looking for a general brain dump? (CT 10)

*(No, the stuff you're sending me is great. I'm getting a real "fly-on-the-wall" look into your classroom)*

David, Hope this is OK. If not let me know and I'll change it next time. (CT 7)

*(Your diary is very good. It's just what I asked for. Keep it coming)*

David, This is the first time to write reflections on my teaching so hopefully my ramblings will be of interest to you. Let me know if this is OK. (CT 8)

*(Hi, (Teacher's name). This is fantastic stuff. It's giving me a real insight into how you manage a classroom with two children who have significant SEN)*

I really am of the opinion that the class should be aware of Autism and why Child X's behaviour can be disruptive and unpredictable on occasion. What are your opinions, David? (CT 9)

*(This is a very interesting point. There are a lot of ethical complexities around the issue. I'd love to have a discussion with you on this on the day we meet for our interview)*

*9/11/2009*

(Teacher's name) mentioned about the need for CPD, while "being in the zone" of inclusive education. She talked in a jocular way about a "help phonenumber" but I wonder if she has something there? Not exactly a phone line but maybe some kind of online resource for each "category" of SEN for professional direction, maybe with links to discussion forum.

*13/11/2009*

(CT 2) Should school day be the same for Child X and class peers? Hadn't considered that before (CT 1 mentioned that in passing, now that I think of it- would have seemed discriminatory. But I can see where they're coming from. Maybe a whole day is just too much – may an "enjoyable" section of day is better than a tiring day where the afternoon leads to difficulty. Remember in my Master's writing about equal treatment not always being fair treatment. I wonder if the "Inclusive zeitgeist" runs counter to such a notion? Maybe concept of "Normalisation" prevents looking at different (but suitable) provision?

*19/11/2009*

(CT 9) raised the very interesting issue of the "visibility" of child with SEN. Should the other children in the class be made aware of the needs of the child with SEN? Would this help or further stigmatise the child? What are the ethical issues around this? Would parents need to be consulted? Must keep an eye out for this with other teachers – maybe bring it up myself in interviews.

*23/11/2009*

(CT 8) talks about children "overcaring" for child with SEN – do not want the teacher to criticise Child X. Teacher feels this impedes socialisation of Child X – allows different norms. This was also mentioned by CT 6. Must probe other teachers about this.

*25/11/2009*

(CT 9) Something that I hadn't thought about – that Child with SEN would resist / struggle against being different – would, in fact, struggle against extra support that was being offered. This posed problems for both class teacher and LS / RT. This was also referred to by CT 3)



*Interview with Class Teacher No. 4 (CT4)**Comments / Categories***R= Researcher**

R: How long have you been teaching now?

CT4: This is my eighth year.

R: What college of education did you attend for your Initial teacher Education?

CT4: Colláiste Mhuire, Marino

R: Did you ever work outside of the field of teaching?

CT4: (Laughs) No, straight from school to college and back to school.

R: what class group are you teaching at present?  
From your diary I see that you teach a mixed group.

CT4: Yes. I teach a group of first, second and third class children. I have eleven in first, seven in second and fourteen in third.

R: That must be quite a stretch.

CT4: Well, in first class now I have the main group for English but I have one child who's on the third class reader – he's quite strong. The second class – they're all the same. Third class, I'd have my main group. Then (mention's Child Xs name) on a second class reader and also two on a fifth class reader. So in one class I have six groups of readers.

*(Range of classes rather than number of children a difficulty?)*

R: Do you feel that your initial teachers education prepared you well for inclusive education?

CT4: No! (emphatic) I didn't. I found that in college, you were trained very much for the ideal classroom and they didn't really do much on special education. You might have heard the terms, you know ADHD – but they didn't give you any guidelines. So I literally found that I had to come out of college and read up extra. You know, I felt that they taught you how to teach but not any of the other aspects.

*(Clash of theory / practice. Feels ITE deficient in preparation for inclusive classroom?)*

R: Is this the first time that you've had a child with special educational needs?

Teacher ID: CT 4

Interview duration: 1 hour 40 minutes

Interview venue: Hotel lobby

School type: Rural 3 teacher school

This venue had been selected by the teacher – she felt that her school was too far for me to travel to and in any case she was visiting a friend in the greater Dublin area – the chosen venue was roughly mid distance between my school and hers.

When we arrived at the venue, we discovered that a Feis was being held in that hotel – making the hotel area quite busy.

We found what we thought was a “quiet” corner in the restaurant. However, as sections of the Feis concluded, more people came into this area – making it a little noisy.

CT 4 came across as a confident, forthright character. She is not afraid to say what she thinks – no sign of wanting to give the “right” answers. She is the youngest teacher in her school and does seem to show some bias against older colleagues – often describing interpersonal difficulties as: “It’s an age thing”.

CT 4 was a good talker but carefully considered what she said.

She seems to have enjoyed the interview and stated that she had found the diary-keeping exercise very useful.

*At the time of the conversation, I never noticed any background noise – I was so intent on what she was saying.*

*This is something that I never considered – Have to bear this in mind as most of the teacher in the study will be relatively young,*

On playing back recording, I discovered that both recording devices had picked up a high level background noises / voices. At the time I was so focused on what was being said by the interviewee that I hadn't noticed this. Our conversations can be made out but it's hard work to figure out some words. I'll have send both transcript and a copy of the audio recording to her and see if we can establish what was being said.

*Hope she'll be OK with this – she's enthusiastic but this will take a bit of time. I'll ask S. (teacher who effected introduction) to chat to her first.*

## Handwritten Notes Jotted Down while Listening to Recordings of Interviews

detracts from line given & other

SNA - not just for child with SEN  
- (Lapsed 11.36)

with children get access to curriculum

Promote independence - child needs to  
be challenged - aim of it a step  
up - danger of being over-  
dependent on SNA

Conclusion - Generating Emotions

Use of Debra's Story - in terms of  
effort - calculated - every minute  
is full - 100% attention to class

Modelling emotion - with any class  
- I don't get annoyed by SEN stories  
- I do get tired - I have to sit down

Need a different expectation of  
class if you have an SEN child  
- no role working

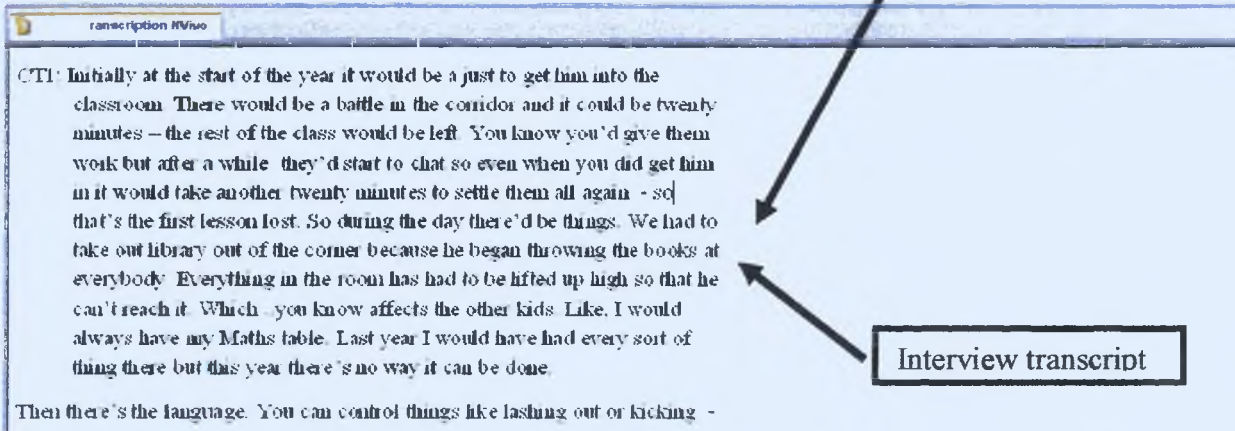
I suppose you need to be tolerant  
- all teachers have remarked on my  
tolerance

Class found not difficult - "unfully  
start"

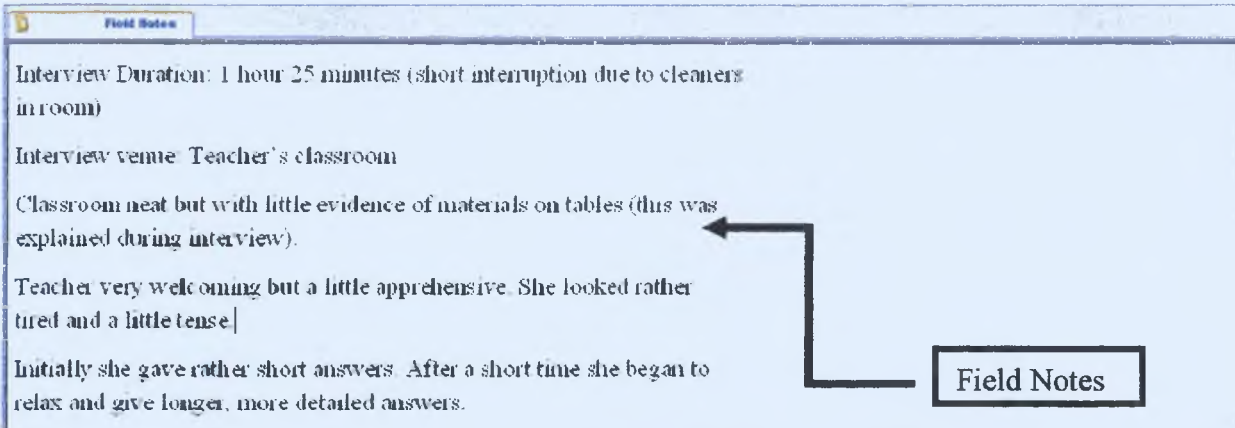
# Appendix K Contextualization of Data Sources



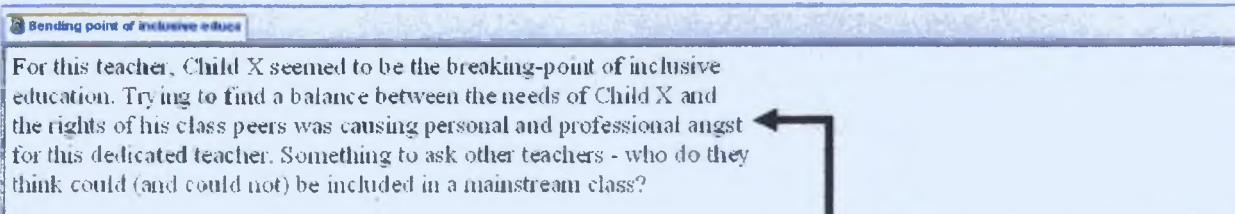
Audio recording



Interview transcript



Field Notes



Analytic Memo

Example of a “See Also” database link relating emerging themes to literature review

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface. On the left, the 'Sources' tree is visible with folders for 'Internals', 'Literature Review', 'External', 'Memo', and 'Search Folders'. The main window displays a table of 'Internals' with columns for Name, Nodes, References, C, Date, and Modified. Below the table, a text box titled 'Time constraints' contains a paragraph of text. A red arrow points from the 'Literature Review' folder to the text box. Another red arrow points from the text box to a box on the right containing the text 'Primary data source linked to Literature Review data generated by researcher'. A third red arrow points from the text box to a citation: 'Anderson, C. J., Klassen, R. M., & Georgiou, G. A. (2007). Inclusion in Australia: What teachers say they need and what psychologists say they can offer. *School Psychology International*, 28(2), 131 - 147.'

Name	Nodes	References	C	Date	Modified
CT 4 - transcription NVivo	57	108	9	01	12 01
transcription NVivo	36	57	9	01	09 01
Transcription NVivo	70	37	9	01	09 01
Transcript NVivo	25	84	9	01	10 01
transcript NVivo	45	75	9	01	10 01

**Time constraints**

The other thing I must mention is the planning. When I was in a class without a child with special educational needs, I was able to do some planning and organisation of work for the kids in my few spare moments – but now there are no spare moments. Every spare minute – in fact I have no spare minute – goes to organising stuff for the child with SEN. So I know now that my notes are nothing compared to what they used to be. I'd bring them home the odd time – at the start of the year for long-term planning, but they're nowhere near what I used to be able to do.

The four major categories that emerged within this theme included: (a) time constraints imposed on teachers; (b) time constraints imposed on non-disabled children; (c) behavioural difficulties in the classroom and (d) disadvantages relating to learning. (p. 138)

Anderson, C. J., Klassen, R. M., & Georgiou, G. A. (2007). Inclusion in Australia: What teachers say they need and what psychologists say they can offer. *School Psychology International*, 28(2), 131 - 147.

Organizational stressors, such as time constraints, workload, role conflict, role ambiguity and administrative bureaucracy, were all cited as stressful.

Foran, C. (2001). Inclusion: Identifying potential stressors for regular class teachers. *Educational Research*, 43(3), 235 - 245.

Primary data source linked to Literature Review data generated by researcher

# Appendix M Definition of Node

The screenshot displays a software application window titled "Teachers experience of inclusion.msp - NWinn". The interface includes a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Project, Links, Code, Tools, Window, Help), a toolbar, and a main workspace. On the left, there is a "Nodes" sidebar with a tree view containing folders like "Free Nodes", "Tree Nodes", "Cases", "Relationships", "Matrices", "Search Folders", and "All Nodes".

The main workspace is divided into two panes. The top pane, titled "Tree Nodes", contains a table with the following data:

Name	Description	Sources	References	Created On	Created	Modified On	Modified
Preparation for Inclusive education	professional prep	0	0	9/27/2010 8:37 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:37	DJ
Internal Research	Teachers use int	3	5	9/27/2010 8:42 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:42	DJ
Organisation and funding of CPD	teachers' beliefs	3	4	9/27/2010 8:44 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:44	DJ
Initial Teacher Education	Teachers' beliefs	4	4	9/27/2010 8:42 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:42	DJ
Making ITE more relevant	Teachers' beliefs	4	4	9/27/2010 8:43 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:43	DJ
Availability of CPD	Teachers' beliefs	5	12	9/27/2010 8:41 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:41	DJ
Previous experience with SEN	Has the teacher	12	21	10/9/2010 9:03 P	DJ	10/9/2010 9:03	DJ
Positive Experiences:	Teachers' describ	0	0	9/27/2010 8:46 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:46	DJ
Challenges:	Areas of inclusion	0	0	9/27/2010 9:09 P	DJ	9/27/2010 9:09	DJ
School environment				9/27/2010 13:24 P	DJ	9/27/2010 10:24	DJ
Emotions				9/27/2010 9:05 P	DJ	10/9/2010 9:05	DJ
Child with SEN				9/27/2010 9:09 P	DJ	10/9/2010 9:08	DJ
Teacher Focus				9/27/2010 9:13 P	DJ	10/9/2010 9:13	DJ
Parents and outside Professionals				9/27/2010 9:27 P	DJ	10/9/2010 9:27	DJ

The bottom pane, titled "Field Notes", contains text from an interview:

Interview 1

Interview Duration: 1 hour 25 minutes (sh)

Interview venue: Teacher's classroom

Classroom neat but with little evidence of materials on tables (this was explained during interview).

Teacher very welcoming but a little apprehensive. She looked rather tired and a little tense.

Initially she gave rather short answers. After a short time she began to relax and give longer, more detailed answers.

A "Tree Node Properties" dialog box is open, showing the following fields:

- Name: Organisation and funding of CPD
- Description: Teachers' beliefs about organising and funding of CPD for inclusion. This probe seeks teachers' views about their perception of availability of CPD, type (formal structured, with award or informal but with the possibility of EPY days), Teachers
- Hierarchical name: Tree Nodes-Preparation for inclusive education-Organisation and f
- Created On: 9/27/2010 8:44 PM By: DJ
- Modified On: 9/27/2010 8:44 PM By: DJ

Red arrows point from the "Availability of CPD" row in the table to the dialog box, and from the dialog box to the "Field Notes" pane. A black box at the bottom right contains the text: "Node definition stored in properties of Node".

Free Nodes Identified on First Coding Pass

The screenshot shows a software application window with a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Go, Project, Links, Code, Tools, Window, Help) and a toolbar. On the left, there is a 'Nodes' sidebar with a tree view containing 'Free Nodes', 'Tree Nodes', 'Cases', 'Relationships', 'Metrics', 'Search Folders', and 'All Nodes'. The main area displays a table titled 'Free Nodes' with the following columns: Name, Sources, References, Created On, Created By, Modified On, and Modified By. A red arrow points from the 'Free Nodes' folder in the sidebar to the table. Another red arrow points from a callout box to the 'Professional persona' row in the table.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Challenging experien	17	54	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	10/7/2010 3:1	DJ
Positive experiences	20	51	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
SMA	16	47	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Parents	16	42	9/18/2010 5:4	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Balance of rights	16	31	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Availability of CFD	12	26	9/18/2010 5:2	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Stress	14	26	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	10/7/2010 3:2	DJ
Social relationships	8	26	9/18/2010 9:5	DJ	10/4/2010 3:1	DJ
Child's condition	13	22	9/18/2010 5:5	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Time constraints	7	21	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	10/7/2010 3:2	DJ
Previous experience	12	21	9/21/2010 9:5	DJ	10/5/2010 3:5	DJ
Initial Teacher Educat	11	20	9/21/2010 9:5	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Professional persona	12	19	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Resource teacher	9	16	9/18/2010 5:3	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Outside professional	8	16	9/18/2010 5:4	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
System changes: nee	9	16	9/18/2010 5:2	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Reflective thinking	9	16	9/25/2010 3:3	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Self support	8	16	9/30/2010 8:1	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Open discourse	10	14	9/18/2010 6:0	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Organization and fund	3	13	9/18/2010 5:5	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Choice of class	3	12	9/18/2010 5:5	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Making ITE more rele	10	11	9/18/2010 5:2	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Intense Research	5	11	9/21/2010 9:0	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Widening gulf	9	10	9/21/2010 9:2	DJ	10/7/2010 3:2	DJ
Labels	5	9	9/18/2010 5:4	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Classroom without ch	6	9	9/18/2010 6:0	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Moderation of emotio	7	9	9/18/2010 6:0	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Teaching experience	9	9	9/21/2010 9:5	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Non-acceptance of dif	4	9	9/21/2010 10:	DJ	10/3/2010 3:3	DJ
Extra work	6	8	9/18/2010 9:0	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Class size	6	8	9/21/2010 9:5	DJ	10/7/2010 3:5	DJ
Emotions	3	8	10/3/2010 6:5	DJ	10/7/2010 3:2	DJ
Principals	6	7	9/18/2010 5:4	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Gulf	5	7	9/21/2010 9:1	DJ	1/14/2011 10:	DJ
Promotion of toleranc	5	6	9/21/2010 9:1	DJ	10/5/2010 3:5	DJ
Ageism	5	5	9/18/2010 5:4	DJ	10/7/2010 3:2	DJ
Length of school day	2	2	9/18/2010 9:0	DJ	10/9/2010 9:5	DJ
Personal relationship	2	2	9/21/2010 10:	DJ	10/2/2010 1:4	DJ
Gradebook	1	1	9/18/2010 6:1	DJ	9/23/2010 4:1	DJ

40 Nodes identified on first pass of coding



# Appendix O

## Third Pass of Coding: Identifying Overlap of Free Nodes

The screenshot shows a software interface with a 'Nodes' pane on the left and a 'Relationships' table in the center. A 'Relationship Properties' dialog box is open in the foreground, with red arrows pointing from the table to its fields.

**Relationships Table:**

From Name	From Folder	Type	To Name	To Folder	Dir	Sources	Refer	Create	Created	Modified	Modified
Time constraints	Free Nodes	Associated	Guilt	Free No	---	4	7	1/12/2	DJ	1/16/2	DJ
Principal	Free Nodes	Associated	Availability of CPD	Free No	---	1	1	1/12/2	DJ	1/14/2	DJ
Preparation for Inclusive education	Tree Nodes	Associated	Preparation for Inclusive ed	Tree No	---	1	3	9/27/2	GA	1/14/2	GA
Preparation for Inclusive education	Tree Nodes	Associated	Availability of CPD	Free No	---	2	3	9/27/2	GA	1/14/2	GA
Preparation for Inclusive education	Tree Nodes	Associated	Parents and outside Profes	Tree No	---	1	1	1/12/2	DA	1/14/2	DA
Initial Teacher Education	Free Nodes	Associated	Availability of CPD	Free No	---	0	0	9/26/2	DJ	9/26/2	DJ
Initial Teacher Education	Free Nodes	Associated	Preparation for Inclusive ed	Tree No	---	0	0	9/27/2	GA	9/26/2	GA
Envision	Free Nodes	Associated	Positive experiences	Free No	---	0	0	1/12/2	DA	1/12/2	DA
Envision	Tree Nodes	Associated	Challenging experiences	Free No	---	1	1	1/12/2	DA	1/14/2	DA

**Relationship Properties Dialog Box:**

- From: Free Nodes/Principal
- To: Free Nodes/Availability of CPD
- Type: [Blank]
- Name: Linkage between school principal and availability of CPD
- Direction: Associated
- Description: How some teachers depend on their principal to arrange / flag-up availability of CPD in inclusive education
- Created On: 1/12/2011 9:43 AM By: DJ
- Modified On: 1/14/2011 10:54 AM By: DJ

# Appendix P

## Demonstrating how Free Nodes were Converted to Tree Nodes

Free Nodes

Name	Source	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Challenging experiences	17	54	9/19/2010 8:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:1	DJ
Positive experiences	20	51	9/19/2010 8:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:1	DJ
SNA	16	47	9/18/2010 8:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Parents	16	42	9/18/2010 8:4	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Balance of rights	16	31	9/18/2010 8:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Availability of CPD	12	29	9/18/2010 8:2	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Stress	14	26	9/18/2010 8:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Social relationships	6	26	9/18/2010 8:5	DJ	10/4/2010 8:1	DJ
Child's condition	13	22	9/18/2010 8:5	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Time constraints	12	21	9/18/2010 8:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Previous experience with SEN	12	21	9/21/2010 8:5	DJ	10/6/2010 8:5	DJ
Initial Teacher Education	10	20	9/18/2010 8:1	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Professional persona	12	19	9/18/2010 8:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Resource teacher	5	18	9/18/2010 8:3	DJ	10/3/2010 8:3	DJ
Outside professional	8	18	9/18/2010 8:4	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
System changes needed	9	16	9/18/2010 8:2	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Reflective thinking	10	16	9/25/2010 3:3	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Staff support	9	16	9/30/2010 8:1	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Open discourses	10	14	9/18/2010 8:0	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Organisation and funding of C	9	13	9/18/2010 8:5	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Choice of class	9	13	9/18/2010 8:5	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Making ITE more relevant	10	11	9/18/2010 8:2	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Internet Research	5	11	9/21/2010 9:0	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Widening gulf	9	10	9/21/2010 8:2	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Labels	6	9	9/18/2010 8:4	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Classroom without child with S	5	9	9/18/2010 8:0	DJ	10/2/2010 10:0	DJ
Moderation of emotion	7	9	9/18/2010 8:0	DJ	10/6/2010 8:0	DJ
Teaching experience	9	9	9/21/2010 8:5	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Non-acceptance of difficulties	4	9	9/21/2010 10:0	DJ	10/3/2010 8:3	DJ
Extra work	6	8	9/18/2010 8:0	DJ	10/4/2010 8:5	DJ
Class size	6	8	9/21/2010 8:5	DJ	10/7/2010 8:5	DJ
Emotions	7	8	10/3/2010 8:5	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Principal	6	7	9/18/2010 8:4	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Guilt	5	7	9/21/2010 8:1	DJ	10/4/2010 8:5	DJ
Promotion of tolerance	5	6	9/21/2010 8:1	DJ	10/6/2010 8:5	DJ
Agrees	5	5	9/18/2010 8:4	DJ	10/7/2010 8:2	DJ
Length of school day	2	2	9/18/2010 8:0	DJ	10/3/2010 8:5	DJ

Free Nodes

Organising Free Nodes into more manageable hierarchy of Tree Nodes

Tree Nodes

Name	Description	Source	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Preparation for Inclusive education	profession of prepa	0	0	9/27/2010 8:37 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:37	DJ
Internet Research	Teachers use intern	3	5	9/27/2010 8:43 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:42	DJ
Organisation and funding of CPD	Teachers' beliefs	3	4	9/27/2010 8:44 P	DJ	11/30/2010 11:0	DJ
Initial Teacher Education	Teachers' beliefs	4	4	9/27/2010 8:42 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:42	DJ
Making ITE more relevant	Teachers' beliefs	4	4	9/27/2010 8:43 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:43	DJ
Availability of CPD	Teachers' beliefs	5	12	9/27/2010 8:41 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:41	DJ
Previous experience with SEN	Has the teacher o	12	21	10/9/2010 8:03 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:03	DJ
Positive Experiences	Teachers describe	0	0	9/27/2010 8:46 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:46	DJ
Promotion of tolerance	Having a child with	1	1	9/27/2010 8:50 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:50	DJ
SEN makes a better teacher	Teaching a child w	1	1	10/9/2010 8:04 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:04	DJ
Reflective thinking	teachers reflect on	2	5	9/27/2010 8:51 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:51	DJ
Positive experiences	teachers describe	20	51	10/9/2010 8:03 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:03	DJ
Challenges	Areas of Inclusive	0	0	9/27/2010 8:09 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:09	DJ
Class size	Should classes be	1	2	9/27/2010 8:12 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:12	DJ
Guilt	teachers feel guilty	2	3	9/27/2010 8:13 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:13	DJ
Length of school day	Should child with	2	2	9/27/2010 8:13 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:09	DJ
Non-acceptance of difficulties	Child in system I	2	4	9/27/2010 8:13 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:13	DJ
Extra work	teachers express	3	5	9/27/2010 8:12 P	DJ	9/27/2010 8:12	DJ
Time constraints	teachers tell of the	4	0	10/10/2010 10:30	DJ	9/27/2010 10:30	DJ
Balance of rights	teachers believe, a	5	1	10/10/2010 10:30	DJ	9/27/2010 10:30	DJ
Balance of rights (2)	teachers believe, a	5	1	10/10/2010 10:28	DJ	9/27/2010 10:28	DJ
Challenging experiences	teachers describe	5	1	10/10/2010 10:11	DJ	9/27/2010 10:11	DJ
SNA	teachers discuss I	8	1	10/10/2010 10:26	DJ	9/27/2010 10:26	DJ
Stress	teachers discuss I	7	3	9/27/2010 10:27	DJ	9/28/2010 10:4	DJ
Widening gulf	Teachers describe	3	10	10/9/2010 8:13 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:13	DJ
School involvement	People encourage	0	0	9/27/2010 10:24	DJ	9/27/2010 10:24	DJ
Emotions	Emotions and feel	0	0	10/9/2010 8:05 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:05	DJ
Child with SEN	Affect of child	0	0	10/9/2010 8:08 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:08	DJ
Teacher Focus	Issues around tea	0	0	10/9/2010 8:13 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:13	DJ
Parents and outside Professionals	Teachers' experi	0	0	10/9/2010 8:27 P	DJ	10/9/2010 8:27	DJ

Tree Nodes

# Appendix Q

## Tree Node Definition Label

The screenshot displays a software application window with a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Go, Project, Links, Code, Tools, Window, Help) and a toolbar. The main area is titled 'Nodes' and contains a 'Tree Nodes' table. A left sidebar shows a tree structure with folders like 'Free Nodes', 'Tree Nodes', 'Cases', 'Relationships', 'Matches', 'Search Folders', and 'All Nodes'. A 'Tree Node Properties' dialog box is open, showing details for a node named 'Preparation for Inclusive education'. Red arrows indicate the relationship between the dialog box, the table entry, and a text box at the bottom.

Name	Description	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Preparation for Inclusive education	professional preparation at	0	0	9/27/2010 8:37	DJ	9/27/2010 8:3	DJ
Positive Experiences	Teachers describe some p	0	0	9/27/2010 8:46	DJ	9/27/2010 8:4	DJ
Challenges	Areas of inclusive educato	0	0	9/27/2010 9:05	DJ	9/27/2010 9:0	DJ
School environment	People encountered in the	0	0	9/27/2010 10:24	DJ	9/27/2010 10:	DJ
Emotions	Emotions and feelings of t	0	0	10/9/2010 9:05	DJ	10/9/2010 9:0	DJ
Child with SEN	Affect of the child and on t	0	0	10/9/2010 9:06	DJ	10/9/2010 9:0	DJ
Teacher Focus	Issues around teachers th	0	0	10/9/2010 9:13	DJ	10/9/2010 9:1	DJ
Parents and outside Professionals	Teachers' experiences of c	0	0	10/9/2010 9:27	DJ	10/9/2010 9:2	DJ

**Tree Node Properties**

General

Name: Preparation for Inclusive education

Description: Professional preparation of ITE and later at in-service level for working in an inclusive classroom. This includes aspects such as college lectures, teaching practice, planned contact with children who have SEN. It also takes into account the induction

Nickname: Preparation

Hierarchical name: Tree Nodes\Preparation for Inclusive education

Created On: 9/27/2010 8:37 PM By: DJ

Modified On: 9/27/2010 8:37 PM By: DJ

Buttons: OK, Cancel

**Definition / label of rules of inclusion for Free Nodes grouped in the Tree Node**

Proposition Statements Generated from Memos

Look for: Search in: Memos Find Now Clear

Name	Nodes	References	Count	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
My Research Journal	0	0	9/13	DJ	10/21/2010 7:	DJ
Agism	0	0	9/25	DJ	9/28/2010 10:	DJ
Balance of rights	0	0	1/17	DJ	1/17/2011 11:	DJ
Wending point of inclusive education	0	0	11/3	DJ	11/30/2010 8:	DJ
Break Point	0	0	11/3	DJ	11/30/2010 8:	DJ

**Challenges**

As teachers, like all human beings, are autonomous individuals, no two will necessarily hold the same views on any one aspect of teaching. Much depends on the teacher's strength of character, previous life experiences and inherent personality. What may be a source of stress to one may be an attractive and invigorating challenge to another. This brings to mind the concept of teacher resilience (Lok all Hardgroves, 1999, 2000, 2005; Gu, 2007; Howard, 2004; Kitching, 2009; Mintz, 2007 in Endnote).

A few points seemed to be agreed to by all  
Having a child with SEN in the classroom was also demanding in terms of finding time for all children, and in deed, for the teacher to prepare work, plan, meet with parents/ professionals.

All participants felt that, to make inclusive education work well for both the child with SEN and class peers, small classes were a *must qua non*. I suppose that within that statement, smaller classes would also make inclusive education work better from the teacher's standpoint (Must give this more consideration - seeing that this study is intended to probe teachers' experiences, rather than that of the children)

For most teachers, there was a strong alignment between lack of time and a sense of guilt: they appeared to feel that they were unable to give both the child with SEN and the class peers the requisite time needed. This in turn provoked a sense of guilt. Some teachers seemed to suggest that the child with SEN were getting far more time than their peers (e.g. "She's only one out of twenty five, but she takes up far more than a twenty-fifth of my time"). A certain level of frustration was more evident in the most junior classes in school - where many children without SEN "labels" may need help with socialising into school routine and where there is a heavier physical workload on the teacher e.g. moving from table to table to demonstrate correct work etc. Some teachers felt that the "weaker children" who still were not low enough in scores to attend the L/S/RT missed out on extra help due to the presence of the child with SEN.

Master memo generated by synthesis of memos on Free Nodes

Look for: Search in: Memos Find Now Clear

Name	Nodes	References	Count	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
My Research Journal	0	0	9/13	DJ	10/21/2010 7:	DJ
Agism	0	0	9/25	DJ	9/28/2010 10:	DJ
Balance of rights	0	0	1/17	DJ	1/17/2011 11:	DJ

**Balance of rights**

This theme generally arose on an unprompted basis in most interviews: teachers seemed to worry and feel guilty about fairly serving the needs of all the children in their classes. In the case of teachers who were dealing with children at the more significant end of the scale (e.g. Down syndrome with additional difficulties such as toilet problems / speech and language difficulties socialisation deficits and also those with severe EBD), the worry was about the rights of the non-SEN children. In these cases, teachers wondered if the rights of the child were being served by the inclusive process.

For those teachers with children who had to more "manageable" conditions (e.g. speech and language disorder / autism at the lower end of the scale / ADHD) the worry was about not doing enough for the child]

Memos written after reflection on identified Free Nodes

Look for: Search in: Memos Find Now Clear

Name	Nodes	References	Count	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
My Research Journal	0	0	9/13	DJ	10/21/2010 7:2	DJ
Agism	0	0	9/25	DJ	9/28/2010 10:4	DJ
Balance of rights	0	0	1/17	DJ	1/17/2011 11:1	DJ

**Length of school day**

CT 2 Questions as to whether Child X should be in for the full school-day Parents are vehemently against any change. Send Child X to school even when she's under the weather. Is it a case of, "My kid is just like all the others"? (Get quote "regular kid" form assignment on moderate intellectual disability)

CT 1 also mentions a shorter day for child with EBD

**Testing Summary Statements****Parents**

We have just started giving written homework in Senior Infants. I discussed this issue with Child Xs parents and I prepared alternative homework sheets for Child X – sheets that were much more suited to his ability.

(Diary CT 2)

**Parental contact**

A much better day today with regards Child Xs behaviour. I'm so glad that I didn't bring the mother on us by talking to us yesterday

(Diary CT 2)

**Parents**

CT2: Oh God! Absolutely! I think.. I know it's not easy for them to have a child with Down Syndrome. It's easy for me to talk because I don't have a child like that. They do feel that you should speak to them every time at the door when you're letting the children out. They seem to think that it's just them and no one else. Oh you definitely see more of them. I mean even at the time of the parent-teacher meeting, you'd feel like saying : "I don't need to see you because I talk to you everyday" but ..no, they came anyway and stayed longer than anyone else.

(Interview)

CT2: Oh, yes but they're coming round (laughs). I mean at the very beginning when I asked: "What are your hopes and expectations for the child?" their answer was: "To be the same as everyone else in the class" Which wasn't realistic – but one half (of the parents is more realistic that the other.

(Interview)

They were at the beginning. But it was quite obvious that they were doing it for him which was of benefit to nobody. So I just stopped sending it home and I spoke to them some more at the parent-teacher meeting and it's ok now. I can send home what I think is suitable or relevant for the child at that time. And in the area of reading.. they claimed he was reading at home, so I asked them to demonstrate for me how he reads and home and their idea of reading and my idea of reading were not quite the same (laughs).

(Interview)

## **Information for teachers considering participation in the research study proposed by David Sorensen**

### **Doctorate in Education Thesis Research**

Dear Colleague,

I am at present undertaking a research assignment to obtain information for my thesis as part of a Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme. Below I outline information regarding aspects of the study and I leave contact details should you require further clarification.

#### **Research Study Title:**

**Not just heads and hands but hearts as well: An exploration of the perceptions, attitudes and emotions of Irish classroom teachers currently providing inclusive education for children with significant SEN.**

#### **Purpose of the Research**

This piece of research sets out to explore the experiences of Irish primary school classroom teachers who currently have within their classroom a child with significant special educational needs, i.e. children who have been designated as being in the Low Incidence category by the National Council for Special Education and who are entitled to resource teaching hours. The study seeks to find out the participating teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of such children, what supports they feel are needed, the emotions teachers might experience when teaching a class in which there is a child with a significant special educational need. As somebody working in the area of special education, I am also very interested in teachers' views on how open the discussion on inclusive education is at present.

#### **Requirements of Participation in the Study**

Teachers who agree to take part in this study will be required to participate in two hour-long interviews, and also to complete entries in a teacher diary / journal. The interviews would be held at 2 – 3 week intervals at a venue selected by the teacher. The diary element would require the teacher to make three entries per week for a period of four week prior to the first interview.

**Potential Benefits of the Proposed Study**

Although there may not be any immediate direct benefits to the participating teachers themselves from this study, I would hope that the finds may be of benefit to the overall teaching body in Ireland. To date very little research is available on the effects of inclusive education on Irish teachers and classroom. The proposed study may help to fill that gap. The findings of the study may also be useful to teacher educators in devising training for preservice teachers, taking into account the voices of serving teachers.

**Confirmation that involvement in the study is voluntary**

Participation in this piece of research is entirely of a voluntary nature. I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage without having to state a reason. I am also aware that although teachers in this study will not be identified by name, anonymity cannot be guaranteed as work settings, job descriptions etc. may identify persons in the study.

I have been made aware that the confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law i.e. it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions. The data generated by this research, whether in paper or digital format, will be stored on campus in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. After a period of 10 years, that data will be disposed of. Such data will only be used for the purposes of the proposed research study. The data will not be used for teaching or publication without the express permission of the participants.

Should you have any queries or should you require clarification on any aspect of the proposed study please contact me on the contact details below:

David Sorensen

David Sorensen,

[Home contact details deleted]

[School contact details deleted]

## **Informed Consent Form**

Dear Colleague,

I am at present undertaking a research assignment to obtain information for my thesis as part of a Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme. To conform with ethical requirements, all participants are required to give written consent prior to the commencement of the research. Below I outline information regarding aspects of the study and having read that information, I ask you to sign this consent form.

### **Doctorate in Education Thesis Research**

**David Sorensen**

#### **Research Study Title:**

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Participant – Please complete the following (Circle **Yes** or **No** for each question)

Have you read the Plain Language Statement? **Yes / No**

Do you understand the information provided? **Yes / No**

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study **Yes / No**

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? **Yes/ No**

### **Participant Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in the Plain language Statement and in this Consent Form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name in Block Capitals: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix V**  
**Letter to School Principal**

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*(Name and Address of School Deleted)*

Dear (Principal's name),

I have been a teacher in the above school for more than thirty years. At present I am also a part-time student on the Doctorate of Education (EdD) programme in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

The latter part of my teaching career has been in area of Special Educational Needs. As you are well aware, there has been a movement towards inclusive, rather than specialised education for children with SEN, over the relatively recent past. Mainstream classroom teachers now encounter children who previously might have been placed in specialised settings. My study looks at the experiences, feelings, attitudes and beliefs of classroom teachers who are providing inclusive education.

One of your teachers (Name) has agreed to take part in this small piece of research and has chosen the school setting as the most convenient for conducting an interview with me. I would be most grateful if you would grant permission for me to carry out such an interview on your school premises. At all times I will act in an ethical fashion

No teacher will be identified by name, but rather by an alpha-numeric code e.g. CT 1 (Classroom teacher 1), LS 3, P4 (Principal 4). Schools will not be named, but given an alphabetic code e.g. School X. Individual children will not be named but given a code e.g. Child X, Child Y etc.

As this interview will take place after the official end of the school day, there is no question of me observing, or being in contact with, pupils of the school.

Your sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

David Sorensen

\_\_\_\_\_

I grant permission to David Sorensen to enter the school premises, after the official end to the school day, in order to conduct an interview with (Teacher's name).

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_