University of Dublin
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Authentic Listening to Student Voice
&
The Transformative Potential to Empower Students with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in Mainstream Schools

A thesis written in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy (Ph.D.)

2013

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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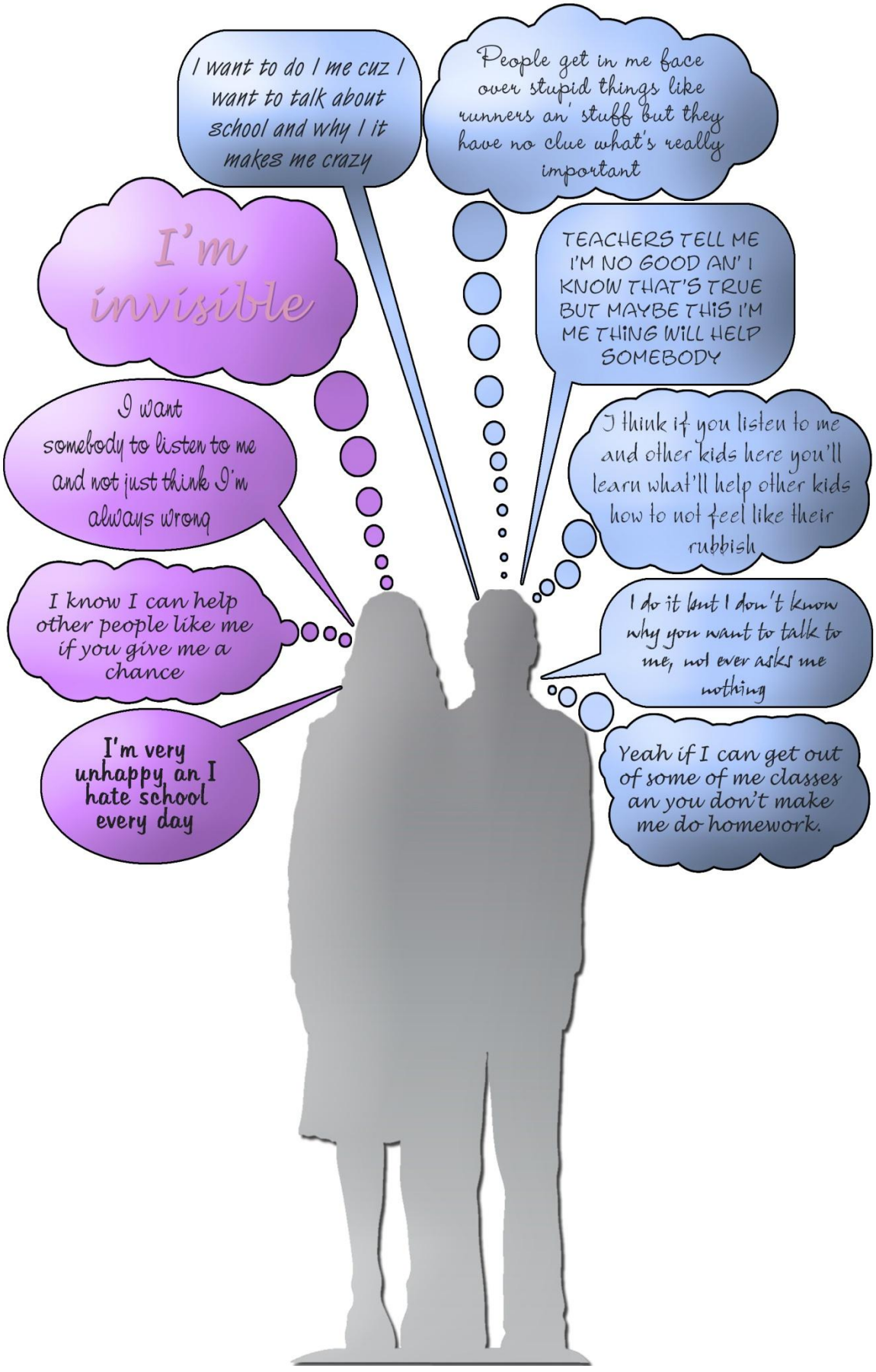

Figure 1 – Samples of Student Voice

SUMMARY

This research study elicits the perspectives on their educational environment of twenty students in mainstream education who were identified as presenting with internalising or externalising behaviours associated with the classification of 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' (SEBD). It was integral to this research undertaking to determine if 'being listened to' would encourage 'active agency' on the part of the participants in positively transforming their experience of school. The rationale for pursuing this study is based in the understanding that students with SEBD represent some of the most marginalised students in school and are often the least 'empowered' of their peers (Cefai and Cooper, 2010). Little has been written about the inclusion of young people with SEBD in mainstream schools as a large number of studies focus on students with SEBD in special schools (Visser and Dubsky 2009).

The review of literature within this thesis reflects the contextual framework of the research by positioning the study as relevant to the practice and pursuit of inclusive education. Interpretations and representations of the terminology associated with 'Emotional Disturbance' and SEBD are examined as well as 'perspectives of normality and ability'; 'attachment to school'; 'care' and 'leadership'. A conceptual understanding of the themes, 'voice' and 'empowerment' is also interrogated in the review in which these themes are presented as pivotal in driving this research because together they represent the process and aim of the study.

The research questions which guided this research process are:

- What is the impact on the pupil participants when they engage in this student voice research process?
- What is the impact on the wider school community?
- What are the implications from this research for creating a more inclusive learning environment in schools?

This research approach is aligned to an 'emancipatory' or transformative paradigm and identifies the significance of 'inclusion', 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'care' relative to the theoretical framework of the study. Commitment to the paradigmatic stance of this research underpins the theoretical assumptions, research approach and reflexive nature of the research.

The methodology is an example of qualitative research using a combination of ethnographic and narrative approaches. Data was collected primarily through one to one interviews and focus group meetings with the student participants, and supported by insights recorded in a reflective journal and contributions from school personnel. The students decided the level and pace of their contributions which impacted on the frequency of one to one meetings and their participation in group activities. Initially, a small number of creative workshops were offered to the participants as part of the design of the process, however, further workshops and creative activities were organised directly by the participants as opportunities for engagement with each other as a group.

The data is presented within case studies and analysed thematically with collaborative contributions of significant themes from the participants. Four of the students volunteered to read and comment on a summary of the final analysis which offers an interrogation of 'voice', 'perspectives of difference', 'care' and 'leadership'.

The findings of this research demonstrated that having the opportunity to be heard was significant to all of the participants. However, for some of the young people who were 'silenced' on important issues in other parts of their lives, the experience of this 'voice' process had less impact. For many of the participants, the opportunity to talk and encountering an 'authentic response' influenced their levels of enthusiasm for and participation in the research process. This study confirmed the potential relationship between 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'transformation' because most of the participants actively contributed to improving relationships with their teachers and peers, while promoting and participating in strategies and activities that impacted positively on their experience of school.

The influence of the students' active agency when they rose to the challenge of precipitating positive transformation to their school environment was realised throughout the school community. Key school personnel confirmed that the ethos and culture of the school had been changed to one that prioritised 'care' and 'listening'. Students with labels that exemplify 'difficult difference' were responsible for positively affecting changes in attitudes towards them and presenting a model for the development of relationality in care and leadership. This evidence suggests that a 'student voice' approach to supporting young people is fundamental to the development of an inclusive learning environment for the benefit of *all* students.

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I have often read 'this would not have been possible without...' but never have truer words been spoken about Peter, my husband. Every day that I have spent mulling over it and engrossed in it are dedicated to you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your indomitable enthusiasm, motivation, support, patience and above all your love through every day especially in challenging times. You sacrificed a huge amount for this to happen and I can never thank you enough. I am deeply indebted to you for the burden you bore with a smile throughout. I love you, and you are my inspiration in every day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ..... **i**

SUMMARY ..... **iii**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **v**

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **vi**

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION **1**

RATIONALE 1

THE RESEARCH 2

THESIS OUTLINE 5

CONCLUSION 7

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE **8**

WHO CARES? 8

INTRODUCTION 8

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION 9

Introduction 9

International Influence 9

A Focus on Ireland 10

Defining Inclusive Education 16

Opposing Views 19

Relevance to this Study 22

Summary of Section One 22

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES 23

Introduction 23

Terminology and Definitions 23

Definition of BESD (UK) 28

The Irish Context 29

Prevalence of SEBD 31

Some Perspectives of SEBD 34

Rationale for Pursuing Student Voice Research with Students Presenting with Challenging Behaviours and/or SEBD 36

Summary of Section Two 37

PERSPECTIVES OF 'DIFFERENCE' 38

Introduction 38

The 'Dilemma of Difference' 38

The Concept of 'Normality' 41
The 'Capability Approach' 44
Summary of Section Three 46
ATTACHMENT AND BELONGING 47
What is the theory of Attachment? 47
Attachment to School 49
Summary of Section Four 51
CARE AND CARING RELATIONS 52
The Importance of 'Caring Relations' and 'Emotional Work' in Schools 52
Summary of Section Five 55
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP 55
'Leadership'; The Lynchpin Theme 56
Summary of Section Six 59
CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 2 59
CHAPTER 3 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE 2 62
STUDENT VOICE AND EMPOWERMENT 62
Introduction 62
Setting out the Context - The Socio-Political Landscape 62
Concepts 64
Rationale 66
Summary of Section One 68
'VOICE' AND THE CHALLENGES OF LISTENING 69
Whose Voice, Who's Listening? 69
Different Perspectives 76
Summary of Section Two 79
EMPOWERMENT: POWER AND A COMMITMENT TO CHANGE 79
Empowerment within Models of Participation and Consultation 79
Power Relations 83
The Transformative Potential of Empowering Students 87
Summary of Section Three 89
CONCLUSION 89
CHAPTER 4 -PARADIGMATIC STANCE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 91
INTRODUCTION 91
THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS 92
THE APPROACH TO RESEARCH 93

THE REFLEXIVE PROCESS 95
CONCLUSION 97
CHAPTER 5 – DESIGN OF RESEARCH 99
INTRODUCTION 99
PARADIGM, EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY 100
ETHICAL CONCERNS 102
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH 106
ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH 107
NARRATIVE INQUIRY 109
CASE STUDY 110
REFLEXIVITY 112
MIXED METHODS 113
Interviews 113
Focus Groups 114
Creative Workshops 115
Field Work Journal/Reflective Diary 117
BRIEF OUTLINE OF DESIGN 118
ANALYSIS 119
The Process of Analysis 121
Concluding Analysis 122
Credibility, Authenticity and Dependability 122
CONCLUSION 124
CHAPTER 6 – THE JOURNEY 126
INTRODUCTION 126
SECTION 1 126
Case Study 1 – The Pilot 126
Background Details 127
6th Class 128
School Meeting; 3rd November 2008 129
A Process of Consultation and Participation 130
Post Primary School 135
Conclusion 137
SECTION 2 138
Introduction to the Major Case Study 138
General Details about St. Bernadette's Post Primary School 138

Gatekeepers 140
Preliminary Interviews 142
Explanatory Note: 144
Introducing the Student Participants; Embedded Case Studies 2009-2011 144
'Legends' 145
'Lone Wolf' 153
'Blood Brothers' 158
'Jigsaw' 168
I'm Me: Student Ownership 179
'The Glass House' 186
CONCLUSION 193
CHAPTER 7 – DATA ANALYSIS 194
THE SPACE BETWEEN 194
THEMES FOR ANALYSIS 194
VOICE 196
The Act of Listening 196
Empowerment and Change 198
Voice; A Research Approach 202
Summary 204
PERSPECTIVES OF DIFFERENCE 205
Context 205
Teacher Perspectives 206
Perspectives of Self 208
Summary 210
CARE 211
Teacher-Student Interactions 211
Relational Care 214
Summary 218
LEADERSHIP 219
A Bottom Up Approach 219
A Top Down Response 222
Summary 223
CONCLUSION 223
CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSION 225
INTRODUCTION 225

THE ENQUIRY....225
FINDINGS....226
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS....230
Introduction....230
Legislation....230
Behaviour and Learning....231
Difference....232
'Care' and the Intrinsic Benefits of Education....233
A Paradigm of Leadership....234
STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH APPROACH....234
CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH....236
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH....237
CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION....238
BIBLIOGRAPHY....240
APPENDICES....263
APPENDIX A – PSEUDONYMS OF PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOOL....263
APPENDIX B – INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PRINCIPALS AND BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT....264
APPENDIX C – SCHOOL LETTER TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS....267
APPENDIX D – PILOT STUDENT CONSENT FORM....268
APPENDIX E – STUDENT CONSENT FORM....269
APPENDIX F – ADULT CONSENT FORM....270
APPENDIX G –STUDENT CONSENT LETTERS THEY COMPOSED THEMSELVES – SAMPLE PHRASES....271
APPENDIX H – LETTERS TO PARENTS....272
APPENDIX I – LETTERS TO STUDENTS....273
APPENDIX J – LYRICS TO 'JIGSAW'....274
APPENDIX K – MY PAD....275
APPENDIX L – MENTORING PROGRAMME GUIDELINES AND WORKSHEET....281
APPENDIX M – MENTORING PARTNERSHIPS JAN – MAY 2010....283
APPENDIX N – I'M ME - A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE....284
APPENDIX O – FEEDBACK FROM SENCO ON THE IMPACT OF THE RESEARCH....286
APPENDIX P – PHOTOGRAPH FROM SCULPTURE WORKSHOP....291
APPENDIX Q – CHILL-OUT CARD....292
APPENDIX R – EXTRACTS....293

APPENDIX S – PILOT STUDY TIME LINE.....294
APPENDIX T – BREAKDOWN OF MEETINGS IN ST BERNADETTE'S.....295
Dates of Attendance in St Bernadette's.....296
Staff Meetings.....297
Legends.....298
Jigsaw.....300
Blood Brothers, Lone Wolf and Others Meetings.....302
APPENDIX U – ETHICAL QUESTIONS – SIKES (2004).....304
APPENDIX V – LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED.....305

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Samples of Student Voice.....ii
Figure 2 – Internalising and Externalising Behaviours.....26
Figure 3 – Division of Participants in Case Studies.....111
Figure 4 – Temporal Breadth of Study: Number of Days in each School per Term...119
Figure 5 – Gender Breakdown of Student Participants in Case Study Groups.....144

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE

> ...our thinking has been informed by a preoccupation with educational justice and empowerment. Thus, we believe that, of all school age populations, that defined as 'EBD' – however artificially the term is constructed – has been the most marginalised in terms of street-level empowerment (Clough, Garner, Pardeck & Yuen, 2005, p.4)

This position in the literature reflects my rationale for pursuing this research study. While I was teaching at post primary school level, I was conscious of the palpable unhappiness, despair and struggle experienced by a number of students there. Some of them had learning difficulties which impacted on their confidence and others presented with emotional or behavioural difficulties which were exacerbated by the school environment. A number of my students were enduring extraordinary circumstances or shouldering 'adult' responsibilities outside school which also impacted on their social or educational development. As a school community, we lost some of our students as a result of educational exclusion and disaffection, but unfortunately we also lost a few in unspeakably tragic circumstances. Clough and Nutbrown (2002) noted that '…in a sense, methodology is as much about the way we live our lives as it is about the way in which we choose to conduct a particular piece of research' (2002, p. 68). They point out that our choice of research methodology is derived from our personal identities and values, and reveals that which we consider important in our understanding of the world.

Young people who are struggling or unhappy in school either because of negative perceptions of their abilities or because they have special educational needs which are not supported, represent a marginalised group within our system of education. Students who present with behaviours associated with the categorisation of 'Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' (SEBD) have been identified as the least popular amongst their peers and teachers (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Scanlon 2008; Shevlin, Winter and Flynn 2012). The rationale behind this research undertaking was to engage in a research methodology to determine if it would have a positive impact on the experience of a sample group of students in mainstream education, identified as disaffected or presenting with SEBD, since they represent some of the most marginalised students and are often the least 'empowered' of their peers (Cefai and Cooper, 2010; Clough et al. 2005). Visser and Dubsky (2009) acknowledge that little has been written about the inclusion of

young people with SEBD in mainstream schools as a large number of studies discussed in the literature focus on students with SEBD in special schools.

I chose to employ a 'student voice' approach within my research study. There is a significant body of literature in the area of student voice which provides evidence of social and academic benefits for students who are engaged in consultative and participative engagement with researchers and/or teachers through 'student voice research' (SVR) (Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Robinson and Taylor, 2007; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). The potential links between 'empowerment' and eliciting student voice, where that voice is met with acknowledgment and opportunities for student participants to affect change in their educational environment, is also attested to in research evidence (Shor 1992; Robinson and Taylor 2007; Tangen 2009).

Cefai and Cooper (2010) contend that 'empowering' students with SEBD can contribute to the resolution and prevention of some of the associated difficulties experienced by them. As a result, evidence drawn from the literature provides a rationale to pursue a student voice approach to research with students identified with SEBD in an effort to determine the impact on the students.

THE RESEARCH

The following three questions guided the research, especially when consolidating analysis and findings to present interpretations based on the study.

- What is the impact on the student participants when they engage in this student voice research process?
- What is the impact on the wider school community?
- What are the implications from this research for creating a more inclusive learning environment in schools?

In addition to these questions it was essential to the research process to determine if the experience of being listened to for the student participants was one of empowerment and if that subsequently encouraged them to make changes that would benefit their educational environment.

Twenty student participants between two mainstream schools were consulted for this research. One male student in his final year of primary school participated in a pilot study and nineteen young people, six female and thirteen male at post primary level, participated in the main study. The data is presented as a pilot case study and an embedded case study.

The methodology is an example of qualitative research using a combination of ethnographic and narrative approaches. Data was collected primarily through one to one interviews and focus group meetings with the student participants, and supported by insights recorded in a reflective diary and contributions from school personnel. The students decided the level and pace of their contributions which impacted on the frequency of one to one meetings and their participation in group activities. Initially, a small number of creative workshops were offered to the participants as part of the design of the process, however, further workshops and creative activities were organised directly by the participants as opportunities for engagement with each other as a group.

The pilot study began in October 2008 and final contact with that participating student was in May 2010. Preliminary interviews were conducted in March/April 2009 with the participants in the main case study, and intensive data collection took place during the school year September 2009 to June 2010. Follow up meetings occurred less frequently from September 2010 and the last contact with a representative group of the students took place in October 2012 so that I could offer a summary of the analysis of this study for their input, comment and approval[1].

Students were invited to contribute themes and issues of significance to them from their experience of this student voice engagement process which were offered in feedback by different groups or individuals before the conclusion of the data gathering process. This feedback, together with a compilation of the data from notes, transcripts and my reflective diary was interpreted and presented using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). 'Voice', 'Perspectives of Difference', 'Relational Care' and 'Leadership' emerged as major themes and together with sub-themes are discussed in the context of the literature and previous research.

[1] Appendices S and T provide a breakdown of contact with all participants and the detailed timeline involved

The findings of this research demonstrated that having the opportunity to be heard was significant to all of the participants. However, for some of the young people who were 'silenced' on important issues in other parts of their lives, the experience of this 'voice' process had less impact. For many of the participants, the opportunity to talk and encountering an 'authentic response' influenced their levels of enthusiasm for and participation in the research process. This study confirmed the potential relationship between 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'transformation' because most of the participants actively contributed to improving relationships with their teachers and peers, while promoting and participating in strategies and activities that impacted positively on their experience of school.

The influence of the students' active agency when they rose to the challenge of precipitating positive transformation to their school environment was realised throughout the school community. Key school personnel confirmed that the ethos and culture of the school had been changed to one that prioritised 'care' and 'listening'. Students with labels that exemplify 'difficult difference' were responsible for positively affecting changes in attitudes towards them and presenting a model for the development of relationality in care and leadership. This evidence suggests that a 'student voice' approach to supporting young people is fundamental to the development of an inclusive learning environment for the benefit of *all* students.

During the research process some of the student participants proposed ideas to improve their educational experience and in the main case study, a few of these emerged as interventions that were trialled in the school. These interventions were not intended as recommendations for behavioural support or to generate a specific intervention or support programme but instead they represent initiatives which can emerge from an engagement with student voice. They contribute to this research in the evidence they provide that students are often best placed to indicate what would support or obstruct their engagement, behaviour and learning.

From the beginning of this research undertaking, ethical considerations related to working with the student participants for this study were paramount to the research approach. Those issues are relevant when engaging children and young people in most forms of research; however, they are particularly significant when working with children identified with special needs, as 'they are considered to have a higher degree of vulnerability' (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004:152). Ethical approval was obtained from

the ethics committee in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin prior to engaging in data collection for the main case study from September 2009 while the pilot study was conducted with the approval of the Education Department of the National University of Maynooth under supervisory guidance from October 2008. Consent was obtained directly from student participants and also from parents and guardians. During preliminary interviews with the participants, I explained that I was neither a psychologist nor a qualified counsellor so that regular contact and individual interviews would not be misconceived as counselling sessions.

THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis is divided into eight chapters with **chapter one** serving to introduce the rationale and focus of the study.

The review of literature is divided between **chapters two and three**. The first chapter of the review reflects the contextual framework of the research by positioning the study as relevant to the practice and pursuit of inclusive education. Subsequently, it examines the interpretation and representation of the terminology: Emotional Disturbance; Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties; and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. The latter part of this chapter examines issues that informed and/or motivated this study as well as provided lenses through which themes and sub-themes were interrogated. These include: 'perspectives of normality and ability'; 'attachment to school'; 'leadership'; and 'care'. The second chapter of the review presents a conceptual understanding of the themes; 'voice' and 'empowerment' and illustrates that together these themes are pivotal in driving this research because they represent the process and aim of the study

Chapter four acknowledges the positioning of this research approach within a transformative paradigm and identifies the significance of 'inclusion', 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'care' relative to the theoretical framework of the study. The commitment to the paradigmatic stance of this research underpins the theoretical assumptions, research approach and reflexive nature of the research.

Chapter five presents the philosophical assumptions that underpin this study and outlines the qualitative research approach taken, elaborating on the use of 'ethnographic', 'narrative' and 'case study' approaches and the data collection methods which included interviews, focus groups, workshops and field work journal/reflective diary.

The data that I collected with the student participants is contextualised with background and general information in **chapter six** and subsequently presented as case studies, all of which were given names by the participants, with the exception of the pilot case study. Following the case studies, an outline of the journey taken by many of the participants and the changes they brought about in their educational environment are explained in a section entitled; '***I'm Me***: Student Ownership.

The title, '***I'm Me***', was derived from an interview with one young person who finished an answer to a question with this specific pronouncement. I decided to use this as a name for the research process when I began the main study because it was useful as an acronym for 'Inclusive Methods in Mainstream Education' but also served as a reminder of the unique nature of every young person participating. Initially, I introduced the process to the students during the preliminary interviews as 'The ***I'm Me*** Project', but at the request of one of the participants, we changed it to 'The ***I'm Me*** Programme'. This does not reflect any intention to design, implement or recommend a 'programme' for either behaviour or indeed 'student voice engagement'. The motive behind the naming of the process was simply to encourage a sense of community within and belonging to the process. However, it should be noted that in written feedback contributed by the principal and also by the special educational needs co-ordinator, they refer to the experience of student voice engagement alternatively as '***I'm Me'***, the project and the programme.

In **chapter seven** I discuss and analyse issues that emerged as significant through collaboration with and consultation of the participants. These are interrogated under the major themes: 'Voice', 'Perspectives of Difference', 'Relational Care' and 'Leadership'. Although the analysis draws upon insights from my reflective diary and contributions from school personnel, the analysis prioritises the perspectives of the student participants.

Finally, **chapter eight** concludes the thesis by reaffirming the context of the enquiry and linking the findings and implications of the study to the research questions. The strengths and limitations of the research approach are discussed and recommendations for future research proposed.

CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter has presented a rationale for this study and an overview of the research process. The chapters have been briefly introduced to illustrate the progression of the thesis.

Within this thesis I have shared the stories and journeys of the young people who participated in the study and presented arguments and recommendations influenced by the perspectives of these participants. Although their perspectives have been largely corroborated in the data by insights from adults who contributed during the process as well as reflections from my journal, I am conscious of a deliberate bias to the 'student voice' in a commitment to the undertaking of this enquiry.

The thesis is unapologetically political in pursuit of change in the educational environment for some young people who are unhappy or struggling there. It is hoped that recommendations from this study will lead to further research in pursuit of the development of a more inclusive learning environment in school for all students by encouraging a culture of 'listening', 'caring' and 'leadership'.

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

WHO CARES?

> 'There is a certain paradox in even asking 'What's the difference?' That question can signal a sincere request for information or a casual shrug. In an episode of the television show *All in the Family*, Edith Bunker asks whether her husband would like his bowling shoes laced under or over the holes. Her husband replies "What's the difference?" Edith begins to explain the difference meticulously, but Archie explodes; he had meant by his reply; "Who cares?"
>
> (Martha Minow, 1990, p.374)

In challenging us to reflect on our language and attitudes around 'difference', Minow (1990) introduces one of her key concerns; 'I worry that a difference assigned by someone with power over another will become endowed with an apparent reality, despite competing versions of that reality' (1990, p.374). This concern serves as an appropriate preface to the two chapters of this review of literature, within which the themes of 'difference'; 'care' and 'power/empowerment' will be explored.

INTRODUCTION

Both literature review chapters engage with concepts pertinent to the context and nature of the enquiry that is driving this research study. From the outset, the objective of this study has been to listen to a sample group of students in mainstream educational settings talking about their experience of school. The target sample was compiled mainly of participant students who had been identified through psychological assessment with difficulties encompassed within the broad spectrum categorisation of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Students who had not had medical or psychological assessments, but had been identified through their school as having regular and consistent difficulties that were impinging on their educational and/or social engagement in school; such as presenting with challenging (externalising or internalising) behaviour and/ or general apathy or disaffection, were also included amongst the sample. It was integral to this enquiry to determine if the experience of being 'listened to' for the participants either positively impacted on or encouraged 'active agency' in transforming their experience of engagement in school.

The first chapter of the review reflects the contextual framework of the research by positioning the study as relevant to the practice and pursuit of inclusive education. Subsequently, it examines the interpretation and representation of the terminology: Emotional Disturbance; Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties; and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. The latter part of this chapter examines issues that have informed and/or motivated this study as well as provided lenses through which themes and sub-themes have been teased and interrogated. These include: 'perspectives of normality and ability'; 'attachment to school'; 'leadership'; and 'care'.

The second chapter of the review presents a conceptual understanding of the themes; 'voice' and 'empowerment' and illustrates that together these themes are pivotal in driving this research because they represent the process and aim of the study.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Introduction

Some of the international and domestic factors that influenced the development of a policy of inclusive education in the Republic of Ireland are identified in this section. Differing interpretations and opposing views around the concept of inclusion are also presented.

The section concludes with the rationale which situates this research enquiry as pertinent to the policy and pursuit of inclusive education.

International Influence

The right to education is acknowledged as being a fundamental human right in a number of international human rights treaties since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, including; The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) United Nations (UN), 1989; Education for All, WCEFA Jomtein, 1990; World Education Forum, Dakar, 2000; and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN, 2006. Education is considered to be a goal in itself as well as a means for attaining all other human rights (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] 2003, p.7).The World Education Forum (2000) in Dakar, reaffirmed the significance of this fundamental human right and

underlined the importance of rights-based government actions in implementing Education for All (EFA) activities.

The roundtable discussion, from which the concept of 'inclusion' first emerged, took place at Frontier College, Toronto, Canada in July 1988 and involved a group of fourteen people from North America who were concerned about the slow progress of integrating children and adults with disabilities or learning difficulties in mainstream education. 'Switching their thinking from 'integration' to 'inclusion' at this legendary meeting was indeed a radical gesture and the use of the word *inclusion* caught on quickly across Canada and the US' (Italics as in original emphasis, Thomas and Vaughan 2004, p.89).

This concept of inclusion within education was adopted within a new Framework for Action at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca (1994). The framework document called on governments to 'adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise' (UNESCO 1994, p.ix). The Salamanca Statement was signed by ninety two countries, including Ireland, and was the first international agreement that argued the case for meeting the needs of students with special needs from a position of integration and segregation to one of *inclusive education*. Inclusive education is presented within this agreement as an opportunity to address the rights of all students and a challenge to governments to develop educational policy so that 'regular' schools may be transformed to respond to diverse groups of learners. It emphasises the necessity to provide opportunities for equal participation for all students;

> '...regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups' (UNESCO 1994, p.6).

A Focus on Ireland

The twentieth century saw a heightened awareness with regard to social justice in education in many developed countries including the Republic of Ireland (Winter and O'Raw 2010). A combination of interrelated factors since the early 1990s altered the landscape impacting on the provision of special needs education in Ireland including: international agreements and trends pursuing both an understanding of and development of inclusive education; parental advocacy and litigation taken against the Irish state; and a

legislative framework underpinned with a presumption for inclusion, (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley 2008; Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Winter & O'Raw 2010; Banks & McCoy 2011; Shevlin, Winter & Flynn 2012).

Griffin and Shevlin (2011) credit the establishment of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) in 1991 as the most significant development of the early 1990s as its brief was to examine how the existing system of special educational needs provision could be resourced in order that the policy of integration could be effectively implemented. The report, published in 1993, highlighted the lack of connectedness between mainstream and special education (Department of Education 1993) and was the most significant and comprehensive policy document in special education that the state had ever produced (Spelman and Griffin 1994). 'It has provided a blueprint for the development of special education that continues to influence policy decisions up to the present day' (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.45). SERC defined students with 'special educational needs' as including:

> ...those whose disabilities and/or circumstances prevent or hinder them from benefiting adequately from the education which is normally provided for pupils of the same age or for whom the education which is generally provided in the ordinary classroom is not sufficiently challenging (Department of Education 1993, p.18).

This broad definition of special educational needs resembled that of the Warnock Committee (1978) in the UK and although relatively encompassing, Griffin and Shevlin (2011) point out that it focussed on 'within-child' deficits. The SERC report (1993) recommended a continuum of education provision for students with special educational needs, which ranged from full time placement in residential special schools to placement in mainstream schools with additional support. It advocated 'as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary' (Department of Education 1993, p.22). The recommendations of the report were reflected in the White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995) in which the government confirmed its objective:

> ...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 and practicable from one type of provision to another. Educational provision will be flexible; to allow for students with different needs, at various stages in their progress through the education system (Department of Education 1995, p.24).

Griffin and Shevlin (2011) acknowledge the important influence of the SERC report for its in-depth review and as 'a credible attempt to improve system capacity in relation to special educational provision' (2011, p.53). However, they also draw attention to its shortcomings. The committee did not include members with disabilities and therefore represented the dominant views of service providers. Furthermore, the role of parental support was relatively underdeveloped and some parents of children with specific difficulties expressed unease, in particular, parents of children with autism, because, despite recommendations for increased support for their children, they would continue 'to be treated within a framework of emotional and behavioural disturbance' (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.53). The implication of this designation was a factor in the pervasiveness of litigious action against the state which occurred through the 1990s.

During this decade, a series of court cases were initiated by families of children with autism and/or severe to profound general learning disabilities to procure improved educational provision for their children. Whyte (2002) contends that 'in the context of persistent and egregious State neglect of the needs of these two distinct categories of children, the litigation at a minimum compelled the authorities to begin to address the problems encountered by the plaintiffs' (2002, p.210). In particular, the cases of Paul O'Donoghue in 1993 and Jamie Sinnott in 2000 engendered significant changes for the provision of education for children in similar circumstances. Paul was deemed by the state to be ineducable but Justice O'Hanlon ruled that not only was he educable but:

> ...there is a constitutional obligation imposed on the State by the provisions of Article 42.4 of the Constitution to provide for free basic elementary education of all children and that this involves giving each child such advice, instruction and teaching as will enable him or her to make the best possible use of his or her inherent and potential capacities, physical, mental and moral, however limited these capacities may be (O'Hanlon ruling[2] 1993)

In the case of Jamie Sinnott, Justice Barr ruled that the State was obliged to provide lifelong education for people with severe to profound learning difficulties. However, this verdict was successfully challenged such that the State's obligation to provide education to children with such disabilities was deemed to conclude at the age of eighteen and as

[2] O'Donoghue v. Minister for Health, The Minister for Education and the Attorney General, Ireland, [1993] IEHC 2; [1996] 2 IR 20 (27th May, 1993) accessed at *www.escr-net.org/sites/default/files/**Decision**%20(Donoghue).docx*

Jamie was aged twenty two at the time of the trial, on a personal level, his case had been won and lost within a short period. Nevertheless, the high profile of this case in conjunction with earlier civil actions had raised public and state awareness of the necessity for appropriate provision of education for students with special needs. Litigation taken on behalf of children with varying special needs by their parents, expedited the acknowledgement in legislation of the constitutional rights to education for all children including 'those with disabilities or other special educational needs' in the Education Act 1998. This was reinforced by 'the milestone announcement by the Minister for Education in October of 1998 of the guarantee of "automatic entitlement" of provision by right of any child who has special educational needs' (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.45). The Act stipulated that the Minister must ensure the availability to every student 'including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person' (Government of Ireland 1998, p.7 [1]a).

The policy of inclusion within the Irish education system is in accordance with a range of legislation since the first acknowledgment of children with special educational needs in the Education Act 1998, and includes: the consolidated Equal Status Acts 2000 – 2011; The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004; and the Disability Act 2005.

The Education Act 1998 was an important step in Irish educational policy as it was the first piece of legislation in the history of the state that outlined the legal rights and responsibilities of the Irish Government relating to education, (Carey 2005, p.136). Apart from providing the first legal definition of 'disability', its significance in relation to special education was in preparing the way for further legislation including the EPSEN Act 2004. However, by imposing an obligation on School Boards of Management to write a 'School Plan', it made clear the need for schools to state their ***objectives*** in writing in relation to equality of access and participation in the school by students who have disabilities or other special educational needs, (Part 4, Section 21,2). The Act was largely aspirational but prepared the way for discourse and further legislative Acts.

The significance of the Education Welfare Act 2000 for students with SEN is that it stipulates that every child in the state participate in and benefit from a minimum education and through the establishment of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB); unexplained, prolonged and poor attendance should be investigated. Children

and teenagers with SEBD for example, are often poor attendees of school and 'there may be a temptation for a school to turn a blind eye on the poor attendance of these children' (Carey 2005, p.146). However, as a result of this legislation, parents can insist that schools pursue the causes of both poor attendance and school related problems with the help of the NEWB or if necessary, schools may enlist the help of the NEWB to investigate potential causes of truancy arising from home circumstances. On the other hand, the Education Welfare Act does not make *specific* provision for students with SEN and where this is most deficient is in the area of discipline:

> …it would be unfortunate if the blanket application of a uniform discipline policy were to have a disproportionately harsh effect on students with special educational needs. This could prove to be the case especially in circumstances where the student's special educational needs arise from, for example, emotional disturbance that renders him/her prone to aggressive behaviour to a greater extent than other students or where the student's improper conduct arises from frustration with the educative process caused by his/her learning differently from his/her fellow students.' (Meaney et al. 2006, p.210 6.39)

Similarly lacking in this respect, the EPSEN Act (2004) does not make provisions or refer to the difficulty which commonly arises when a school needs to decide whether to impose the same sanctions on a student whose rule breaking may be as a direct result of SEBD as it would on a student without the same difficulties. Since some students with SEBD may present with challenging behaviour, treating them within the school environment as though they do not have these difficulties is problematic and may often perpetuate further challenging behaviour.

The consolidated Equal Status Acts (2000-2011) are relevant to special education because they prohibit discrimination; direct, indirect and discrimination by association. As a result of this, schools can be challenged in accordance with this legislation if a member of the school staff harasses a student or if application for enrolment to a school is denied admission under any of the 'discriminatory grounds', (2000, p.8 3 (2) a – j) of which the 'disability ground' is (g).

Despite the legislative framework to support inclusive education, the Acts stop short of being "rights-based" legislation as they include the caveat inherent in the phrase "having regard to the resources available" or "as resources permit" (Shevlin and Rose 2008; Drudy and Kinsella 2009). This qualification fundamentally allows a school to deny access to a child with a disability or special educational need if what is required to

facilitate that access ‘impairs the quality of provision for the generality of students’ (Shevlin and Rose 2008, p.427).

Provisions and opportunities for students to be centrally involved and consulted in some of the critical decision making processes that would affect her/him were included in the publication of the EPSEN Act 2004 as illustrated in the process outlined for the formulation and implementation of the ‘education plan’ (Government of Ireland 2004a:13-15 Sections 8 and 9). However, due to economic constraints, full enactment of this legislation was deferred in 2008 and the statutory obligation on schools to introduce a system of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) has not been implemented. This is despite recommendations and guidelines from the National Council of Special Education (NCSE) on the implementation of a uniform national approach (NCSE 2006). ‘This failure to enact the provisions regarding individual education planning has lessened the impact of the EPSEN Act in ensuring that this process becomes an established feature of provision in all mainstream schools’ (Rose et al. 2012, p.111). Although Rose et al. (2012) found that many of the schools participating in their longitudinal research study were formulating their own versions of IEPs, they also point out that even where they are in place ‘they do not always follow a consistent format even within an individual school’ (2012, p.112). This inconsistency in terms of tangible support and opportunities for consultation and involvement on the part of the student represents an inexcusable example of inequitable access to resources despite the objectives within the legislative framework.

Part 2 of the Disability Act (2005) relates to the legal right to access an assessment for children of school age. At time of writing, this legal entitlement is only available for children aged five and under, because in October 2008, full implementation of Part 2 of the Disability Act (2005) was deferred as a result of the decision not to commence similar elements of the EPSEN Act (2004a), which also relate to assessment. An alternative timescale for full implementation of these parallel provisions within the two Acts has not been developed. Consequently, the statutory framework does not provide for equality of access to supports and resources for all children in schools throughout Ireland. When children are identified within their schools as potentially in need of additional support under the general allocation model (Government of Ireland 2005), they may be recommended for assessment by the principal in that school under the allocation of assessments through the National Educational Psychologists Society (NEPS) or the

Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA). However, the allocation of assessments for each school is limited and dependent on enrolment figures, so for that reason, not every child who may need access to assessment will necessarily have the opportunity to avail of it or may have to wait a lengthy period before the opportunity arises. Alternatively, where parents or guardians of children are financially able to afford a private psychological assessment, they are obviously in a more advantageous position.

An evaluation of the legislation has shown inequitable opportunities amongst children with special educational needs as a consequence of the deferral of some aspects of the EPSEN Act 2004, specifically in relation to statutory assessment and education plans. Consequently, it is reasonable to suggest that 'educational provision for children and young people with special educational needs is in a transition phase as inclusion policy and practice has yet to become firmly embedded in Irish schools' (Shevlin et al. 2012, p.2). At the same time however, the delay in fully enacting the necessary legislation demonstrates that the policy of inclusive education has yet to be fully embraced at a systemic level and this continues to impede fair and equal access by children with special educational needs to their educational entitlements.

Defining Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusion replaced the previous model and terminology of 'integration' which referred to the placement of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools and was based on an assimilation model. Integration focused on 'within-child' deficits as criticised by Griffin and Shevlin (2011) in their analysis of the SERC Report (1993) because educational provision within this model emphasised providing supports to students to enable them to 'fit in' to a mainstream programme without changes necessarily being made to the programme itself (Farrell and Ainscow 2002). The Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) make the distinction between inclusion and integration in education by clarifying that inclusion shifts the focus from the child to the school, unlike integration, which does not specify what should be done. The term 'inclusion' is used to describe the extent to which a child with special educational needs is involved as a full member of the school community with full access to and participation in all aspects of education (CSIE 2002).

Defining 'inclusive education' and best practice is not a simple task, despite the apparent accord within international policy on inclusion (Slee, 2001 & 2010; Winter & O'Raw

2010). There are many definitions and explanations of 'Inclusion' and 'Inclusive Education'. However, the absence of a universally agreed upon definition (Griffin & Shevlin 2011; Shevlin & Flynn 2011; Slee 2001) reflects its complex and contested nature (Florian 1998) and means that 'inclusive education' is understood in some of the literature in its broadest sense, referring to meeting the learning needs of all students, while other authors use the terminology specifically with reference to students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Shevlin et al. 2012; Slee 2010).

The Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) defines inclusive education as follows:

> All children and young people – with and without disabilities or difficulties – learning together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges and universities with appropriate networks of support. Inclusion means enabling all students to participate fully in the life and work of mainstream settings, whatever their needs. There are many different ways of achieving this and an inclusive timetable might look different for each student' (CSIE 2002, p.2).

Similarly, Booth's definition is, 'the process of increasing participation of learners within and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of neighbourhood centres of learning' (Booth, 2000, p.78). Within these definitions there is an emphasis on 'enablement' and the services being brought or adapted to meet the child rather than the child adapting to the services. Stainback and Stainback (1990) define inclusive schools as 'places where everyone belongs, is accepted, and supports and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met' (1990, p.3). Correspondingly, Ballard (1996) describes inclusion as the right of every student to access the curriculum as a full-time member, in an ordinary classroom with similar age peers'

In an effort to generate a definition of inclusion to use within the Irish context, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Consultative Forum which was established under the EPSEN Act 2004, decided that the definition would be a combination of the UNESCO (2005) definition and the description included within the DES (2007) Post-Primary Guidelines for Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs[3]

[3] See Appendix R

Consequently, inclusion within the NCSE report (2010) is defined as a process of

- Addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and
- Removing barriers to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements, to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school

(Winter and O'Raw, 2010, p.39).

There is a vast body of literature on the topic of *Inclusion* and/or *Inclusive Education* in which some authors emphasise 'rights', some 'focus on school capacity to cater for difference' while others highlight 'values and community' (Winter & O'Raw 2010, p.12). For example, Sandkull (2005) argues that inclusive education is a key strategy in a rights based approach to achieve education for all, which 'gives preference to strategies for empowerment over mere service-delivery oriented responses' (Sandkull 2005, p.4). MacGiolla focuses on the principle of inclusion within which the school changes to meet the needs of all the children it serves and provides a framework within which they are valued (MacGiolla 2007, p.291). However, in response to a request from the CSIE to endorse their charter, the British Psychological Society (BPS) produced a position paper in which it pointed out that the '... drive toward inclusive education is about more than "special educational needs". It reflects changes in the social and political climate wherein an inclusive approach characterises thinking about difference' (BPS 2005, p.1). Within that approach the position paper elaborates on the benefits to society of an 'inclusive' ethos and suggests that 'a society which can nurture, develop and use the skills, talents and strengths of all its members will enlarge its collective resources and ultimately is likely to be more at ease with itself' (Ibid.).

There is agreement with the BPS stance in much of the literature which more specifically argues that inclusion has been too narrowly conceptualised and must focus on developing school capacity to respond to a broader realisation of social diversity which addresses the inclusion of children and young people from disadvantaged communities or those who represent minority groups whether 'ableist', socio-economic, religious, sexual, ethnic or cultural. A truly inclusive educational environment must address and combat factors that contribute to the marginalisation of children through non-recognition and/or respect for any kind of 'difference' (Lodge and Lynch 2004; Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Florian, Young and Rouse 2010; Shevlin et al. 2012).

Thomas and Vaughan (2004) emphasise the point that 'inclusion' is not simply an issue within education but represents and characterises social and political issues also. 'Inclusion', in fact, emerged from several directions:

> ...from research, certainly, but more importantly from the imperative to greater social justice; from calls for civil rights; from legislation that prohibits discrimination; from the stimulus provided by original, distinctive projects started by imaginative educators; from the voices of people who have been through special education...the ideas that brought people to the wisdom of mainstreaming...are but one strand in a much broader bundle of ideas having its lineage in notions about rights and social justice'
>
> (Thomas and Vaughan 2004, p.1-2).

However, despite the origin of ideas about inclusion within a 'rights and social justice agenda' it remains a contentious concept in education, especially when defined in opposition to any form of 'exclusionary practice' and 'because it relates to educational and social values, as well as to our sense of individual worth (Winter and O'Raw 2010, p.11). According to Winter and O'Raw (2010), there is little dispute around the aim to develop an inclusive education system striving for 'tolerance, diversity and equity,' but the process of achieving this is much more controversial.

Opposing Views

Cigman (2007) argues that inclusive education is a contested concept because there are strongly held principles that divide commentators with regard to whether schools should 'welcome and adapt themselves to all children without exception, irrespective of the nature or severity of their difficulties or disabilities...(or)...welcome and adapt themselves to all children as far as possible' (Cigman 2007, p.776). She calls these principles 'universalist' and 'moderate' respectively 'and contends that 'universalists' tend to be antagonistic towards special schools because they see them as a threat to the project of 'universal inclusion' (Ibid.). She points out that 'moderates' believe that inclusive education requires the existence of special schools for a small number of children. Similar views are expressed in the literature which criticise 'purist' or 'full' models of inclusion and advocate what they describe as a 'responsible' or 'cautious' form of inclusion (Evans and Lunt 2002; Farrell 2000; Hornby 1999; Wilson 2000).

Cigman (2007) criticises the 'universalist' contention that it is possible to include every child in mainstream schools and draws on the literature to assert that the inclusion of some children in mainstream schools;

> ...can be disastrous not only for their teachers and classmates, but for these children themselves...Some children have difficulties that are inescapably social in nature; they appear unable to understand the nature of groups or to participate in such communities (Cigman 2007, p.786)

Liu (1995) also argues that another group of children whose needs may not be met in inclusive educational settings are those of hearing impaired children. He illustrates ways in which support provided is not adequate to achieve 'subsequent self-sufficient participation in society' to meet deaf children's educational, cultural or social needs and argues that proponents of full inclusion often make the mistake of 'pursuing equal treatment at the expense of equal opportunity' (Liu 1995 in Frederickson and Cline 2009, p79).

Cigman criticises the 'rights argument' put forward by CSIE that 'all children have a right to mainstream education' (CSIE 2002) arguing that:

> ...this kind of 'rights talk' is problematic and inflationary. The rights argument sometimes sounds like a duty argument, suggesting that all parents have a duty to send their children to a mainstream school, irrespective of the nature or severity of the child's difficulties or disabilities. Another duty argument is sometimes ascribed to schools, which are said to have a duty to provide an appropriate educational environment for every child without exception. In all this talk (or implied talk) of duties, there are suggestions about what 'ought' to be the case without any apparent awareness of the fact that, as philosophers put it, "ought implies can' (Cigman 2007, p.780).

Winter and O'Raw (2010) also draw attention to the conflict of rights that can occur in the pursuit of inclusion especially if there is disagreement between children and their parents on whether their child attends a mainstream or special school. They point out that there may be situations where the parents and child's wishes are not compatible especially if the parents would rather their child attend a mainstream school but the child 'for whom interaction with peers who understand their issues is paramount may prefer segregated settings' (Winter and O'Raw 2010, p.18). Farrell (2000) insists that conflicts can arise between parents, children and the rights of their peers if a model of inclusion is pursued solely within 'a human rights agenda'. He questions whose rights are being met if placing a child with SEN in a mainstream environment disrupts the education of the other pupils (2000, p.155). He also criticises what he describes as the pursuit of a more inclusive society which attempts to solve a range of problems through the prevention of different forms of exclusion, for example the exclusion of disruptive students from school;

> Inclusion in this more general sense is now seen as a `good thing' and exclusion as a `bad thing'. Within this general rhetoric there is a risk that the need for pupils with SEN to receive high quality education may get forgotten as people get swept along on the `inclusion' bandwagon (Farrell 2000, p.154).

The argument between 'universalists' and 'moderates' as articulated by Cigman (2007) represents a broad spectrum of beliefs around what exactly constitutes 'inclusive education'. For example, Kauffman (1989) argues that trying to force *all* students into the inclusion mould is just as coercive and discriminatory as trying to force *all* students into the mould of special education' while Booth (1996) argues that for advocates of *full* inclusion, the values of social justice and equity are foremost. Ainscow et al (2006) claim that the 'rights' perspective invalidates any argument that some children's needs are best served in any kind of special setting and insists that all children belong in the regular classroom learning together.

However, Thomas and Vaughan (2004) point out that although ideas around rights and social justice were influential in the development and pursuit of inclusive education in the twentieth century, there were also some other significant influences, for example:

> ...a decline in respect for authority, and particularly the kind of authority and power exercised by professionals and other experts. That declining respect has given rise to an increase in parental voice and power in education and latterly even to something that would have been unheard of even in the 1980s: a hearing of the child's voice. As these various voices have been heard, and as their speakers have gained in confidence, the equation of power has shifted from expert to user, from those who provide knowledge to those who need to use knowledge. The culture of 'doctor knows best' (or psychologist or teacher knows best) has diminished substantially' (Thomas and Vaughan 2004, p.2).

The conclusion that may be drawn from their argument and the position taken in this thesis is that now it is truly time to hear the voice of the child as expert in her own situation and with regard to what inclusive education means to her. This 'declining respect' may very well be a response to 'the equation of power' being shifted from expert to user, however, the user must play a significant role in determining how to advance the development of inclusive education.

Accordingly, Thomas, Walker and Webb (1998) challenge the arguments in favour and in opposition to forms of inclusion and instead call for research to focus on ways of *making* it work.

Relevance to this Study

The pursuit of 'inclusive education' is acknowledged in much of the literature as relevant to the educational rights of those groups of learners who may be vulnerable or at risk of exclusion or underachievement. Consequently, the topic is of particular relevance to the pursuit of this enquiry which involves consulting with a sample group of students who have been identified with SEBD or challenging behaviour and disaffection.

The following section, in conjunction with the discussion around 'Voice' and 'Empowerment' in Chapter Three, will demonstrate that disaffected students and students with SEBD are often 'at risk' of exclusion within our education system and are also acknowledged in the literature as the least popular students amongst their peers and teachers. Just as this section has shown the lack of consensus around the universal inclusion of students with SEN, there is also discord around whether all students with SEBD, in particular students presenting with very challenging or aggressive behaviour, should be educated in segregated special schools or within a mainstream environment. For this reason, listening to their opinions and recognizing that they are best placed as experts on their own experience of education to convey what they may identify as supports or obstacles, may be critical to the development of inclusive education.

Summary of Section One

This section of the literature review has focused on 'Inclusive Education' and drawn from external and internal influences to present the development of inclusion policy in Irish education. The current legislative framework has been criticised because of the inconsistency experienced by students with special educational needs in accessing supports and resources. This has been exemplified by the fact that education plans, as recommended by the NCSE and intended as a statutory requirement under the EPSEN Act 2004, have not been fully implemented. The point has also been made that financial disadvantage will also reinforce inequality if a student has difficulty accessing a psychological assessment due to the limited number available to any school under the aforementioned NEPS and SCPA scheme.

Different viewpoints of inclusive education have been presented between the sub-sections 'Defining Inclusive Education' and 'Opposing Views.' However, an over-riding argument has been made that the concept of inclusion and the development of inclusive

education must take into account a broader realisation of social diversity which addresses the inclusion of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, and those who represent minority groups. The challenge to focus on solutions to 'making it work' is emphasised as paramount to any argument around the continuum of provisions available to students or to the ideological differences between the 'universalist' and 'moderate' stance on what constitutes inclusive education.

The rationale for presenting this research as relevant to the policy and pursuit of inclusive education is because the enquiry specifically focuses on the views of a group of young people who have been identified as experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or presenting with challenging behaviour and disaffection. Students with SEBD may find themselves at risk of educational and/or social exclusion and for this reason, eliciting their opinions to learn from their experience of mainstream education may provide insights relevant to the development of the inclusive school.

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

Introduction

This section of the review of literature introduces the terminology 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' (EBD); 'Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD/ BESD) and 'Emotional Disturbance'(ED) or Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED). It puts forward some of the current definitions and perspectives from the literature. Insights into the prevalence of SEBD, particularly in Ireland are presented and the section concludes with a rationale for focussing on students with SEBD within this student voice research study.

Terminology and Definitions

> While many concepts in the special needs arena are contested, disagreement in this area of disturbed and disturbing behaviour is more widespread than in any other. Since 1944, terminology used in government publications to describe the area has included: maladjustment, emotional or behavioural disorders; emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD); and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) (Frederickson and Cline 2009, p.408)

Although the terminology associated with ED/EBD/BESD is contested and there is no internationally accepted uniform definition, what *is* acknowledged, however, in much of

the literature and among government publications is that this classification represents a complex spectrum of difficulties encompassing internalising and externalising behaviours. The spectrum includes emotional disorders (such as anxieties, phobias and depression), self-harm and suicide; conduct disorders, hyperkinetic disorders/ADHD, autistic spectrum disorders, psychotic disorders, eating disorders, and substance and/or drug abuse (Cooper 2008, p.14).

Kavale, Forness and Mostert (2005) point out that Emotional Disturbance (ED) represents one of the largest groups of students in the United States in receipt of special education and yet, it is a category which has failed to receive consensus on the way it should be defined. They explain that definitional problems arise because the interpretation of the label ED is inherently subjective and encounters 'difficulty when applied to individual cases because a uniform interpretation is lacking' (Kavale et al. 2005, p.46).

The Federal Government in the United States of America (USA) adopted a definition of Emotional Disturbance/Emotional Disability that was first proposed by Eli Bower in 1957:

1 The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
   a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors
   b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers
   c) Inappropriate types of behaviour or feelings under normal circumstances
   d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
   e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems
2 The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (Code of Federal Regulation, Title 34, Section 300. 7 [c] [4])

This definition for students with ED or EBD has been retained in the amended Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004. However, an alternative

definition proposed by Forness and Knitzer in 1992 is used by many organisations in the USA, such as the '*Council for Children with Behaviour Disorders*' and '*Head Start*' (Zionts et al. 2002, p.11):

1 The term Emotional or Behavioural Disorder means a disability characterised by behavioural or emotional responses in school programs so different from appropriate age, cultural or ethnic norms, that they adversely affect educational performance, including academic, social, vocational or personal skills and which:

   i. Is more than a temporary, expected response to stressful events in the environment
   ii. Is consistently exhibited in two settings, one of which is school related
   iii. Persists despite individualised interventions within the education program, unless, in the judgments of the team, the child or youth's history indicates that such interventions would not be effective.

2 This category may include children or youth with schizophrenic disorders, affective disorders, anxiety disorders or other sustained disturbances of conduct or adjustment when they adversely affect educational performance in accordance with section (1).

Zionts et al. (2002) argue that the term *emotional disturbance* and other similar terms such as *behavioural disorder, social maladjustment, emotional handicap* etc. can be, by definition, quite ambiguous and extremely general. They stress that it is important therefore to determine the intensity, pattern and duration of the problems experienced (2002, p.10). Similarly, Webber and Plotts (2008) comment on the federal definition and emphasise that;

> Even if one or more of the five characteristics is met, there are other qualifiers inherent in this definition, including 'over a long period of time' 'to a marked degree and 'adversely affects educational performance'…These qualifiers must also be considered before identifying a student as eligible for special education under the classification of EBD. Because all individuals may exhibit characteristics of emotional distress at some time in their lives, it is necessary to distinguish emotional disturbance that requires special education intervention from more transient negative emotional states (2008, p.58-59)

Character patterns proposed by Karen Horney (1945) in relation to emotional and behavioural disorders indicate an adoption of one of the following rigid patterns to the exclusion of others.

- Moving toward people, characterised by compliance, submissive behaviour and a need for love
- Moving against people, characterised by arrogance, hostility and a need for power
- Moving away from people, characterised by social avoidance, withdrawal and a need for independence

Horney's hypothesis informed further research such as that conducted by Quay et al. (1966) and Kaufman et al. (2005) which identified 'Internalising and Externalising Behaviours associated with EBD as demonstrated in the table below (Webber & Plotts 2007, p.15):

INTERNALISING BEHAVIOURS	EXTERNALISING BEHAVIOURS
Shy, withdrawn	Defiant, disobedient
Inferiority	Aggression toward property, rules, and other children
Self-conscious, overly sensitive	Demands excessive attention
Fearful, anxious	Swears
Avoids participating in groups	Distrusts,
Sad, moody, irritable	Blames others
Apathetic	Destructive Hyperactive
Preoccupied,	Temper tantrums
Inattentive	Jealous

Figure 2: Internalising and Externalising Behaviours

Similar illustrations of externalising and internalising behaviours are used in government publications (DES [UK] 2001; DCSF 2008; NEPS 2010) to indicate the broad spectrum of behaviours associated with the complex terminology of ED and EBD. For example, in *Better Behaviour, Better Learning* (2001) it is noted that children with EBD may:

- Be unhappy, unwilling and/or unable to work
- Receive less praise for their work and have fewer positive child/adult interactions
- Have learning difficulties or be under-achieving

- Have poor social skills and fewer friends
- Have low self esteem
- Be emotionally volatile
- Be easily hurt (Scottish Executive 2001, p.13 [2.14])

Cooper (1999) points out that the different manifestations of emotional and behavioural difficulties which are given the label of EBD are not related to a single condition. As indicated from Table 1, emotional difficulties can present themselves in terms of extreme withdrawal and social isolation to aggressive and volatile behaviour, any or all of which may impinge on a student's social development and interpersonal relationships as well as the ability to reach her potential in an educational setting.

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) recommends determining the presence of the following before suggesting a psychological disorder.

a) Significant pain or distress, inability to work or play, increased risk of death, loss of freedom in important areas of life
b) Not a reaction to poverty, prejudice, government policy or other conflicts with society
c) Source of problem lies within the person due to biological factors, learned habits or mental processes

However, it is argued in the literature that these determinants are too limiting. For example, Zionts et al. (2002) suggest that 'most behaviourally disordered and emotionally disturbed children and adolescents do not have problems exclusively because of biological factors. It is most often thought to be a complex interaction between biological and environmental factors that causes such disorders' (2002, p.43). Some commentators argue for the use of a 'biopsychosocial' framework in order to understand (S)EBD in context (Cooper 2005 and 2011; Norwich 1999). Clough et al (2005) expound further that 'biological, social and psychological factors combine at every juncture of the aetiology of EBD' (2005, p.5). They draw on Hargreaves et al. (1975) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) as essential to reaching an understanding of what constitutes 'emotional and behavioural difficulty'. Hargreaves et al. (1975) emphasized the significance of 'behaviour in context', arguing that 'social actions are viewed as variously problematic or non-problematic according to person, place and timing'. Bronfenbrenner (1979) presented 'behaviour' within an environmental setting, which he defined as an ecosystem. The

'ecosystem' provides a 'complex map of factors that impact on individuals within their immediate and extended environments' (Clough et al. 2005, p.11). Commenting on the environmental context of school, Cooper et al. (2006) argue that an over emphasis on exam results, attainment targets and assessment procedures rather than acknowledging and nurturing the developing identities of all our pupils, contributes to difficulties experienced by students with EBD (Cooper et al. 2006, p.306-317).

Definition of BESD (UK)

Although the federal category of 'emotional disturbance and severe emotional disturbance' is still in use in the United States since the first IDEA of 1978, the term 'EBD' has come to be favoured according to Cole (2005). Similarly in England, the category of 'maladjustment' which was 'seen as stigmatizing and unsatisfactory – was abolished by the inclusionist 1981 Education Act....and was soon unofficially replaced by the term EBD' (Cole 2005, p.39) and more recently in government publications as BESD. The (UK) Department for Education and Skills (2001) *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* describes behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) as:

> ...a learning difficulty where children and young people demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties such as: being withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing; being hyperactive and lacking concentration; having immature social skills; or presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs. Learning difficulties can arise for children and young people with BESD because their difficulties can affect their ability to cope with school routines and relationships (2001, p.87 [7.61])

Garner (2009) points out that the legislative definition 'sought to connect EBD with the social difficulties that such children invariably encountered' (Garner 2009, p.52). A broader definition of BESD is outlined in *The Education of Children and Young People with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties as a Special Educational Need* (Department of Children, School and Families [DCSF] 2008):

> The term behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) covers a wide range of SEN. It includes children and young people with emotional disorders, conduct disorders and hyperkinetic disorders (including attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD)) and children and young people whose behavioural difficulties may be less obvious, for example, those with anxiety, who self-harm, have school phobia or depression, and those whose behaviour or emotional wellbeing are seen to be deteriorating (DCSF 2008, p.13 Par 54).

The DCSF (2008) publication also acknowledges the 'two-way relationship' between learning difficulties and behavioural difficulties, pointing out that difficulties experienced by pupils with BESD can be a 'barrier to learning' but similarly, a learning difficulty 'may lead to or exacerbate behavioural and emotional difficulties...and can also lead to low self-esteem and even depression' (DCSF 2008, p.14 Par 57). It also recognizes that there need not be a medical diagnosis for a young person to be identified as having BESD and that such a child or young person's needs must also be addressed (DCSF 2008, p.14 Par 58).

The same publication elaborates that for a child or young person to be considered to have BESD is dependent on 'a range of factors, including the nature, frequency, persistence, severity and abnormality of the difficulties and their cumulative effect' on behaviour and/or emotional wellbeing as compared to what might be expected within that young person's age group (DCSF 2008, p.13 Par 55). In this respect, the criteria for identification of BESD are similar to the inherent qualifiers within the IDEA (2004) definition, and address concerns raised by Zionts et al. (2002) and Webber and Plotts (2007) that it is necessary to distinguish emotional difficulties that require special education support from more transient negative emotional states. However, Pirrie et al. (2009) argue that these criteria are open to interpretation and represent 'an infinite regression of fractured meanings and unclear boundaries' (Pirrie et al. 2009, p.27). This further compounds the contested nature of the category (Clough et al. 2005; Frederickson and Cline 2009; Thomas and Loxley 2007) and the consensus in the research literature that there are few generalisations that can be made about students with (S)EBD or indeed agreement around precise definition (Cole 2005; MacNab et al. 2007; Macleod and Munn 2004; O'Mahony 2005; Visser 2003).

The Irish Context

There are approximately one hundred special schools in the Republic of Ireland of which twelve cater specifically for students with Emotional Disturbance or Severe Emotional Disturbance and/or behavioural problems. In addition, there are residential high support units (HSUs) and special care units (SCUs) under the sponsorship of the Irish Health Service Executive which cater for students in a variety of locations across Ireland.

In mainstream schools, children with Emotional Disturbance (ED) or Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED) who have been assessed as requiring additional resource support are

designated as having special educational needs under the definition currently in use since the EPSEN Act 2004:

> … a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that difficulty (Government of Ireland 2004, p.6).

Under the allocation of additional teaching support for students with SEN, students with ED are in receipt of three and a half hours of resource support per week and students with SED qualify for five hours per week (Government of Ireland 2005 Sp Ed 02/05). ED/SED is defined as follows:

> Such pupils ***are*** being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school. ***(This category is not intended to include pupils whose conduct or behavioural difficulties can be dealt with in accordance with agreed procedures on discipline)*** (Bold and italics as per original publication, Government of Ireland 2005, p.19)

This definition clearly focuses on the categories of ED and SED from the perspective of a medical 'within-child' deficit and also highlights these difficulties in terms of 'negative conduct and behaviour' with the inclusion of the caveat in bold and italics. However, the Irish National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Special Education Support Services (SESS) use the broader spectrum terminology Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) in their guidelines to schools on supporting students within this classification (NEPS 2010 and SESS 2011). Their use of the terminology includes students classified as ED/SED who are in receipt of medical treatment but also more generally, to refer to:

> ...difficulties which a pupil or young person is experiencing which act as a barrier to their personal, social, cognitive and emotional development. These difficulties may be communicated through internalizing and/or externalizing behaviours. Relationships with self, others and community may be affected and the difficulties may interfere with the pupil's own personal and educational development or that of others. The contexts within which difficulties occur must always be considered, and may include the classroom, school, family, community and cultural settings.'' (NEPS 2010, p.4; SESS 2011, p.3).

Cooper and Jacobs (2011) contend that the definition of the term 'emotional disturbance/behaviour problems' from DES policy on the allocation of resources for SEN

(DES 2005) needs to be addressed. They acknowledge that the current definition relates to issues of legal entitlement and the allocation of resources but argue that

> ...the identification of this category of problems with an entirely within-student biomedical definition may be problematic within an educational context, where an individual student's medical profile may or may not have a significant role to play in any difficulties that s/he is experiencing in achieving social, emotional and academic engagement' (Cooper and Jacobs 2011, p.15).

They recommend a broader interpretation, similar to that in the UK (DCSF 2008), to the more encompassing terminology SEBD or BESD to include students who are not under medical treatment such that it would reflect a bio-psycho-social approach rather than a concentration on biological and psychological dysfunction (Cooper and Jacobs 2011, p.163). Adopting this interpretation would acknowledge social and environmental influences as significant to the challenges experienced by a student rather than the more exclusive 'within-child' deficit approach currently inherent in the Special Education definition (DES 2005, p.19).

Internationally, the terminology EBD, BESD and SEBD are often used interchangeably in the literature and government reports, however, Pirrie et al. (2009) believe that the term "SEBD" with its emphasis by position of 'Social' in the title, 'more accurately reflects the nature of the difficulties many young people experience, as these often have their origins in the social situations in which young people find themselves' (Pirrie et al 2009, p.11). So as to retain some consistency within the use of terminology and in accord with this point of view, which focuses an emphasis on social and environmental factors in relation to the challenges experienced by children within this broad ranging classification, the abbreviation SEBD is used throughout this thesis, unless a direct quotation requires a variation on same.

Prevalence of SEBD

Estimates of the prevalence of SEBD amongst children and adolescents in The United States, U.K. and Ireland range from 10 to 20%, (Cooper 2008, p.16; DES 2006, p.67[School Matters]; NCSE 2012; Zionts et al. 2002, p.xi). The British Medical Association (2006) estimates that 20 per cent of young people experience a mental health problem at some point in their development, and 10 per cent experience these problems to a level that represents a 'clinically recognisable mental health disorder' (Cooper 2008,

p.14). Cooper points out that these figures have increased considerably in the last 50 years and in an attempt to understand why this has happened suggests;

> A persuasive argument would appear to be that many SEBD and some of their assumed causes are actually best understood in relation to social and cultural factors. Chief among these social and cultural causes are the related phenomena of the breakdown in community and the increase in individualism that characterizes the evolving state of advanced economies. (Cooper 2006 in Hunter Carsch et al 2006, p.7)

NCSE (2012) acknowledges the difficulty in accessing an accurate picture of the prevalence of SEBD amongst school age children in Ireland due to differences in classification. 'There is a general consensus however, among researchers, that up to one in five pupils may experience emotional and or behavioural difficulties at some stage during their school years' (NCSE News 2012, Issue 7). NCSE data for August 2010, indicates that the number of pupils with emotional and/or behavioural disturbance or severe emotional and/or behavioural disturbance in receipt of resource hours allocation was 6,900, 'which equates to just over 20% of the population of pupils with special educational needs in receipt of additional teaching hours' (SESS 2011, p.4). However, as was indicated in the previous sub-section, students within this designation must be under medical supervision (Government of Ireland 2005, p.19) to fulfil the requirements for allocated resource support and as such, this number does not reflect students within the broader classification of BESD (NEPS 2010 and SESS 2011).

Recent studies indicate the prevalence of children who are identified as having SEBD is disproportionately from lower income households, with the number of boys exceeding that of girls (Flynn et al. 2011 and 2012; McCoy and Banks 2012). Banks, Shevlin and McCoy (2012) draw on data from *The Growing Up in Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children* (Williams et al. 2009) which reveals that children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those attending schools designated as socio-economically disadvantaged 'are significantly more likely than their peers to be identified as having a special educational need of a non-normative type such as emotional behavioural difficulty (EBD)' (Banks et al. 2012, p.219). This is supported by the findings of the *How Are Our Kids* study (2012) carried out by Limerick Children's Services Committee which found that between 15% and 37% of children living in designated disadvantaged areas were rated as having significant emotional and behavioural difficulties compared to 6% in more economically and socially advantaged areas (in NCSE News 2012, Issue 7).

Similarly in the UK, research shows higher rates of identified BESD in socially deprived areas, amongst boys and amongst Black Caribbean and Mixed White & Black Caribbean pupils. Travellers of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils are also over-represented (DCSF 2008, p.15 Par. 64). Garner (2000) draws attention to the prevalence of students who have been identified to have an SEBD, and others regarded as 'pupils with problems' in more disadvantaged urban or metropolitan regions. He points out that, schools in these areas with high numbers of students identified with;

> ...EBD-related SENs, are often not well-placed to respond to the needs of such students, whether in terms of curriculum provision or in terms of support work utilising external agencies. Neither are they attractive to influential middle-class parents whose children may be expected to be high-achievers in school (Garner 2000).

The implications of this and the data from the *Growing up in Ireland Study* (Williams et al., 2009) reveal critical issues in relation to the pervasiveness of social class inequalities in education and the consequences for children, particularly from socio-economically disadvantaged areas. On the one hand there is an apparent 'over-identification' of some children, in particular; boys, children of single parent households and children from low-income households (Banks et al. 2012, p.230) revealing a level of inconsistency in terms of 'perspectives and perceptions' of 'normative behaviour'. However, there is also the unquestionable fact that the data reveals an over representation of SEBD in disadvantaged schools which is supported by children's self perceptions of their social emotional well-being by means of the Piers-Harris self concept scale; 'Findings show that overall self-reported social emotional well-being bears a strong relationship to the probability of being identified with an EBD' (Banks et al. 2012, p.219).

Research has already criticised the prevalence of social class related inequalities as they pertain to education (Drudy and Kinsella 2009; Lodge and Lynch 2002; Smyth and McCoy 2009) and this recent study highlights the fact that a significant number of children in disadvantaged areas are more susceptible to SEBD. By implication, this suggests a higher prevalence of students in disadvantaged schools who may:

- be prone to negative self-concept or low self esteem (SESS 2011)
- experience barriers to learning (DCSF 2008)
- have problems working in groups or forming relationships (SESS 2011)
- present with aggressive behaviour or disaffection, potentially leading to criminality (Kazdin 1995; Wearmouth 2004).

Some Perspectives of SEBD

Children with behavioural difficulties are often the least liked and least understood of all children with special educational needs (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Scottish Executive 2001, p.13). A number of research studies have demonstrated that teachers are more positively disposed to the inclusion of students with other forms of special educational need in their classrooms than towards students with SEBD (Cooper and Jacobs 2011; Farrell; 2000; Lindsay 2007; Scanlon 2007; Shevlin et al. 2012; Winter and O'Raw 2010). Scanlon's research (2007) focused specifically on teacher attitudes towards SEBD and found that although participant teachers were predominantly positive towards the inclusion of children with SEBD in mainstream education ***generally***, they showed more negative reactions to the possibility of having children with SEBD placed ***directly*** within their classrooms (Scanlon 2007, p.113-114). Further enquiry indicated that only 40% of teachers involved in her study were 'willing to adjust their teaching practices to facilitate inclusion of an EBD child' (2007, p.115).

An explanation of teacher attitudes may be discerned from Clough et al. (2005), who contend that children who are considered to experience SEBD carry a burden of 'blame' that is not assigned to children with other learning difficulties (2005, p.11). They point to assumptions that are made about students with SEBD that include, for example, the assumptions 'that these school students are manipulative, capable of controlling their actions and unwilling to comply with the work orientation of school (Clough et al. 2005, p.11). This view is supported by Cooper (2008) who claims that 'no other educational problem is associated with such a level of frustration, fear, anger, guilt and blame' (Cooper 2008, p.13).

Research conducted in Ireland by Shevlin et al. (2012) indicates that challenging behaviour is cited as the main reason for continued forms of segregation, with teachers reporting that social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are on the increase 'in terms of severity, complexity and prevalence...(and)...that the support systems are inadequate or too slow to respond' (Shevlin et al. 2012, p.12). Garner (2012) argues that since research has demonstrated disruptive behaviour represents a major challenge, in particular to new teachers;

> ...this should be a matter of particular concern given the normative policy approach obtaining in most countries relating to education inclusion. In spite of a

> burgeoning literature on this topic, there remains a studied failure to address what O'Brien (2001) has referred to as the "hard cases" in inclusive teacher education – pupils who present behaviour challenges (Garner 2012, p.331).

He criticises the failure of teacher education to address learning differences, special educational needs and 'EBD issues' in favour of 'subject knowledge' and argues that this 'has further marginalised the prospect of dealing systematically with issues relating to pupil behaviour' (Garner 2012, p.332). The development of a 'behaviour for learning' strategy which promoted positive approaches towards promoting positive behaviour and subscribed to the inextricable link between behaviour and learning, had emerged as part of teacher training in response to 'Every Child Matters' (DfES 2003), establishing a 'positive approach to pupil behaviour instead of reactive behaviour management' (Garner 2012, p.332). Unfortunately, under a new political administration in England, a "back-to-basics' approach to dealing with pupil behaviour was instigated (DfE 2011), which generated a significant change in policy direction. As a result the current provision of teacher training and development in England is one of polarities, he points out, as;

> Competing belief systems are at work, in which respectful, pupil-focused approaches to pupils are denigrated as being "soft", whilst those that are rule-governed, hierarchical and authoritarian are deemed to be "character-forming" and inclined to promote "standards" (invariably interpreted as those measured by academic performance) (Garner 2012, p.334).

Cooper et al. (2006), also argue that a lot of difficulties experienced by students with SEN, including SEBD are the fault of an education system which prioritises subject attainment and academic performance over other aspects of the school curriculum. They recommend that we broaden the way we view 'success', and recognise that the most successful pupil is the one who makes the most progress, whatever the starting point, (Cooper et al. in Hunter-Garsch et al. 2006, p.306-317).

Thomas (2005) contests the label of '(S)EBD entirely and asserts that;

> By retaining and using the label 'EBD', sight is often lost of the fact that schools for many children present an environment with which it is difficult to come to terms. By packaging this difficulty as a problem of the children, we divert our own attention from ways in which schools can become more congenial and inclusive places (Thomas 2005, p.77).

It is clearly evident, that there are vastly opposing views around difficulties either 'perpetuated by' or 'experienced by' students with SEBD in schools. At one end of the spectrum there is a mistrust of children presenting with these difficulties, attributing 'blame' and a 'within-child deficit' approach. However, there is an alternative view in the

literature which ascribes the responsibility for supporting students with SEBD within a 'respectful, pupil-focused' approach; one that 'nurtures developing identities' and posits SEBD as a socio-environmental response in particular to an education system which is not adapting to the student's needs.

> We must recognize the possibility that the origins of misbehaviour lie less in children's emotions or even in their 'disadvantage' and lie more in the character of the organization which we ask them to inhabit for a large part of their lives (Thomas 2005, p.72).

Rationale for Pursuing Student Voice Research with Students Presenting with Challenging Behaviours and/or SEBD

The rationale for a study which focuses on eliciting the voices of a sample group of young people in mainstream education, who are ascertained as experiencing SEBD, is primarily to determine their views on the experience of school. Visser and Dubsky (2009) acknowledge that little has been written about the inclusion of young people with SEBD in mainstream schools as a large number of studies discussed in the literature focus on students with SEBD in special schools (e.g. Cooper and Cefai 2010, Nind et al. 2012; Sellman 2009). Davies (2005) argues that it is essential to include the voices of young people with SEBD in research as 'a failure to find out what these pupils really think is likely to perpetuate their negative experiences of school' (Davies 2005, p.300).

Clough et al. (2005) contend that international perspectives on inclusive education have not fully confronted the dilemma posed by the broad range of 'challenging behaviours' including SEBD, on the pursuit and development of inclusion. Furthermore, they point out that 'it is this group of school attendees who are most frequently cited whenever the efficacy of educational exclusion is being scrutinized' (Clough et al 2005, p.12-13). Problems associated with SEBD and challenging behaviour include academic underachievement, disengagement from school, early school leaving, disaffection and potentially, educational and/or social exclusion (Knitzer 1993; Wearmouth 2004). Kazdin (1995) contends that behavioural difficulties in school may also lead to an increased risk of depression, low self esteem, criminality and substance or drug abuse.

Garner's (1995) account of two student voice case studies involving one group of boys in a mainstream class in England and another comparable group in the United States,

presents insights from students who had been identified as 'disruptive'. Garner points out that 'by offering disruptive pupils the opportunity to present their views, the "reality gap" between what these pupils think, and what teachers and others think they think, can be significantly closed' (Garner 1995, p.20). Substantially, that aim is inherent to the enquiry in this thesis. Data from Garner's study conveyed the sense of isolation or 'lack of inclusion' which affected the students. Significantly, the students expressed; 'the wish that the teacher would talk to them and find out what "we really think"...and an admission that they are an "underclass" within the school community' (Garner 1995, p.27).

The concepts of 'Voice' and 'Empowerment' are pivotal to the process and aim of this study. These concepts are explored in chapter three and further generate a rationale for the inclusion of students presenting with challenging behaviour, disaffection or SEBD within the discussion.

Summary of Section Two

This section has attempted to convey the complexity within the contested terminology Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. SEBD is described in the literature and in a number of government publications as encompassing a broad spectrum of difficulties which may present as internalising through to externalising behaviours. A number of different definitions have been presented and the inherent difficulties that are attached to the legal interpretation of the definition in use in the Republic of Ireland have been discussed.

There are serious implications as conveyed in relation to the prevalence of SEBD, both in terms of over-representation and over-identification, especially in disadvantaged areas. This fact is common to the UK and Ireland.

Opposing views of SEBD indicate very different perspectives of challenges as experienced by, or alternatively, perpetuated by students within this classification. Children with SEBD are the least popular of children with SEN in schools and the experience of these difficulties can potentially lead to further serious challenges throughout their lifetime, including low self esteem, criminality or substance abuse.

It is not enough to accept a 'policy' of inclusive education unless the lived experience of education for 'all' students is inclusive in reality. Students with challenging behaviour or

SEBD represent a group of children who are marginalised within schools largely through an acceptance that they are difficult to work with. Attitudes towards children with SEBD are proven to be negative from research and for that reason; this study aims to determine the views of a sample group of students, and to elicit their views and opinions of their experience of education. It is also integral to this pursuit, to determine if this opportunity of being listened to may encourage 'active agency' on the part of the participants in positively transforming their experience of school.

PERSPECTIVES OF 'DIFFERENCE'

Introduction

Perspectives of 'difference', particularly within the area of special needs education, have generated very strongly held opinions which relate to the impact of 'labelling', recognition of 'ability' and 'concepts of normality'. The positioning of students as 'different' or 'other' with respect to the majority of their peers can engender a sense of rejection and/or invisibility. This section presents some of the arguments that are pertinent to this discussion and positions them as relevant to this thesis.

The 'Dilemma of Difference'

Minow (1990) engages with an issue which divides opinion with regard to the provision of special needs education;

> '…schools struggle to deal with children defined as 'different without stigmatizing them….when does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatize or hinder them on that basis? And when does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatize or hinder them on *that* basis? I call this question "the dilemma of difference"' (1990, p.20).

Within this 'dilemma of difference' there is potential for stigma and inequality. Stigma may be created by either ignoring or focusing on differences that exist between students. For example, ignoring a different way of learning or particular ability is disempowering for a student for whom an alternative learning style may provide access to the curriculum. This is evident in the Irish post primary system of schooling, as literacy

skills are prioritised even within practical and creative subjects, such as music, art, metalwork and woodwork because they are partially examined through written tests. Lynch and Baker (2005) point out that written testing dominates assessment procedure and consequently, the processes of education. 'These tests are often remote from the reality that they purport to examine' (Lynch and Baker 2005, p.138).

Minow (1990) argues that refusing to acknowledge differences can reinforce their existence and 'make them continue to matter' within a system which is constructed for some groups or intelligences and not others; 'The problems of inequality can be exacerbated both by treating members of minority groups the same as members of the majority and by treating the two groups differently' (Minow 1990, p.20). In order to address this, a schooling system that purports to be inclusive in its endeavour, should provide a system of education which similarly respects and provides opportunity to access and assess different forms of knowledge and ways of learning. For example, as argued by Lynch and Baker (2005);

> Forms of knowledge and understanding that have hitherto been defined as inferior and unworthy of study and investigation need to be recognized and accredited systematically. Correlatively, there is a need for *intelligence fair* testing, so that the multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993) that people possess can gain recognition in schools and colleges and be awarded credentials on a par with the more traditionally recognized intelligences' (Lynch and Baker 2005, p.141).

Minow (1990) suggests that the 'the dilemma of difference' is produced by the ways society assigns individuals to categories and based on this assignation decides whom to include or exclude from political, social and economic activities (1990, p.21). She points out that this is exemplified where categories such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, religion or disability have decided eligibility for enrollment, whether in societies, clubs or schools. If activities are designed within the processes of education with the 'majority' or 'dominant culture' in mind, the excluded comprise those students whose forms of knowledge or capabilities are neither represented or valued (Lynch and Baker 2005; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Minow 1990). Those students who encompass the marginal group or minority within the school may, as a consequence become identified as 'other' or inferior and within the prevalent and dominant culture of learning, this has the potential to render them either invisible or, if visible, subject to non recognition or implicit rejection (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). A failure to acknowledge and respect

difference such that any child may be scarred within this silent misrecognition is at the crux of the 'dilemma' (Minow 1990, p.374).

However, 'how' to recognise difference such that it does *not* stigmatize, is also inherent to this dilemma. Minow (1990) acknowledges that the assignment of the label of difference is an act of power. "The name of difference is produced by those with the power to name and the power to treat themselves as the norm. Though the difference does not reside in any one person, the comparison is drawn by some to distinguish themselves from others" (1990, p.111).

Griffin and Shevlin (2011) point out that; 'In order to understand our reality, we have to name our world...(however)...Difficulties arise when these names become associated with negative stereotypical imagery of the individual or group concerned' (Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.14). With similar views to Minow, they draw on Swain, French and Cameron (2003, p.12) who observed that 'labels are usually bestowed by those who have power and authority ("experts") upon those who do not' (in Griffin and Shevlin 2011, p.14). Holt (2004) reports evidence of disabled children being labelled as 'other' and experiencing various levels of exclusion in mainstream schools through representations of difference. She highlights the consequences of failing to conform to 'normalized expectations of behaviour or learning' (Copeland 1999 in Holt 2004) which is reinforced by the power within special education to label and diagnose children as "special" or "disabled" 'through medical and pseudo-medical educational practices' (Holt 2004). She points out, however, that the concept of normalized expectations or 'the normally developing child' is a socio-cultural construct influenced by the hidden curricula of schools, which are unconsciously underpinned by normative representations of development. Teachers and students do not intentionally reproduce notions of ability and disability; instead they are often unintended consequences of everyday practices associated with fulfilling the purposes of schools (Holt 2004).

Veck (2009) highlights the difficulty associated with labelling in educational institutions which results in the label not just identifying what a learner has been identified to need but creating assumptions about '*who* someone is' (italics as in original 2009, p.142). The power within the process of labelling learners, results in the association of commonality within a group that share the same label. The student who has been labelled as "having learning difficulties" endures the 'constant threat that their failures and successes will no longer be conceived as their own, but will, instead, be read either as a confirmation of or

as a challenge to their place within the category: "students with learning difficulties" '(Veck 2009, p.144). His analysis is supportive of Lynch and Lodge (2002) because he argues that this tool of designation renders a 'curse' of enforced invisibility and enforced visibility in that the labelled student is seen and heard for what they are assumed to be and the dominant group is not. 'Reduced to a stereotype or label, we have to struggle *for* recognition, for the right to appear and to be listened to as unique individuals, and *against* the obscuring of our uniqueness' (Veck 2009, p.144). When students are not listened to, he insists, they 'are, as a consequence, excluded *within* these institutions: they are *in* but not *of* them' (italics as in original Veck 2009, p.142).

Consequences of labelling, however, are not confined to special needs education. Lynch and Lodge (2002) report that several students within their research admitted to feelings of inadequacy and failure because they had been placed in low streams or bands in their schools and used language to describe themselves that 'indicated at times that they had internalised the subordinating 'ability' codes about themselves' (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.71). Some of the adjectives they used to describe themselves and others included: dumb, brainy, smart and stupid (2002, p.71). Students in higher bands and teachers also conveyed their awareness of the stigma experienced by students labelled as members of lower track classes, with teachers commenting on:

> ...the low institutional regards for, and labelling of, these students relative to their higher placed peers: quotes from teachers include language around 'the weaker child' 'very little self esteem'; 'poor self-image'....'Lower stream students are just *bricks in the wall*' (original italics, Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.73).

Tomlinson (1982) argues that categorisation and classification of children based on abilities and 'needs' is 'also a social categorisation of weaker social groups... [wherein professionals and practitioners]...have very real power to define and affect the lives and futures of the children they deal with' (Tomlinson 1982).

The Concept of 'Normality'

Garner (2009) highlights some of the contentious perspectives that are linked to the 'concept of normality', which implies that 'to be "normal" is measured by the behaviours, performances and interactions of society as a whole' (2009, p.30). He draws on Morris (1993) who argues that the oppressive misapprehension that disabled people want to be 'normal', reinforces stereotypes of what constitutes 'normality' at the expense

of those who are 'different'. However, Garner also points out that normality is powerfully linked to social acceptance; 'A pupil is more likely to be included within the social and educational processes of a school if he or she is socially aware, knows the rules of engagement, succeeds in learning and does not 'stand out' as physically or emotionally different' (Garner 2009, p.30). For a student whose behaviour or learning presents as 'different' from the norm, such as those students identified with the normative label of SEBD, Roaf and Bines' (1989) criticism of the assumptions and terminology within special needs is relevant. They argue that 'needs' are a matter of professional and value judgments specifically in relation to normative categories; 'assumptions about needs are grounded in conceptions of "normal" cognitive development or behaviour' (Roaf and Bines 1989, p.7). They support Tomlinson's (1982) contention that 'hidden within these conceptions of needs are social interest, for example, to make the disabled productive or control troublesome children, together with a range of assumptions about what is normal' (Tomlinson 1982).

These points of view as they relate to the identification of children within the broad spectrum of behaviours identified as SEBD, resonate with concerns raised by Banks et al. (2012) with regard to over identification of students that are gender specific or representative of more disadvantaged backgrounds. However, they are also relevant to concerns raised by Collins (1996) with regard to the misrecognition of needs or 'invisibility' that may be experienced by the 'quiet child'. She argues that a child who is overlooked or ignored despite presenting with isolated or withdrawn behaviours can experience a reinforced sense of poor self image and esteem. Lynch and Lodge (2002) discuss the implications for students who find themselves identified as 'other' by the dominant group in society or school. This experience of marginalisation or oppression with reference to the dominant group is what Young (1990) describes as cultural imperialism and can simultaneously produce both an experience of invisibility (non-recognition) and negative stereotyping (mis-recognition), (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.131):

> '...this invisibility causes members of oppressed groups to view themselves through the lens of supposed "normality". Furthermore, they often internalise the negative stereotypes to which their group is subjected (Bell 1997)' (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.132).

Rogers (2007) claims that within the promotion of 'inclusive' education there is an attempt to deny or normalise aspects of learning or behavioural difficulties. She argues

that despite the suggestion of 'tolerance of difference' within inclusive education, it is evident that high standards in academic achievement are privileged over and above non-academic achievements (Rogers 2007, p.65). Rogers (2012) draws on Jock Young's (1999) analysis of societal attitudes which are distinguished between 'modern world' and 'late modern world' to develop this contention. Young claims that the modern world (post world wars) was intolerant of 'diversity' which it attempted to absorb and assimilate in the post war era but was relatively tolerant of 'difficulty', 'of obdurate people and recalcitrant rebels whom it sees as more of a challenge to rehabilitate and reform' (1999, p.59). However, in contrast, he claims that the late modern world (from final third of 20th century) celebrates diversity and difference, 'which it readily absorbs and sanitizes; what it cannot abide is difficult people and *dangerous* classes' (Ibid.). Rogers (2012) suggests that this standpoint is critical when thinking about education and inclusion; 'here we see exclusion as an answer to dealing with difficult differences, whether they are disabled others who are difficult to teach, difficult others unable to control or culturally diverse others who are difficult to understand' (Rogers 2012, p.2). Her perspective is not dissimilar to Tomlinson (1982) above.

Cigman (2007), however, asks;

> Is it demeaning to be identified as different from the norm? If we retain the concept of normality, how should we define it and how should we think about people who fall outside its bounds? If we reject the concept of normality, how can we ensure that atypical needs are adequately met? (Cigman 2007, p.783).

Cigman claims that the universalist's reserve about the conceptualisation of difference creates a barrier against 'proper receptivity to, and respect for, individual children (2007, p.786). She argues that denying differences between learners to protect children from the stigma of abnormality is provocative, as it suggests that those who contend the importance of acknowledging difference and focusing special needs strategies for learners who need such provision do not similarly want to protect children from such stigma, which she says, is untrue. She concludes, 'failure to address the needs of a "very small minority" means failure to accord respect to all, in favour of the spurious notion of inclusion for all' (Cigman 2007, p.792).

The 'Capability Approach'

Shevlin and Rose (2008) point out that 'it is not long since children were labelled as "ineducable" – our understanding of "capability" must be challenged and reappraised in order to pursue full participation in education for all children' (2008, p.429). Norwich (2007) supports this contention and calls for "resolutions" to tensions inherent in the "dilemma of difference", that are exemplified by; 'Recognising difference can lead to different provision that might be poor quality, stigmatized and devalued; but not recognising difference can lead to not providing adequately for individual needs' (Norwich 2007, p.72). The concept of SEN was introduced following the Warnock Report (Warnock Committee 1978) with the intention of emphasizing the relational aspect of learning difficulties and bringing the theory and practice of special education beyond the use of categories of disability. However, Norwich (1993b) points out that not only does the concept of SEN remain inscribed in a 'within-child model' but the new category of 'special needs' is presented as essential to the individual child, and effectively separates children with SEN from their peers (Norwich 1993b, p.45). What counts as a disability or a special need, and how this relates to a learning difficulty is much debated in education. This debate may be summarized to one between those who see disabilities and special needs as individual or 'within-child' limitations and deficits (the medical or personal tragedy model), as opposed to positions that see them as limitations and deficits of school systems, and a failure to accommodate the diversity of children (the social model) (Oliver 1990 and 1996).

Terzi (2010), however, criticises the social model of disability and examines positions which 'maintain that disabilities and special educational needs are wholly socially constructed' (2010, p.38). She points out that for some educationalists 'difficulties and needs are caused by the inflexibility of the school system and by its inability to meet the diversity of children' (Ibid.). This stance is similarly outlined by Norwich (1993 and 2007) who notes that within the social model of disability, difficulties are seen as arising from the relation between the diversity of children and the school system whereby attention is directed to the limitations of the school rather than to a comprehensive understanding of how this relation takes place. For example he draws on Dyson (1990) who states;

> Special needs are not the needs that arise in a child with disabilities with regard to a system that is fixed. Rather they are needs that arise between the child and the

> educational system as a whole when the system fails to adapt itself to the characteristics of the child' (Dyson 1990 in Norwich 1993, p.50).

Norwich points out that there is an inconsistency in arguing for an interaction between child and school while at the same time asserting that the limitations exist only on the part of the school (Norwich 1993, p.50).Terzi supports this contention and claims that there are theoretical problems within the 'the social model of disability' perspective, which states 'that learning difficulties and special educational needs are socially constructed, in that they are the products of disabling barriers and exclusionary and oppressive educational processes (e.g. Armstrong et al. 2000; Barton 2003; Corbett 1999; Oliver 1996; Tomlinson 1982 in Terzi 2008, p.248). This, she argues, 'presents obvious elements of over-socialization and significantly overlooks the individual factors related to impairments' (2008, p.248). She takes the example of a 'hearing impairment' which has to be recognized and acknowledged in order that provision is made to avoid educational barriers and thus 'simply stating that hearing impairment is a difference to be celebrated does not seem to be a sufficient means to the end of educating the child' (Ibid.).

> Ultimately, current perspectives on disability and special educational needs present artificially fixed and limited positions, which while reflecting main theoretical frameworks in socio-medicine and disability studies, do not account for the complexity of disability and special educational needs (Terzi 2010, p.40).

Terzi (2007) responds to Norwich (2007) and states that she believes 'the capability approach' developed by Amartya Sen and collaborated upon by Martha Nussbaum, '*resolves* the dilemma of difference in the way that Norwich says it needs to be resolved' (italics as in original Terzi 2007, p.100). She argues that the approach provides an important perspective to re-examine the dilemma, while at the same time 'locating the debate within a normative framework based upon justice and equality' (2007, p.95). According to Terzi (2004), difference within a capability perspective is neither deviance from a normal standard, as inherent in the medical model, nor is difference just something to celebrate as in postmodern views of the social model, but 'is a *specific variable* with an objective reality, which can be evaluated in relation to an individual's functions and capabilities' (italics as in Terzi 2004, 155).

Terzi describes the capability approach as an interplay between the theoretical level of defining disability and special educational needs in terms of human diversity, also referred to as 'the difference', with the political level of providing a just educational

entitlement, also referred to as 'the sameness'. Differences are defined in terms of functionings and capabilities and are central to evaluating an individual's capabilities (2007, p.100).

According to Terzi (2008), the capability approach repositions diversity as it relates to our understanding of disability by assessing equality in the space of capability:

> This enables the overcoming of current understandings of impairment and disability as biologically or socially determined in a unilateral way…the capability approach shifts attention away from the biological or social causes of disability to the full set of capabilities one person can choose from (Terzi 2008, p.253).

Reindal (2010) similarly credits the capability approach as one that transforms our understanding of disability. However, in contrast to Terzi (2004, 2007, 2008, 2010), she argues that the approach is aligned with the social model (Reindal 2009 and 2010) as it locates disability as a condition caused by impairment which has been generated by social and environmental inequalities that restrict freedoms and opportunities. Similar to 'the social model' it emphasises 'social barriers and discrimination as the chief factors involved in the emergence of disability' (Reindal 2010, p.6). Considering people as 'agents of their own lives' and the provision within education of supports to develop such agency, is central to the capability approach. This, Reindal asserts is where the capability approach may be linked with 'empowerment and core educational values' (2010, p.7). The centrality of 'empowerment' and 'agency' resonates with the objectives of this thesis.

Summary of Section Three

This section has focused on perspectives of 'difference' with respect to 'the dilemma of difference'; the 'concept of normality'; and the 'Capability Approach'. The dilemma of difference highlights the tension between potential stigma either from focusing or ignoring difference. Treating every student the same is not necessarily treating them fairly, however, treating them differently can emphasise difference. The point has been made that a schooling system which purports to be inclusive in its endeavour should provide a system of education that similarly respects and provides opportunity to access and assess different forms of ability, knowledge and ways of learning. As evident from the first section of this review, providing a legislative framework to support a policy of

inclusive education without the necessary scaffolding to reinforce fairness and equity in opportunity and access, strongly indicates weaknesses in the realisation of this objective.

'Naming' difference and the imposition of normative judgements and labels is an act of power and dominance. The potential to render 'invisibility' and marginalisation has also been discussed as it impacts on students through stereotyping and/or labelling. These issues are relevant to this research enquiry because the sample group of participants have been identified as 'different' from their peers and categorized with a range of labels within the spectrum of SEBD as determined by normative assessment.

The 'concept of normality' has been presented to show differing views on the topic. There is potential for students to internalise negative perspectives of their difference when viewed through 'lenses' of normality which can reinforce their sense of 'other' or 'invisibility'. This has also been shown as relevant to students who present with a broad range of behaviours within the spectrum of SEBD. The point has also been made that normality is powerfully linked to social acceptance. However, 'difficult differences' with respect to behaviour and learning is not easily addressed within schools and society and exclusionary practice is sometimes the response.

The Capability Approach has been discussed as it is presented in the literature. Two different interpretations of this approach were identified with the suggestion that the approach may be linked with 'empowerment' and 'agency' considered most relevant to this thesis.

ATTACHMENT AND BELONGING

This section briefly outlines the theory of attachment and looks at how the concept has been found to be applicable to schools, especially in relation to students who present with behaviours identified as disaffected, challenging or generally within the spectrum of behaviours associated with SEBD. The significance of 'belonging' has also been identified in research as important to children with SEBD.

What is the theory of Attachment?

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth shared with Freud the psychoanalytic view that early experiences in childhood have an important influence on development and behaviour in

later life. Bowlby conducted extensive research related to the theory of attachment, which he described as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (Bowlby 1969, p.194). He believed that attachment styles are established in childhood through the relationship between infant and caregiver, and characterised by specific behaviours, such as seeking proximity to the attachment figure when under stress, upset or threatened (Bowlby 1969). According to Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment research, during periods of time when children are separated from their parents, children react with protest and despair. If 'rapprochement' is not accomplished by the child and caregiver within a period of time that is appropriate for the child's developmental stage, lasting effects can influence the child's future behaviour (Ainsworth 1964).

Mary Ainsworth (1978) expanded upon Bowlby's research in her study of children between 12 to 18 months; '*Strange Situations* 1978' from which she concluded that there were three major styles of attachment: 'secure'; 'ambivalent-insecure'; and 'avoidance-insecure' (Ainsworth et al. 1978). Securely attached children generally become visibly upset when their caregivers leave and are happy on their return. Characteristics of ambivalent-insecure attachment are demonstrated when children display distress when separated from their caregiver but do not appear to be comforted on their return, sometimes conveyed in rejection of the caregiver or direct aggression. Children with avoidant attachment may not reject attention from their caregiver but they also do not seek out comfort or contact (Ainsworth et al. 1978).

Main and Solomon (1986) identified a fourth classification; 'disorganized attachment'. Children with disorganized attachment have experienced frightened and/or frightening behaviour in their primary attachment relationship and can exhibit 'the most extreme forms of maladjusted behaviour of all four classifications' (Kennedy 2008, p.213). Kobak (1999) reports that children in this classification 'are more likely to display aggressive behaviour in school and to continue to act out through adolescence' (Kobak 1999 in Kennedy 2008, p.213).

Holmes (1993) summarises the characteristics of secure and insecure attachment as follows:

> A securely attached child will store an internal working model of a responsive, loving, reliable care-giver, and of a self that is worthy of love and attention and will bring these assumptions to bear on all other relationships. Conversely, an

> insecurely attached child may view the world as a dangerous place in which other people are to be treated with great caution, and see himself as ineffective and unworthy of love (Holmes 1993, p.78).

In early adolescence individuals may begin to transfer primary attachments from adults to their peers (Ainsworth 1989). This transference can result in an over-reliance on peers and a susceptibility to peer pressure and dependent relationships that respond negatively to unsupportive behaviour (Kennedy 2008, p.214). However, Sroufe et al, (2005) claim that despite the negative impact that correspondingly negative life events may have on attachment, there are several studies that indicate attachment classifications can shift from insecure to secure, especially if those shifts occur before adulthood.

Attachment to School

Smith's research (2006) indicates that a young person's attachment to school is directly related to their behaviour in school and more widely to 'delinquent and criminal conduct' (Smith 2006, p.18). He concludes that the most important dimension to the experience of attachment to school is in the quality of relationships with teachers. Other impacting factors include 'belief that school success will bring later rewards' and also 'the level of commitment to school and involvement in school activities on the part of the parents' (Smith 2006, p.18).

Davies (2005), writing about students with SEBD, acknowledges the significance of the relationship between student and school when he draws from Mounton et al. (1996) who argue that schools need to 'foster an environment within which pupils can develop a sense of belonging, a network of relationships with peers and staff, and an appreciation of the learning that is experienced at school' (Davies 2005, p.309). This view is supported by Cooper (2008) whose research with children identified with SEBD aged 5 to 18 indicated that their key concern in school was the extent to which they felt themselves to be respected and acknowledged:

> School regimes that were characterised by a mechanistic and impersonal approach to pupil management were associated with pupil disaffection, whereas regimes that pupils and staff experienced as being underpinned by values of respect and care for all persons were associated with positive challenges to disaffection and lower levels of exclusion (Cooper 2008, p.15).

Cooper (2008) also confirms the findings of Smith's (2006) research within his own study and acknowledges that students who have a strong attachment to school,

correspondingly have feelings of attachment to their teachers and believe that success in school will lead to significant rewards in later life. 'Weak attachment to school is characterised by indifference or hostility to teachers and scepticism about the value of schooling' (Cooper 2008, p.14).

Cooper and Jacobs (2011) point out that weak attachment is not necessarily related to mental health difficulties, delinquency or social deviance, but is often a problem in itself that can lead to disaffection and alienation. However, evidence suggests that:

> ...our most socially and emotionally vulnerable school students are likely to have the least satisfactory experience of schooling. A recent study by Barnardo's (2006) found strong associations between social disadvantage, educational failure and SEBD (Cooper and Jacobs 2011, p.39)

Nind et al. (2012) conducted student voice research with a group of girls identified with SEBD who were attending a special school for behavioural difficulties; 'Realising the power of voice is less developed in the field of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties... (and because)... as Corbett (1998) argues, children and young people with moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties are the most "feared" and least likely to be listened to with respect (Nind et al. 2012, p.644). They point out that is not easy 'to hear' the voices of students with SEBD because their methods of communication can be unconventional and their social status is marginal. Their behaviour and transgressions within the school environment can lead to further labelling which may have the effect of 'expanding their deficits and reducing their capacity' (Lloyd 2005). The impact of this reinforcement of negative perspectives could potentially further disenfranchise the students with respect to being afforded opportunities to be heard and listened to. The most significant theme which emerged from Nind, Boorman and Clarke's (2012) research with female students identified with SEBD was their desire 'to belong' and to have 'some sort of attachment with people and places'. Their analysis of the girls' accounts indicates a desire for attachment with people and places encompassed within a sense of belonging. They point out that the realisation of this desire is not an easy or stable process as it is dependent on 'audiences potentially responsible for labelling or reinforcing the girls as deficit in these domains and fraught with challenges behaviourally, emotionally and socially' (Nind et al. 2012, p.653).

Allen et al. (2007) claim that students who have learned not to trust others and who view themselves negatively will express their view through internalized or externalized maladaptive behaviour. Kennedy (2008) points out that presentation of 'maladaptive'

behaviours may reflect early attachment experiences and it is important to understand that while school personnel may identify externalizing behaviours in particular as disruptive to the school environment, the students are suffering too:

> ...if their behaviour is seen as a volitional affront on the part of the student, school personnel are likely to react in punishing ways that only confirm the students' views about the world and themselves. School personnel must also understand that student behaviour reflects a desire to avoid further neglect, abuse or abandonment by trusted adults and that these adults must respond sensitively and consistently regardless of student behaviour' (Kennedy 2008, p.224-5).

Similar to Davies (2005) and Cooper (2008), Kennedy (2008) recommends that students who present with internalizing or externalizing behaviours are encouraged to develop positive relationships with their teachers and peers. They need to see that their contributions in the learning environment are recognized and meaningful and believe that they can be a party to their own desired change in their classrooms (Kennedy 2008, p.225). She also acknowledges the limitations within the potential for relationships between teachers and students as they exist only within the institution of the school, and teachers already have a range of responsibilities within their position, 'the quality of the academic performance of students, school safety and a host of other factors inherent in the institution [which] affect the development of relationships at school' (Kennedy 2008, p.226).

However, Kennedy (2008) also argues that children who have had negative experiences, above all, need to be cared for and to encounter caring relations in school. Her stance resonates with Noddings' (2005) theory of caring:

> Subject matter cannot carry itself, Relation, except in very rare cases precedes any engagement with subject matter. Caring relations can prepare children for an initial receptivity to all sorts of experiences and subject matters (Noddings 2005, p.36).

Summary of Section Four

Children who have experienced 'insecure' attachment with their primary caregivers may present with negative internalising or externalising behaviours later in life. This may also lead to an experience of disaffection or alienation in school. A negative attachment to school, however, is not exclusively indicative of 'insecure attachment to primary caregivers' but can be as a result of poor relationships with teachers and scepticism with regard to the value of school.

Research has highlighted that students identified with SEBD articulate a desire for respect and acknowledgement in school. Positive relationships with teachers and peers are beneficial to their experience and they express a wish to belong and experience 'some sort of attachment with people and places'.

The value of 'caring relations' has been highlighted which serves to pre-empt the following section in this review.

CARE AND CARING RELATIONS

The previous section highlighted the significance of positive relationships and a sense of belonging and/or attachment to school for all students but most particularly students experiencing SEBD (Cooper 2008; Davies 2005; Nind et al. 2012). The impact of relationships with teachers emerges as a substantial theme throughout the literature for students with SEBD (e.g. Cefai and Cooper 2010; Garner 1993; Harris et al. 2006; Jahnukainen 2001; De Pear and Garner 1996; Sellman 2009; Wise 1999 and 2000) and this is further elaborated upon in chapter three within a discussion of student voice. Cooper (2008) and Kennedy (2008) have also highlighted the importance for students who have had negative life experiences or present with disaffection or SEBD to encounter 'respectful' and 'caring' school environments. Kennedy (2008) highlighted the necessity for students who have had negative life experiences to experience 'caring relations' in school. This supports Noddings' (2005) theory of caring which asserts that 'caring relations' for students, 'precedes any engagement with subject matter' (Noddings 2005, p.216). The remainder of this section builds on the concerns and recommendations from the last section as it examines the importance of 'care' and 'caring relations' in schools.

The Importance of 'Caring Relations' and 'Emotional Work' in Schools

Lynch and Walsh (2009) point out the significance of friendship and kinship bonds in our lives since people have both the need and capacity for:

> ...intimacy, attachment and caring relations....Being deprived of the capacity to develop such supportive affective relations, or of the experience of engaging in

> them when one has the capacity, is therefore a serious human deprivation and injustice' (Lynch and Walsh 2009, p.37).

The inherent implications of such deprivation and injustice support the stance taken in the previous section which highlights the importance for students to have an experience of 'attachment' and a 'sense of belonging' in school. Cooper (2008) demonstrated that schools which cultivated values of care and respect for all students and staff were in a stronger position to combat disaffection and exclusion. Similarly, O'Brien (2008) claims that inequalities in relation to care relations impacts on the lives of students and their capacities to flourish both in and out of school (O'Brien 2008, p.13). However, despite these contentions, Lynch et al. (2007 and 2012) argue that there is not enough attention paid to the subject of caring in education.

Noddings (1992) emphasizes that to care and be cared for are fundamental human needs absent in today's educational system, and stresses that in the same environment in which children learn to respond to dependable caring, they can also achieve academic goals and begin to develop the capacity to care. She argues that the main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring and loving people (Noddings 1992, p.8). Caring in the classroom, not only consists of the teacher caring about the student but also helping the student learn to develop care both with others and the environment around them. In this way, education is fundamental to the cultivation of caring in society. She defines a caring relation as:

> ...in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In order for the relation to be properly called caring, both parties must contribute to it in characteristic ways (Noddings 1992, p.15).

Central to Noddings' care theory is that 'caring-about' is instrumental to the establishment of conditions to promote 'caring-for'; the objective is to ensure that 'caring' occurs but is an empty exercise unless it culminates in 'caring relations' (Noddings 2002, p.23-4). Within the relationships established as 'caring relations', both parties have important roles, wherein the provider of care offers nurture and the recipient accepts and reciprocates (Noddings 1992).

Noddings (2005) insists however, that she is not suggesting that the establishment of caring relations will accomplish everything that must be done in education:

> But these relations provide the foundation for successful pedagogical activity. First, as we listen to our students, we gain their trust and, in an on-going relation of care and trust, it is more likely that students will accept what we try to teach.

> They will not see our efforts as "interference" but, rather, as cooperative work proceeding from the integrity of the relation. Second, as we engage our students in dialogue, we learn about their needs, working habits, interests, and talents. We gain important ideas from them about how to build our lessons and plan for their individual progress. Finally, as we acquire knowledge about our students' needs and realize how much more than the standard curriculum is needed, we are inspired to increase our own competence' (Noddings 2005)

Smyth et al. (2010) support Noddings' stance on the importance of engaging in dialogue with students and the value of developing caring relations between teachers and students. They state that when these connections are 'missing, damaged, or never established, then young lives suffer dramatically as a consequence (Smyth et al. 2010, p.39). Their research examined reasons for disengagement from schools from which the emergent themes included: The importance of investing in relational power/placing relationships at the centre; the crucial need for student and community voice; the realisation that if young people 'cannot, or do not, form a relationship in school with at least one adult or with their peers, then they disconnect, disengage and 'drop out' of school' (Smyth et al. 2010, p.37).

Lynch and Baker (2005) develop further the significance of 'care' and 'emotional work' in schools by outlining the potential benefits for students who are facilitated to invest in this level of engagement. They point out that emotions and emotional work are integral to education, which itself is based on a dialogue between students and teachers, and between students themselves. The key role that 'emotions' play 'in developing a politics of solidarity and concern for others [is] something that is fundamental to the functioning of an inclusive democratic society' (Lynch and Baker 2005, p.151). They also draw attention to the significance in emotional work for young people to develop an awareness of educational rights in general. 'The feelings of failure, purposelessness or isolation that many students experience in schools cannot be addressed unless the language of emotions is allowed to enter educational discourse in a legitimated way' (Ibid.). Engaging students in the language of emotions towards empathy and an awareness of educational rights has the potential for positive empowerment. However, emotional work is not emphasised in schools, 'paralleled by the neglect of education of the personal intelligences involved in emotional work' (Lynch and Baker 2005, p.152). Instead there is an emphasis on education as a product rather than a process; academic outcomes and league tables in favour of emotional support and engagement; in short, the extrinsic benefits of education at the expense of intrinsic benefits (Dunne 1995; Lynch and Baker 2005; Lynch et al 2012).

Summary of Section Five

This section has drawn from the literature to argue the significance of care in terms of the development of caring relations between teachers and students, and students with their peers. There is substantial evidence from research on the importance of positive relationships for all students in school but especially for students who have had negative life experiences, present with disaffection or have been identified with SEBD.

The neglect of 'emotional work' in education has been highlighted, outlining the potential benefits for students through the engagement of personal intelligences and emotions for positive empowerment, and to develop empathy and awareness of their rights and the rights of others. Supporting the development of caring relations and emotional work is not just significant for relationships, however. There is potential in the engagement of dialogue and student voice for the teacher to learn how best to support their students' learning styles and 'provide the foundation for successful pedagogical activity' (Noddings 2005).

One of the main points which emerged from section three was the need for respect and opportunity of access for different forms of ability, knowledge and ways of learning. This section reinforces that contention by highlighting the necessity to cultivate and provide opportunity for different intelligences. Amongst the different intelligences which should be supported and promoted in school is that of the 'emotional' and 'personal' intelligences (Lynch and Baker 2005). The underlying theme throughout this thesis is that of 'student voice' which is essential to the context of 'care and caring relations'.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

This final section of the first literature review chapter presents perspectives on school leadership, particularly focusing on principals in the Irish context.

> There is a noticeable absence of the word "leader", or "leadership" in documents issuing from official sources. Education legislation tends to use "Principal" e.g. Education Act 1998; Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (DES 2007b, p.18)

‘Leadership’; The Lynchpin Theme

The positioning of this theme in relation to what has been discussed before and what has yet to be introduced is deliberate, because the role of the school leader/principal is essential to fostering and encouraging learning for all students (Government of Ireland 1998 Section 22). For that reason, every issue discussed in this chapter has relevance to the role of the school principal; from the development of an inclusive educational environment to the overall responsibility of ensuring that the needs (learning and welfare) of all students including those with SEN are met (DES 2007a, p.67). This topic also serves to pre-empt the interrogation of ‘student voice’ and ‘empowerment’ to follow in Chapter three.

The legislative framework for Irish primary and second level education includes a clear definition of the functions of a school and the roles and responsibilities of the school principal. This framework is comprised of the Education Act 1998, The Education Welfare Act 2000 and the EPSEN Act 2004. Additional legislation that impacts on schools and accordingly the leadership role includes: Equality legislation 2000-2011; The Teaching Council Act 2001 and Teaching Council Amendment Act 2006; Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005; and the Disability Act 2005. Sections 22 and 23 of the Education Act 1998 set out the functions and obligations of the school principal. As sections 3 and 4 of the EPSEN Act 2004 have not been commenced the principal is not statutorily required to organise assessments or implement individual education plans. However, the existing framework provides for schools to supply additional support for children as needed within the school’s general allocation model and to apply for additional supports to the NCSE (DES 2005 02/05) for children with SEN.

Lynch et al. (2012) point out that school principals and academic leaders, traditionally, have had a high status in Ireland and play a central role in school and community life. Principals who took part in the Lynch et al. (2012) study demonstrated their ‘sense of vocation and commitment’ when they spoke about ‘the importance of vision, ethos and pastoral care of their students, staff, parents and the wider community...Three interrelated areas emerged as underpinning their ‘ethics of practice’; the quality of student experience; fostering positive collegial relations and the aspiration towards excellence in their own practice (Lynch et al.2012, p.121-122). McGorman and Wallace (2011) also stress the pastoral nature of the position and advocate that the school principal develop leadership potential amongst teachers to demonstrate the operation of a

'team effort' to students. Linksy and Lawrence (2011) similarly describe the shared responsibility of leadership; 'leadership is an activity, not a person' (2011, p.6) and interestingly, suggest that 'leadership can come from any of the interested factions: teachers, students, administrators, parents, government officials, businesspeople, or electeds' (Ibid.), although the point is not developed in relation to fostering leadership amongst students. Correspondingly, Winter and O'Raw (2010) make the point that:

> Effective leadership from the top should be accompanied by bottom-up support, and a partnership approach, in order to ensure the successful implementation of necessary reforms or changes. This means that the teachers and other staff who have to implement the changes must not only support the reforms themselves but also be supported as they strive to make the changes (Winter and O'Raw 2010, p.28).

There is no mention of leadership potential amongst students or the inclusion of the student within the 'partnership approach' or 'bottom-up support'. This is despite their recognition within another section of the publication, of students as 'key stakeholders in education' and their support of a range of literature which advocates including the voice of the child in 'decision making' and 'to enhance learning, teaching and relationships' (Winter and O'Raw 2010, p.33).

Shevlin and Flynn (2011) argue the importance of 'informed, capable school leadership' as 'an essential prerequisite for the development of a suitable learning environment for children and young people who have been identified as experiencing special educational needs' and point out:

> within an Irish context there is little evidence that the connection between school leadership and effective provision for children and young people who have special educational needs has been extensively explored (Shevlin and Flynn 2011, p.127).

In her discussion about the "servant-leadership paradigm" introduced by Robert Kiefner Greenleaf (1904-1990) in his essay entitled, *The Servant as Leader*, Crippen(2005) points out how Greenleaf maintained the servant leader is servant first and foremost:

> It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant: - first, to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?" (Greenleaf 1970).

The concept of 'servant as leader' is problematic, however, as it does not challenge patriarchal norms. Eicher-Catt (2005), argues that the values attributed to the theory are gender-biased and perpetuate 'a theology of leadership that upholds androcentric patriarchal norms' and 'insidiously perpetuates a long-standing masculine-feminine, master-slave political economy' (Eicher-Catt 2005, p.17). The position within Greenleaf's delineation of the 'servant-leadership paradigm' which resonates with this thesis is in which it focuses on the importance of 'caring' and 'empowerment', with the assumption that this form of leadership can foster autonomy and leadership amongst those being led. There is some similarity to this in the identification by Lynch and Baker (2005) of two levels at which equality of power is an issue in education and their argument for 'democratizing education':

- the macro level – the institutionalized procedures for making decisions about school management, educational and curriculum planning, and policy development and implementation
- the micro level – the internal life of schools and colleges, in terms of relations between staff and students and among the staff themselves

(Summary from Lynch and Baker 2005, p.148)

They stress that democratizing education comprises the involvement of all the relations within which schools (and colleges) operate such that all stakeholders have a say at every level of educational planning and decision-making. They insist that stakeholders should have an involvement greater than that of a consultative role but should be listened to, engaged and accountable in a participatory democratic context:

> Unless educationally disadvantaged groups in particular are involved in the planning and development process in education, other inequalities cannot be meaningfully challenged. They are the people with the day-to-day experiential knowledge of injustice that is a necessary condition for informed decision-making' (Lynch and Baker 2005, p.150).

This stance is an apt encapsulation of the objective inherent to this research enquiry. The aim of this study is to 'listen' to students who have the 'experiential knowledge' on their own day-to-day experience of school life. Their marginalisation cannot be challenged unless they are active participants, engaged in changing and transforming their experience. For that reason, the conclusion of this section serves to pre-empt the discussion of 'student voice' and 'empowerment in the following chapter.

Summary of Section Six

This section identified the role of principal/school leader as essential to fostering and encouraging learning for all students. The theme of 'leadership' has been demonstrated as relevant to major themes already discussed in this review; from inclusive education to pastoral care/caring relations and as a precursor to themes which dominate the second review of literature; empowerment and voice.

The point has been made that there is little evidence, however, of an exploration of school leadership and the effective provision for children and young people with SEN. Perspectives of leadership in the literature promote a model of 'team effort' and 'shared responsibility' but despite a recognition of students as key stakeholders in education, there is little mention of the importance of including them in a 'partnership approach' to leadership.

Comparison has been drawn between the 'servant leadership paradigm' and a model of democratising education involving all stakeholders, including students, as essential to educational planning and decision making. This model has been identified as relevant to the scope of this enquiry, which takes a bottom up approach to learning from a group of young people about their experience of school, to determine if they may be empowered to become active agents in positively transforming that experience of school.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 2

The first chapter of the literature review introduces the contextual framework of this research study by positioning the enquiry as relevant to the practice and pursuit of inclusive education in the first section. The student participants in this study have been identified either through psychological assessment, or by their schools (Cooper and Jacobs 2011; NEPS 2010; SESS 2011) with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD); consequently, section two presents some of the terminology, definitions and perspectives around Emotional Disturbance and SEBD. Section three focuses on perspectives of difference and discusses this topic relative to the 'dilemma of difference', the 'concept of normality' and the 'capability approach' presented with respect to 'within-child' and the 'social' models of disability. The final three sections are interrelated topics; 'Attachment and Belonging'; 'Care and Caring Relations'; and

‘School Leadership’ as there is a common thread running through these themes in relation to the environment of care and welfare for students.

The current legislative framework has been criticised in particular because important aspects of the EPSEN Act 2004 have been deferred. As a result this has led to a level of inconsistency in access to resources for students with SEN particularly in relation to individual education plans and assessments. The point has been made that a broader interpretation of inclusion is necessary to include all marginalised groups. The successful implementation of inclusive education is challenging but focusing on solutions and identifying barriers to the realisation of this pursuit is paramount to any argument around the continuum of provisions available to students or to the ideological differences between the ‘universalist’ and ‘moderate’ stance on what constitutes inclusive education.

Students with SEBD represent a group of children who are marginalised within schools especially as research has shown that they are the least popular children amongst their teachers and peers. There are serious implications as conveyed in relation to the prevalence of SEBD, both in terms of over-representation and over-identification, especially in disadvantaged areas.

There is potential to stigmatise students by either focusing on or ignoring difference. It is essential that our education system similarly respects and provides opportunity to access and assess different forms of ability, knowledge and ways of learning. The ‘naming’ of difference has been identified as an act of power and dominance, while the potential for stereotyping and labelling to reinforce marginalisation and render ‘invisibility’ has also been discussed.

Differing views on the ‘concept of normality’ have been presented from which there is potential for students to internalise negative perspectives of their difference when viewed through ‘lenses’ of normality that can reinforce their sense of ‘other’ or ‘invisibility’. This has also been shown as relevant to students who present with a broad range of behaviours within the spectrum of SEBD.

A sense of ‘attachment and belonging’ to school has been presented as important for all students but most particularly for those children who have had negative life experiences or present with SEBD. It has been shown that cultivating positive relationships and an ethos of care and respect is significant to challenge potential disaffection and exclusion.

The development of caring relations and eliciting dialogue between and with students is important for the engagement of personal intelligences and emotions for positive empowerment and to develop empathy and awareness of their rights and the rights of others.

The role of principal/school leader is essential to foster and encourage learning for all students. Although there are perspectives of leadership in the literature which promote a model of 'team effort' and 'shared responsibility' there is little evidence of the recognition of students as key stakeholders in educational leadership. A model of 'democratising education' to include students in educational planning and decision making resonates with the objective of this student voice research study, and serves to introduce the context for chapter three; *Student Voice and Empowerment*

CHAPTER 3 - REVIEW OF LITERATURE 2

STUDENT VOICE AND EMPOWERMENT

Introduction

The second chapter of the literature review, which is presented in three main sections, examines the themes, *Student Voice* and *Empowerment* in the context of the thesis. The first section looks at the changes in the socio-political environment which provided the momentum and significance for this kind of research. This section also presents a conceptual understanding of the themes and illustrates that they are pivotal in driving this research because together, they represent the process and the aim of the study. The second section focuses on *Voice* within the literature and interrogates the challenges surrounding student voice research and some of the sub-themes which are inherent, such as: 'whose voice is heard'; 'authentic or tokenistic listening'; 'engaging students in the research'; 'what student voice research has contributed already to our understanding of the perspectives of students' and 'student voice; a rights perspective or a legal imperative'. The final section examines *Empowerment* and how it is related to the following: 'student participation and/or consultation'; 'power relations' and 'the transformative potential of empowering students'.

Setting out the Context - The Socio-Political Landscape

Both nationally and internationally, there has been a growing significance of the importance of children's rights especially influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (Mayall, 1995; Roche, 1999; Shevlin and Rose, 2003 & 2008; Leith et al, 2005; Lundy, 2007; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). The UNCRC challenged the treatment of children and sought to improve this by affirming their need for 'special consideration' enshrining a number of rights which are particularly significant to this thesis: **Article 12 -** the right to express their views; **Article 13** – the right to freedom of expression including the right to share information in any way they choose, which includes talking, drawing or writing (as long as the information is not damaging to them or others); **Article 23** – the right to special care, education and training, regardless of disability, to help them achieve the greatest possible self-reliance

and to lead a full and active life in society; **Article 28** – the right to a primary education for all children; .Discipline in schools should respect and take into account the child's human dignity; Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable; **Article 29** – Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest (UN 1989).

The inherent significance of these articles to this thesis is their emphasis on:

- **'voice'** through rights to express views and freedom of expression in a variety of manners appropriate to the research design of this thesis
- the implication to students with SEBD within a designation of students with **Special Educational Needs/Disability** and the associated difficulties for some children within this spectrum with challenging behaviour and ensuing **discipline** difficulties
- every child has the right to **participate** in an education system which should help them determine and reach their **full potential**

At time of writing, three countries had not yet ratified this treaty; The United States of America, Somalia and South Sudan. Many of the countries which *did* ratify it have drafted or amended legislation to draw upon principles in relation to children in their respective states. Ireland signed the convention in September 1990 and proceeded to ratify it in September 1992. This subsequently led to the publication of a ten year National Children's Strategy (2000); the establishment of 34 Comhairle na nÓg throughout the country who elect representatives to Dáil na nÓg; the creation of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the appointment of a Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, which was elevated to the status of senior ministry, Minister for Children, by the coalition government in March 2011. With these developments, Ireland has subscribed its commitment to the rights of children and demonstrated that commitment in the vision of the National Children's Strategy (2000):

> 'An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential. (Government of Ireland [GOI] 2000, p.5)

Within educational research and reform, the issue of 'student voice' is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) point out that there was vigorous pursuit of student voice research in the late 1960s and 70s 'driven by the desire to build a

fuller understanding of life in classrooms and schools' (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.3) However, they proceed to explain that although this research yielded evidence that student voice had an important contribution to make, 'there was no general expectation, as there is now, that the data would be fed back to teachers and pupils as a basis for informed action' (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.21). Since the 1990s there has been steadily increasing interest in the involvement and voice of young people in educational research from the United States; (Kozol, 1991; Levin, 1994; Weis and Fine, 1993) to the United Kingdom; (Fielding and Bragg 2003; Flutter and Rudduck 2004; Leitch et al. 2005; Rudduck et al. 1996;) and Ireland; (Kenny et al. 2000; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Shevlin and Rose 2008; Williams et al. 2009).

Concepts

> The only thing I would change would be that we would listen to our nation's children and young people much more, as we are the next generation that will have to run the country. The voice of innocence can sometimes be wiser than a hundred years of experience (Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA] 2000, p.17)

The conceptual understanding of 'voice' for the purpose of this thesis evokes the sentiment of these words in the context of a research undertaking to 'consult' students on their experiences in mainstream school and 'listen' to what they have to say.

Within this understanding of the concept is the assumption that having a "voice" suggests having also a 'legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part, and/or having an active role in decisions about and implementation of educational policies and practice', (Holdsworth, 2000, p.355). However, for groups who are not usually consulted or in some cases 'silenced', bell hooks (1989) maintains that 'coming to voice is an act of resistance' (1989, p.12). Cook-Sather (2006) challenges that silence and questions the absence of student voices from discussions of educational policy. She suggests that their inclusion must have implications for the power to influence and make decisions about practices in schools as well as experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence (2006, p.362). Nonetheless, Robinson and Taylor (2007) address some concerns pertinent to student voice research (SVR), such as the implication that a student group has only one voice, arguing that this assumption is illusory and therefore must be accepted as one of the limitations of such research. In addition, they point out that voice does not just encompass the "words" spoken by students but also the myriad of ways students choose to express their feelings about any aspect of their lives. They describe

"voice" as 'our representational signifier which, via the style, qualities and feelings conveyed by the speaker's words, gives insight into the metaphorical perspectives and worldviews that individual inhabits' (Robinson and Taylor 2007, p.6). Consequently, it is important to acknowledge that students participating in SVR will each interpret the world with respect to their own relative experiences, which will not necessarily be a uniform interpretation despite any commonality within the sample group. The task of interpreting and acknowledging what students say and avoiding what may be perceived as "tokenistic listening" is a fundamental challenge implicit to SVR (Flynn et al. 2011).

Drawing on Habermas (1984), Robinson and Taylor (2007) point out the resemblance between "student voice work" and "communicative action" as 'an exchange of communicative acts, that is, through the use of language orientated towards reaching an understanding' (Habermas, 1984, p.44). They suggest that the assumption of this theoretical framework is 'that student voice work enables, indeed empowers students to have the opportunity to participate meaningfully and collaboratively in school improvement work' (2007, p.10). Within the context of this thesis, the concepts of voice and empowerment are similarly linked as it is the central aim of this study to determine if participants are empowered to transform their experience of school when their voices are listened to. Banks (1991) argues for the pursuit of transformative action when he insists:

> A curriculum designed to empower students must be transformative in nature and help students to develop the knowledge skills and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political and economic action (Banks 1991, p.131)

Shor (1992) expands on this argument by suggesting that the goal of empowering education is change; both in "self" and society. He describes empowerment as "a critical-democratic pedagogy", explaining that if students are engaged in methods promoting their experience of consultation and democracy in schools, this can impact on their personal growth to public life by developing their curiosity about society, power, inequality and change (Shor 1992, p.15). Melander-Wikman (2007) defines empowerment as a process of focusing on human rights and capacities so that people can actively participate in and influence their own lives.

The conceptual understanding of 'student voice' and 'empowerment' which has been outlined for the purpose of this study is that the pursuit of the former must enable an

experience of the latter for the purpose of change or 'transformative action', which in turn may have implications for policy, practice and power relations in schools.

Rationale

In this sub-section I will draw from the literature, in order to support the rationale that underpins and motivates this research study. Tangen (2009) contends that with the engagement of student voice, comes the potential to improve teacher-student alliances and the quality of school life which may empower marginalised students. She suggests that an emphasis on the importance of "quality of school life" together with appropriate methodologies can contribute to a greater understanding of pupils' experiences, all of which is necessary in the development of inclusive practice, (2009, p.13). However, she acknowledges that it is evident from the literature (Clark et al, 2003; Tangen, 2008), that some groups of children and young people are seldom given a voice; specifically, children under the age of five, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities, (2009, p.2). Of particular relevance to the motivation for this research is the realisation that there have been many studies which focus on the perceptions of students in mainstream education but very few have focused on students with SEBD or disruptive students (some examples of PVR in special schools: Cefai and Cooper 2010; Nind et al. 2012; Sellman 2009; in mainstream: Garner 1995). This is in spite of evidence which shows that the empowerment of students with SEBD can contribute to the resolution and prevention of some of the associated difficulties experienced by these students in school (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Kroeger et al. 2004; Leitch and Mitchell 2007; Norwich and Kelly 2006). Specifically, the findings of a small scale study conducted in Maltese post-primary schools;

> ...in line with the international literature, suggests that giving students with SEBD the opportunity to have a meaningful and influential voice at school is set to lead to an improvement in teacher-student relationships, enhance their interest and participation in school activities, and consequently contribute to more positive academic and social behaviours (Cefai and Cooper, 2010, p.193).

However, Cefai and Cooper (2010) acknowledge that their findings need to be considered in the light of the limitations of this relatively small study and suggest that more research is needed in exploring student voice in mainstream schools amongst students assessed with SEBD. They particularly recommend the inclusion of students who have managed to thrive socially and academically in their educational

environments, since much can be learned from them on how they have overcome difficulties they may have experienced. In much of the literature, children are acknowledged as having an expert role with respect to the knowledge and understanding of what it is like to be a student in a particular school, (e.g. Cooper 1996; Gersch 2001; James et al. 1998; Leitch et al. 2005; Rose and Shevlin 2010) and for that reason they are the best sources of that information.

Cefai and Cooper (2010) identify potential barriers to eliciting the voices of students with SEBD which they believe further research into the area may help to remove. These barriers include a lack of belief amongst teachers that students with SEBD may have anything worthwhile to contribute to the improvement of learning and behaviour and also the fear that giving them a voice may compromise the teacher's authority in the classroom, (2010, p.195). The prospect of addressing these issues within this study further supports the rationale for the undertaking and is explored in more detail under the sub-theme of 'power relations' within the third section of this strand.

Wearmouth draws on the British White Paper, '*Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational* Needs', where concerns related to disaffection and failure as experienced by students with SEBD are expressed: 'The cost to society more widely of failure to tackle these problems is higher still, both in terms of reduced economic contribution in adult life and, for some, of criminal activity and prison.' (DfEE, 1997, p.78) She concludes that considering the implication of failure to address the potential "problems" for disaffected students and their non-engagement with education, it is particularly important to determine the perspective of these students on themselves and their experience of the learning environment (Wearmouth, 2004, p.7). Davies (2005) has similar concerns as he points out that 'legislation alone will not achieve the goal of greater social or educational inclusion for disaffected or alienated pupils...research suggests that listening to what these pupils have to tell us holds the key to subsequent action to help combat social exclusion' (Davies 2005, p.299). This indicates a social imperative to include students with SEBD and students otherwise identified as presenting with challenging behaviour in a research project of this nature in an effort to ascertain from them, what measures may help to prevent disaffection and non-engagement and in the process avert what for some could be the potential for social exclusion. Cefai and Cooper (2010) reinforce this necessity, confirming that students with SEBD often feel excluded, victimised and abused within an educational system that 'labels them as

antisocial, deviant and failures' (2010, p.194). They agree that it is important to elicit the voice of these students but also suggest that rather than being 'objects' of the research process, instead the students should be partners. This is a view which is similarly expressed by Shevlin and Rose (2003), who point out that:

> While the intention of much of the research carried out has been honourable and has undoubtedly informed our understanding and improved our practices in childcare and teaching, the focus has been on doing research *on* or *about* children rather than engaging them fully in the investigative process (Italics as in original, Shevlin and Rose 2003, p.4 – 5)

Young people want to be heard. When given the opportunity to respond in a survey which asked them to describe the kind of school they would like, the fourth most popular response from 15,000 students in England was "a listening school" (Ruddock and Demetriou 2003, p.277). One of the main findings of a research project conducted on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People was that not having a say in the decisions made about them was the single most important issue to children in Northern Ireland (Kilkelly et al, 2005, p.xxii). Similarly, in an Irish study to determine children's experiences of participation and decision-making in Irish hospitals, the children expressed 'strong' desires to have their voices heard in relation to decisions about matters that affected them and their bodies (Coyne et al, 2003, p.4). The findings of this research resonates with the first goal of the National Children's Strategy (2000), which states that 'children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity' (GOI 2000, p.10).

To conclude, it is evident that the voices of some students are seldom sought, in particular, those of children with SEBD. Research which elicits the voices of a sample of these children may help to provide insights into their experiences of their learning environments while accessing their views on best practice to prevent disaffection and encourage engagement. When asked, children express the wish to be heard.

Summary of Section One

This section has placed this study within the legitimacy of the socio-political landscape and body of research to which it hopes to contribute. It has also outlined the conceptual understanding of 'Voice' and 'Empowerment'; and the rationale behind the focus on these specific themes as drivers of the research.

The socio-political and education research landscape frames the justification for a study of this nature. It is clear that children with SEBD and children who are disaffected or presenting with challenging behaviours have the right to express opinions and be heard on matters that affect them, and these rights are enshrined within the vision and goals of the National Children's Strategy (2000). There is a considerable body of research already on student voice; however, there are few studies that include the voices of children with SEBD.

The conceptual understanding of 'voice' within the context of this thesis, is inherent in its verbal form, 'to voice' which implies an active reaction; 'to listen'. The primary objective behind this relationship of speaking and listening is one of consultation for the purpose of empowering the participants to take the opportunity to transform their experience where appropriate. 'Empowerment' is understood as a process of challenging 'hierarchies of power' and enabling change within self and society. Some children with SEBD in our educational systems nationally and internationally are acknowledged within the literature as being at risk of disaffection, disengagement and in some cases social exclusion. It has also been suggested that further research in partnership with young people in these circumstances may help to prevent further perpetuation of these problems and contribute to altering perceptions which sustain barriers experienced between some teachers and students in schools.

'VOICE' AND THE CHALLENGES OF LISTENING

Whose Voice, Who's Listening?

A significant question posed already in the literature, resonates in the discussion and analysis which follows: 'In the acoustic of the school, whose voice gets listened to?' (Arnot et al, 2001)

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2003) warned that:

> ...appearing to listen to children is relatively unchallenging; giving due weight to their views requires real change. Listening to children should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means by which States make their interactions with children and their actions on behalf of children ever more sensitive to the implementation of children's rights (UNCRC 2003, p.4).

This directive challenges *how* and *why* we listen to children. Within this research study, that challenge is especially appropriate as it is essential that the act of listening to the

students who agree to participate should be 'purposeful' and 'significant'; by that I mean, the experience needs to be 'authentic' rather than 'tokenistic' and should generate some experience of acknowledgement *or* change *or* transformative action as appropriate.

School Matters (2006), which is the report of The Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools, devotes a section to 'The Empowerment of Students' (DES 2006, p.120). The report acknowledges that Ireland has taken on a new perspective on children within a "newfound status" accredited earlier in the report to the UNCRC (1989) and the subsequent publication of the National Children's Strategy (2000). It elaborates on the need to provide opportunities for students to express their views and for those views to be taken seriously as set out within the aspirations of the Strategy. The establishment of Student Councils is endorsed as 'a welcome and visible expression of a school's commitment to these aspirations into a reality' (DES 2006, p.120) and the Action Plan on 'The Empowerment of Students' which follows, recommends the establishment of student councils as a priority in schools where they have not already been created. This report is situated within terms of reference outlined in chapter one, which include: 'To examine the issue of disruptive student behaviour as it impacts upon teaching and learning'; and 'To advise on existing best practice both nationally and internationally, in fostering positive student behaviour in schools and classrooms' (DES 2006, p.10). Within these parameters, the opportunity taken to make recommendations on eliciting 'student voice' within this action plan does not go far enough. Evidence from the literature demonstrates that students do not always believe themselves to be fully represented in their Student Councils nor do they necessarily accept them as a democratic medium through which to express their views or generate meaningful change, (e.g. Alderson 2000; Leitch and Mitchell, 2007; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Munn et al, 2009; Whitty and Wisby, 2007). The report of the Task Force (2006) recommends that 'every effort should be made to ensure that the Student Council is representative of the total student population'. However, in many cases, the children whose behaviour may account for some of the disruption which the report refers to, for example, children with SEBD, are less likely to be invited on or elected to student councils as 'they are usually the least listened to, empowered and liked group of students' (Cefai and Cooper 2010, p.4).

Lundy (2007) cautions that a common and cogent criticism levelled at Article 12 of the UNCRC 1989 is, that it is easy for adults to comply with outward signs of consultation

and ultimately ignore children's views. She explains that tokenistic or decorative participation is not only in breach of Article 12 but can be counter-productive, citing Alderson's (2000) example of having found that "tokenistic school councils" had as much or more negative impact than having no council at all (Lundy 2007, p.938). In the report, *Behaviour in Scottish Schools* (2009) a number of comments were made by students about their student councils including that: despite having the chance to vote for a representative, teachers could veto student selections; they were tokenistic; and 'pupil councils did not really represent pupil views' (Munn et al. 2009, p.80). These opinions are supported by Leitch and Mitchell (2007) in their research; 'Across the students, there was a strong sense that the school council did not achieve very much and scant attention was paid to it' (2007, p.66). It is evident that student councils do not sufficiently provide opportunities to channel and elicit student voice or provide adequate representation of their respective student bodies.

As highlighted in the last section, there is support in research and policy for the pursuit of "student voice". However, O'Brien (2008) contends;

> It is problematic if we hear the voices of researchers, educators and policy makers on well-being without recourse to those of young people themselves in this significant yet contested terrain in the education field. Students have not traditionally been given the power to name their world or the kinds of education that they think would facilitate well-being in their particular context and relative to their own individuality (O' Brien 2008, p.181).

Further issues relevant to this discussion include; 'how what is said gets heard' and its dependence on 'not only who says it but on style and language', (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.164). Robinson and Taylor (2007) claim that some schools listen only to the articulate and able students or 'those who agree with what the school wants to hear' (2007, p.10). They argue that for PVR to be meaningful, 'schools need to think carefully about who they listen to, how they listen to pupils and what they listen to pupils about' (Ibid.) This stance supports Bourdieu's theory of the "reproduction of habitus" (1977) when he argued that students with a linguistic code similar to that transmitted by the school are the most likely to achieve in that school. Robinson and Taylor (2007) suggest that Bourdieu's theory may also be relevant to student voice, as the students the schools choose to listen to are perhaps those who "speak" the same language as the school (2007, p.11). This argument is particularly significant if we are to return to O'Brien's (2008) concerns about the input needed from children in order to determine the 'kind of education that they think would facilitate well-being' (as above) and at the same time

include those students who are disaffected, disengaged and perhaps at risk of social exclusion. Tangen's (2009) contention resonates with the motivation of this research when she points out 'it is somewhat paradoxical that those pupils who, literally, often speak or shout loudest in the classroom, are those whose voices are most seldom heard' (Tangen 2009, p.841).

Addressing this paradox is an important objective within this study. It is essential that the student participants experience "authentic listening", however, Robinson and Taylor's (2007) admonition that 'listening to pupils itself is not sufficient, it is what happens with the information, what is done with this' (2007, p.14) is also pertinent to the process of the research. Lundy (2007) supports this view and insists that where students' views have been elicited, they should be informed about what decisions were made subsequently and the reason why action has proceeded in a certain way (2007, p.939), in order for the students to realise an experience of having being heard. Cook-Sather (2006) also cautions what Pollard, Thiessen and Filer (1997, p.2) regard as the "aren't they sweet" attitude which reflects the condescension of adults but does not contribute to further understanding (Cook-Sather 2006, p.368). Consequently, 'authentic' listening can only be determined by the students themselves as they are in the best position to judge the manner in which their views and opinions have been responded to (Rose and Shevlin 2010).

Fielding (2004) expresses the concern that;

> ...to include hitherto silenced voices in research is not of itself empowering or liberating, not only… because such inclusion may be manipulative, but also because unless we are clear who is listening, whether such attentiveness is customary or spasmodic, and an entitlement or a dispensation, then the power of those who speak and those who hear cannot be understood' (Fielding 2004, p.301).

The implications of this further render the issue of PVR as more complicated than considered at the outset of this research and they are explored also by Cruddas (2007) who argues that engaging voices of children in student voice work challenges power relations and the privileging of one voice over another. Within her research she realised that working with student voice had implications for her position as adult, teacher and researcher in terms of thinking critically about her 'own' voice and identity; how she held power in the relationships and how she represented/spoke on behalf of the children and young people with whom she was engaging. She acknowledges that 'These are not safe or predictable issues' (Cruddas 2007, p.480) What she describes as the 'common

sense' position of asking children what they want if you want them to 'give voice' to their views, she also criticises as embedded with some powerful assumptions that ironically contribute to the absenting of children's voice and power. She challenges two assumptions within student voice work:

1) 'voice' is a tool to enable the child progress towards rationality
2) 'the concept of "voice" assumes that children will freely articulate a spontaneous, coherent, consistent and un***adult***erated position, entirely consistent with their individual conscience and their own interests' (ibid.).

It is essential to avoid an interpretation of what children say that is obscured by adult defined conditions and beliefs, as there is evidence in the literature that children and young people interpret the world and the culture of their school quite differently from adults (Fielding 2004; Leitch and Mitchell 2007; Shallcross et al. 2007). If we are to 'listen authentically' then we must also be in a position to 'present authentically' and avoid 'romanticising the child as naturally competent and reasonable' (Marshall 1996, p.97). The authority of the teacher/researcher with relation to the child is imbued with social legitimacy. Cruddas (2007) suggests that inherent in the pursuit for children's and young people's right to voice is an attempt to redress the power balance, but she argues that we cannot escape the binary relation either by rendering the place of the adult as "natural" or "invisible" (2007, p.484). She recommends that we challenge benevolent paternalism and tokenism and find ways of speaking together, children and adults, that are 'internally persuasive and contribute to our shared ideological becomings' (Cruddas 2007, p.486). It is important that any attempt to understand or indeed interpret the views of children is conducted with *their* support and approval as otherwise it would be too easy to transpose 'adult' rationality and inference (Flynn et al. 2011). This further reinforces the necessity to involve the student participants as partners in this research at every juncture including the process of analysis. Listening authentically requires subsequent affirmation from the child that what has been heard is interpreted as it was intended to be received. This necessitates more than 'listening' but rather, a shared experience of understanding and research between researcher and participants in this study. 'The best form of interpretation/analysis, and that most consistent with the philosophy underpinning student voice projects, is to engage the help of the participants with this task' (Morgan 1997).

Fielding and Rudduck (2002) similarly point out the inherent challenge of representing the voice of the students by recognising and acknowledging the gulf that exists inadvertently between "well-meaning adult researcher" and participant students and draw from Shotter (1993) who said:

> ...no matter how benevolent we may be towards those we study, no matter how concerned with "their" betterment, with preventing "their" victimisation, etc., the fact is that "we" do not make sense of "their" lives in "their" terms. "We" do not even make sense of "their" lives with them. Indeed, the language of the adult, whether teacher or external researcher, may be used to reshape the language of the students and even in benign hands, the editorial power of the ethnographer remains high (Shotter 1993)

This insight is especially pertinent to the challenge that PVR confronts in the inclusion of conflicting, silenced, critical and even obnoxious voices, (Atweh and Bland 2004; bell hooks 1989; Bragg 2001; Fraser 1992; McGuigan 1996). Robinson and Taylor (2007) argue that the potential of student voice work to achieve social justice can only be realised by including these "other" voices and the avoidance of what has been perceived as the prevalence of "powerful" voices over others which are less so (2007, p.10). Cook-Sather (2006) cautions that 'it is very difficult to learn from voices we don't *want* to hear and to learn to hear the voices we don't know *how* to hear' (2006, p.368 my italics). Michael O'Loughlin cites a personal communication from Ira Shor to him in May 1994 which says;

> We must resist the temptation to glamorise student voices and recognise that the multiple voices students bring to the classroom, while potentially possessing some elements of resistance and transformation, are likely to be deeply imbued with status quo values. The challenge of critical thinking is to create a climate that is safe enough for the expression of students' voices and experiences but that is also sufficiently politically conscious and critical to allow for the examination of these experience (Shor (1994) in O'Loughlin 1995, p.112).

It is not an unreasonable expectation that what some children may wish to say, is challenging to listen to. Apart from issues of 'distance' between adult and young person in respect of 'interpretation', there is also the potential for expressions of anger, disdain, vulgarity and rudeness dependent on the circumstances and/or inherent difficulties experienced by the child. This is something which is especially relevant when working with *some* students assessed with particular conditions within the spectrum of SEBD. It is also conceivable that what is said, may also be extremely upsetting and/or distressing by virtue of the sadness or despair communicated and experienced by some children. This challenge was experienced and articulated by Sara Bragg (2001) in her account of student voice work, and what she describes as the complex "relational dynamics of the

classroom" about which she asks, 'how we might work with student voices that do not appear to keep their side of the bargain – those that seem incomprehensible, recalcitrant or even obnoxious' (2001, p.70). Her description of her experience at first presents as uncomfortable and difficult, e.g. the students' condemnation of the pedagogic game of discussion as "shit" and their trenchant denunciation of her "personal opinions in their evaluations"; but subsequently 'illuminates a performance that itself constructs that meaning, momentarily and provisionally, and in relation to the specific power struggles investments of the location' (2001, p.71). Bragg (2001) explains how she took her students' words and repeated them back to them, which enabled the participants to reflect and take responsibility for *these* words; creating a gap between the "selves who produced them, and who listened to them but did not necessarily recognise themselves within them" (2001, p.72).

It is perhaps, a provocative way of challenging students to consider what they have said and was especially interesting in Bragg's research because of the negative comments, verbal and written, she had experienced till then. Among the conclusions she drew from the experience is: 'I challenged my own assumption that teachers should or could make students better people, as if there are easy solutions to questions of identity, or as if teaching can offer transcendence' (Bragg 2001, p.72). This perception is revealing in relation to PVR as the objective of this study is not necessarily to precipitate a change in the participants but rather, to determine if they experience a sense of empowerment from which *they* may affect a change in their *environment* and their response to it.

Within this subsection, it has been demonstrated that efforts to elicit student voices must include those voices which may not be popular or articulate as well as those whose voices may not always be pleasant to hear. *How* and *why* they are being listened to as well as *what* response their views will be met with needs to be clarified. The experience of expressing their views should not be met with 'tokenistic' listening but rather, the opportunity to contribute to a change in their teaching and learning environment. Adults and children interpret the world differently and it is essential that as researchers, we do not ***adult***erate the data. Involving students in the process as co-researchers, contributing to the analysis and understanding of findings is an opportunity to present and represent within the philosophy and concept of 'student voice'.

Different Perspectives

Despite evidence of the educational benefits of engaging student voice (e.g. Rudduck et al. 2003) it is, however, a contentious issue and one with differing opinions. This sub-section presents: some of the controversy around student voice; evidence, perceptions and points of view shared by students in other PVR projects; and whether this issue is situated in "a rights perspective" or "a legal imperative".

> ...in practice, children's enjoyment of Article 12 is dependent on the cooperation of adults, who may not be committed to it or who may have a vested interest in not complying with this. Adult concerns tend to fall into one of three groups: scepticism about children's capacity (or a belief that they lack capacity) to have a meaningful input into decision-making; a worry that giving children more control will undermine authority and destabilise the school environment: and finally, concern that compliance will require too much effort which would be better spent on education itself (Lundy 2007, p.929-930).

Lundy's (2007) assertions are similar to those already articulated by Cefai and Cooper (2010) who identified barriers to eliciting the voices of children with SEBD around lack of belief in these students to contribute to the improvement of learning, and fear of giving voice as potentially compromising the authority of the teacher in the classroom (2010, p.195).

What follows is a brief account of some of the perspectives of students who were invited to contribute to or take part in PVR prior to this study. In the Scottish report, *Behaviour in Scottish Schools* (2009) among the main findings from the student surveys and focus group interviews with students in eight secondary schools were the following:

- Pupils were more aware of punishments and sanctions than more positive approaches to behaviour management.
- In contrast with primary schools, they are less happy in school, and have more concerns about bullying and social relations in general.
- Pupils had strong feelings about fair and unfair teacher interventions but there was praise for teachers who listen, were fair, had a sense of humour and those who provide a variety in their teaching methods

(Munn et al.2009, p.80)

These findings are similar to those from other research projects and common themes that re-emerge are ‘dissatisfaction around behaviour management’ but most significantly,

'the importance of positive relationships with teachers'. The Irish report, C*hildren's Understanding of Well-Being* (2005) set out to determine a national set of well-being indicators by eliciting contributions from children through the medium of pictures and photography. The study identifies the centrality of interpersonal relationships across all the age groups targeted for this research in both primary and post primary schools. (NicGabhainn and Sixsmith 2005, p.64) In another research project, similarly using visual images as the method of data collection, the single biggest issue which emerged across the three schools in this study was 'the differing degrees of basic trust between staff and students and how this manifested in students' feelings of disengagement' (Leitch and Mitchell 2007, p.67). Sellman (2009) conducted research in a special school for boys with SEBD. The conclusions of his data collection are illuminating:

> The students' key point was that it does not matter what "tool" (their word) a teacher has at their disposal (reward, sanction, restraint), if the relationship is poor this tool can be misused. Hence, it was less important to modify the reward system/behaviour policy and much more important to address the issue of relationships (2009, p.42).

Sellman (2009) points out that these findings are consistent with previous studies in this area, (e.g. Willis 1977; Garner, 1993; Harris et al. 2006; Jahnukainen 2001; De Pear 1997; De Pear and Garner 1996; Pomeroy 2000; and Wise 1999 and 2000), which highlight the importance pupils placed on relationships as factors in their engagement with school and its curriculum. Also, he points out that similar to these studies, feedback from the student research group indicated that their attitude was not anti-educational or even anti-discipline, rather, they request clarity, consistency, inclusivity and good quality relationships (Sellman 2009).

Cefai and Cooper (2010) discuss the implications and lessons learned from Maltese students with SEBD who participated in another student voice research study. The findings reinforced the common universal needs felt by children and young people namely: the need to be respected; listened to and treated with dignity and understanding; the need to feel competent and successful; and the need to have a sense of responsibility and autonomy (Deci et al. 1991). They indicated that they were ready to invest in teachers who respected them and believed in them despite their difficulties and, as with peers in other cultural contexts, they referred to the significance of caring relationships with particular teachers and the power of such relationships in realigning their development towards more positive pathways (2010, p.193). The fact that students with

SEBD or indeed students who are labelled "disruptive," consider fairness and respect from their teachers as greatly important is frequently highlighted in the literature, (Scarlett 1989; Getzels and Smilansky 1983; Garner 1993; Cruddas 2007; Davies 2005).

Kilkelly et al. (2005) discovered that many professionals working with and for children, although acknowledging the desirability of consulting with children as a matter of good practice, were unaware of the existence or scope of Article 12 of the UNCRC 1989. This is in breach of Article 42 of the UNCRC which requires state parties to: "make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means to adults and children alike" (UN 1989, Part II, Art 42). (Lundy (2007) argues the need for greater awareness that respecting children's views is not just a model of good pedagogical practice but a legally binding obligation and that as a minimum, those working in the education sector need to know that Article 12 exists, that it has legal force and applies to all educational decision-making. She cautions that the initial goodwill associated with "student voice" and "children's rights discourse" may dissipate when the rhetoric needs to be put into practice, especially when the effect of this is to challenge the dominant thinking, generate controversy or cost money. Cruddas (2007) draws attention to the statutory guidance which exists in the UK, requiring headteachers, governors and local education parties to "give children and young people a say" (DfES 2004 and the Children Act 2004) which purports to be in line with Article 12. However, she argues that the statutory guidance does not reflect the spirit of this entitlement in law but merely encourages the involvement of children and young people (Cruddas 2007, p.487). She reinforces Lundy's (2007) contention that the notion of student voice is an inadequate concept for understanding and protecting the full legal rights of children and young people as set out by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

In the context of research into the empowerment of children through ‘voice’ in Irish hospitals, Coyne et al. (2006) consider the same issues with regard to children’s rights and the obligation to meet those rights. They explain that children's rights can be classified into two different categories; nurturance rights and self-determination rights of which the latter fall under the classification of the child's right to participation and control over his or her life. They conclude that while the legal and ethical concept of the best interests of the child has become contentious, what is needed is a change in the public perception of the child as incompetent when it comes to having a role in consultation on matters which impact on them, moving on to one where attention is paid

to what each individual child is saying and respect afforded their views (Coyne et al. 2006, p.16-17).

This sub-section has drawn attention to different perspectives on and as a result of "Student Voice"; suggestions of distrust and fear of implications with respect to teacher authority, to views elicited from students especially in relation to the impact of negative/positive relationships; and finally to the concern that indeed the rights perspective does not go *far enough* - "Voice" is not simply a rights perspective, but it is also a legal imperative.

Summary of Section Two

This section has presented some important considerations in the pursuit of 'student voice'. Inviting children and young people to *participate* in a study of this kind is not sufficient; when they speak they need to know that they are being listened to, that their views are respected; and implications, further action and potential outcomes need to be discussed and disclosed to the students. In order to ensure authenticity within the experience of "listening" to and "interpretation" of what is voiced, it is important to consult with participants and elicit their involvement in data analysis. Within a student voice research approach, the participant of each young person should be equally important irrespective of whether the participants are articulate or not or whether what they have to say is pleasant to hear. Every child involved must be recognised as having an important contribution to make to such research. The opportunity for young people to express their voices is both a right and a legal imperative.

EMPOWERMENT: POWER AND A COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Empowerment within Models of Participation and Consultation

Shor (1992) discusses 'empowering' and 'traditional' pedagogies from the perspective of the students and insists that they are linked 'with the positive or negative feelings students can develop for the learning process' (1992, p.23).Within his analysis of the two pedagogies, he describes what is for some students, their experience of traditional education and he makes connections between:

- negative behaviour
- passive learning environments
- boredom, cynicism and frustration on the part of the students
- a *top down* approach imposed by teachers, i.e. ignoring the students' themes, languages, conditions and diverse cultures
- an experience of education for students where '**their role is to answer questions, not to question answers'** (original emphasis Shor 1992, p.26).

In contrast, he situates 'empowering education' within a participatory model:

> To help move students away from passivity and cynicism, a powerful signal has to be sent from the very start, a signal that learning is participatory, involving humour, hope and curiosity. A strong participatory and affective opening, broadcasts optimistic feelings about the students' potential and about the future: students are people whose voices are worth listening to, whose minds can carry the weight of serious intellectual work, whose thought and feeling can entertain transforming self and society (Shor 1992, p.26).

Shor's presentation of 'empowering education' is relevant for this thesis, especially as he stresses that students' negative behaviour and attitudes in school can be directly as a result of boredom, frustration or an experience of disempowerment. This is reminiscent of the concerns expressed in the literature pertaining to students with SEBD, (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Cooper 1996 and 1999; Davies 2005; Rose and Shevlin 2010; Wearmouth 2004), the impact of which can lead to serious consequences such as prolonged disengagement, disaffection and the potential for educational and/or social exclusion. As many of the students with SEBD who participated in this study have also been assessed as having co-morbid difficulties or learning difficulties, their experience of education can be frustrating if they encounter obstacles to their styles of learning which are either not adequately supported or further compound what may already be a negative perception of themselves and/or their learning environment. Griffin and Shevlin (2007) similarly identify the links between disempowerment and negative behaviour in the context of working with children with behavioural difficulties in schools:

> Children and young people who constantly experience failure, disempowerment and lack of status become infused with an inner sense of distance and unhappiness and eventually lose all sense of motivation. Some will withdraw into an inner despair where they stop trying. Others will adopt 'acting out' misbehaviour to mask the pain of failure and the constant assault on their sense of self-worth (Griffin and Shevlin 2007, p.188).

In consideration of the challenges experienced by some students as pinpointed here and also within the context of Shor's (1992) assertion that some negative behaviours are symptomatic of a *top down* approach to the teaching and learning environment, this study approached learning from participant students in a *bottom up* – consultative participatory model. The rest of this sub-section draws from the literature to justify this stance.

Fielding and Bragg (2003), conclude from their own fieldwork, *Students as Researchers,* that some of the benefits of consulting students and involving them in organisational and pedagogic decision-making include; improved academic, communication and civic skills amongst students, as well as an increased sense of agency, motivation and engagement with school affairs. Leitch and Mitchell (2007) support that conclusion and point out that there is an array of evidence (Flutter and Rudduck 2004; Mortimore et al. 1988; Rudduck et al. 1996; Rudduck 2001; Rudduck and Flutter 2000; Rutter et al. 1979), which demonstrates that schools are likely to increase the effectiveness of individual and group learning as well as student motivation by means of active consultation processes with students (Leitch and Mitchell 2007). However, they caution that although it has been demonstrated that student consultation can help teachers and students achieve more collaborative learning cultures in schools, students are typically seen as the potential beneficiaries of change rather than as genuine participants in the process. Taking an example from their own research which included participant students across three post primary schools, all of the students involved expressed a significant gap between the aspiration as held by their head teachers of a consultative participatory model in their respective schools '...and their felt experience of being at the bottom of a rigid hierarchy in which control measures, surveillance and academic expectations are high and trust in student voice is negligible or tokenistic' (Leitch and Mitchell 2007, p.67).

Similarly, there are concerns expressed in the literature that students may be involved in participative processes in order to raise standards and levels of attainment rather than for reasons of personal and social development (Fielding 2004; Robinson and Taylor 2007; Rudduck 2006). Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) draw distinctions between "consultation" and "participation" by defining the former as 'a form of student voice that is: purposeful; undertaken in some kind of partnership with teachers as distinct from participation; and which is about involving students in aspects of the school's work and development through committees and working parties' (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.590). In

further analysis of these practices, they express concern about "generalising trends whereby the broader concept of participation came to be seen as more accessible than the more specific – and more demanding – concept of consultation' (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.7) because it requires "pupil commentary" in a way which participation does not often allow. In this, their final publication, Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) are troubled at the possibility for consultation about teaching and learning being sidelined before its potential has been fully understood. They argue that consultation should not be seen as in conflict or competition with the "achievement agenda" of schools but rather as a supportive process which may also help to secure a range of personal and social outcomes identified as important to pupils 'but that tend to be marginalised by the present narrow boundaries of the performance agenda' (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.10). They point out that;

> When pupils are consulted seriously, it can make them feel, often for the first time, that their school and their class are to some extent ***their*** school and ***their*** class...when pupils find themselves treated as partners in the educational enterprise, not merely as its objects, they can come to see themselves as members with a stake in the enterprise (original emphasis Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.141-142).

Fielding and Rudduck (2002) explain that through consultation, we may deepen our understanding of marginalised groups but caution that if we wished, we could use this information and understanding to exercise greater control over them (2002, p.5). To elucidate, they draw on Hart's Ladder of Participation (1994) and specifically address the bottom three rungs where consultation and participation are described as 'tokenistic, decorative and manipulative' by virtue of children appearing to have a voice but with little or no choice in the subject or style of communication; being used to promote a cause but having no involvement in organising the occasion; or their voices being used by adults to carry the adults' message (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007, p.5). To counteract this, they recommend that consultation should involve students in the design of the research project and discussions around methods of collecting information and the production of collective research knowledge. As the participants in this research study represent a vulnerable and marginalised group it was essential that every effort was made to draw from the "higher rungs" of Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation (Hart et al. 1994) which reflect the recommendations of Fielding and Rudduck (2002) and suggest in ascending order that:

- young people lead and initiate action

- young people and adults share decision making

(www.freechild.org/ladder)

The analysis within this subsection contributes to the justification of a research model of consultative participation. This is informed by perspectives which have illustrated the relationship between passivity and a sense of disempowerment to challenging behaviour and potential disaffection within the teaching and learning environment. A contrast between the benefits of facilitating opportunities for students to 'participate' only as opposed to being 'consulted' within a participatory model, demonstrates the potential for children and young people to secure outcomes that are of significance to them and the process may also impact on their sense of belonging and attachment to their school. The necessity of involving students in the design of the research as well as decision making and analysis has also been reiterated in order to ensure the authenticity of the study within the theoretical framework as well as the pursuit of empowerment and voice for the participants.

Power Relations

Freire's (2005) and Foucault's (1982) discourses on 'power' and 'power relations' resonate at this point of analysis in the review and are reflected in the discussion which follows. Freire (2005) recommends a dialogic pedagogy in which the (oppressed) individual transforms her reality and liberates herself from the experience imposed by a traditional pedagogy, not in an effort to adapt to 'this world', but rather as part of an effort to reform it and make it conform to her needs. 'Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed is sufficiently strong to free both' (Freire 2005, p.44). The relevance to this thesis is implicit in the positioning of the target students for this research process, through dialogue and practice, as participant and co-researchers within the context of institutions where they are often disempowered, silenced and disaffected (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Davies 2005; Norwich and Kelly 2006; Tangen 2009; Wearmouth 2004).

Although Freire's theorization of power is of relevance to student voice research, it is also a theory which has attracted criticism. Ellsworth (1997) argues that his theory of power fails to address gender issues because of the difficulty in achieving democratic dialogue on account of the gendered, 'classed' and 'racialized' power relations that exist

in our society. Also, Freire's analysis of power is predicated on binary oppositions which suggest that either you have power or you do not, if you are among the oppressed you must be against the oppressors and you are either marginalised or not (Robinson and Taylor 2007). Bland and Atweh (2003) argue that power has become recognized for its diversity and complexity. It is not a 'thing' to be possessed or given away but rather, a relation within all social processes. This view of power is indebted to Foucault.

Foucault's (1978) analysis of power relations, as complex, interactive webs of relations which reveal inequalities and are produced by knowledge systems, is also significant to the perceptions of power and authority that influence relationships between students and their peers as well as with their teachers. 'Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus' (Foucault 1982, p.208). He describes modern power as a constantly shifting set of force relations that emerge from every social interaction, 'power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (1978, p.93). However, Fraser (1989) argues that although Foucault claims power is always accompanied by resistance, he cannot explain why domination should be resisted:

> ...only with the introduction of normative notions of some kind could Foucault begin to answer such questions. Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it (Fraser 1989, p.29).

The importance of power relations in relation to 'social justice' have been asserted and reiterated in Young 1990; Fraser 2000; and Lynch and Lodge 2002. Emergent from the data analysis from student and teacher voice research involving twelve schools, Lynch and Lodge (2002) identified a number of themes with respect to power relations and the subsequent impact on relationships between student and teacher, student and student and also between teacher and teacher. For the purpose of this thesis, the latter is not relevant; however, the former two sets of relationships are particularly significant. Some of the themes which emerged as problematic in student-teacher relationships through issues which participating students identified, include the following:

- Respect; e.g. the use of sarcasm, humiliation, 'hurtful comments', bullying, shouting, not letting them have their say, no right to reply
- Differential Power; adults treating other adults differently to the way they treat young people
- Exercise of Power; unfair use of power by adults

- Labelling; being labelled a troublemaker because of a particular incident, associating with ‘undesirables’, having older siblings/relations who were troublesome (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.152ff)

41% of the students had jobs during the school year at the time of this particular study and the authors point out that earning money impacts on the student’s sense of control over their own lives. Together with the fact that some children and young people are also called upon to engage in varying degrees of responsibility in their homes including caring for family members; younger children or sick parents, ‘This can provide a challenge to traditional relationships of domination and subordination’ (2002, p.164). This further perpetuates the sense of injustice felt by students when they have a negative experience of power, control and authority in their relationships with teachers.

Within student-student relationships, negative examples of power relations revealed occurrences of bullying experienced by 1:5 students of which verbal bullying related to appearance, academic ability, religion, sexual orientation, race and social class. Lodge and Lynch (2003) further contend that ‘Young people actively reproduce hierarchical, oppressive relations in society through their own peer interactions, values, norms and culture...their attitudes and behaviour play a part in the ongoing oppression of these groups within society’ (Lodge and Lynch 2003, p.31). Taking the same argument in a different direction; Sellman (2009) highlights the "reproduction of a hierarchy among students" in special schools for children with SEBD. He points out that this practice, noted from students' comments, was encouraged by staff. Specifically, the school in question, like many other provisions for children with SEBD, implements a strict, authoritarian regime which includes physical restraints when necessary to control students' actions. The headmaster admitted that the hierarchy was indeed somewhat encouraged by staff;

> Positioning himself at the top, then teachers, then older students and finally new students. In such a context, it is not surprising that the view that empowerment is commensurate with the legitimacy and ability to physically overpower another was entrenched (Sellman 2009, p.43).

Noyes (2005) also cautions about the danger of reinforcing existing hierarchies if PVR approaches are adopted uncritically and we only hear the voices of students who can express themselves in a way that is more readily understood and valued or situated within the recognised forms of cultural and linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1989)

advantaged by schools. He cautions listening only to the voices of students from the top classes or even the "centre ground" of students' perspectives as this will not help those already marginalised by the system in the bottom classes. He questions *how* the silenced classes get to speak and whether we would listen to them if they did. In his critique of PVR he supports the model of "Students as Researchers" in Fielding and Bragg's work (2003) which promotes partnerships and consultation between students and teachers and where students become "change agents" and "producers of knowledge" (Noyes 2005, p.535 – 537). This challenge is also reminiscent of concerns expressed with respect to "how what is said, gets heard" in PVR and what happens next. However, within the context of power relations, the position of researcher is a contentious one especially in relation to interpreting, without adulteration, the voices of children as well as the interpretation of their "empowerment". Orner (1992) argues that;

> Educators concerned with changing unjust power relations must continually examine our own assumptions about our own positions, those of our students, the meaning and uses of student voice, our power to call for students to speak, and our often unexplained power to legitimate and perpetuate unjust relations in the name of student empowerment' (Orner 1992, p.77)

This is a valid concern and must be addressed within a model of research which continually examines the adult role in the process. Just as it is important to include all voices involved in the research, whether they are expressing what is expected, wanted or even pleasant to hear, the powerful position of being the 'adult researcher' cannot be made invisible (Cruddas 2007) but needs to be interrogated and acknowledged both in field work and in every possible communication and analysis with the student participants. Acknowledgement, however, must also appreciate limitations as well as aspirations: 'in attempts to empower others we need to acknowledge that our agency has need limits, that we might "get it wrong" in assuming we know what would be empowering for others' (Gore in Luke and Gore, [eds.] 1992, p.63).

Devine (2003) contends that it is important to highlight children's experience of power relations as they currently operate between adults and children within and through the school system in order to validate the students' perspectives and enable them to exercise their voice in education (Devine 2003, p.39). This stance is reiterated in the literature with regard to students with SEBD. Arguably the most influential factor that students view as significant in shaping their perceptions of school is their view of teachers as authority figures especially as, when compared to other students, 'pupils with EBD often

spend more time with their teachers than they do socialising with peers' (Davies 2005, p.51). Among the suggestions made by Cefai and Cooper (2010) arising from their research with students with SEBD, is that a change in the power dynamics between teachers and students is needed, whereby student voice is not seen as students taking over control but a collaborative and democratic process in learning and behaviour control.

> Paradoxically, the teachers themselves need to help students to challenge the notion that teachers know best and start believing more in themselves. Giving away their" power" is thus set to bring the teachers closer to the students and increase their influence on student learning and behaviour (Cefai and Cooper 2010, p.194-195).

This subsection has attempted to show that issues of power relations are relevant to the subject matter of this thesis. There is evidence in the literature that their relationships with teachers are very important to students with SEBD (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Cooper and Jacobs 2011; Davies 2005; Jelly et al, 2000; Sellman 2009;) but these relationships are sometimes imbued with negative perceptions of power and authority. Understanding and addressing how perceptions could be changed on both sides of the relationship may enable a collaborative approach and positive change in the power dynamic. Power relations, nonetheless, are also significant for students in their relationships with their peers, especially for children who are perceived as "different". The position of power of the adult researcher, however unintended, must always be accounted for, acknowledged and dissipated where feasible or possible, when engaging in student voice research.

The Transformative Potential of Empowering Students

'Empowerment is not simply a matter of transferring power from one group (researchers/adults) to another (research subjects/children) where the group with the power perceives this as beneficial'. (Edwards and Alldred 1999, p.267) This review of literature has already demonstrated that engaging students in student voice research is not of itself empowering, nor can empowerment be readily determined as that by well-intentioned researchers or adult participants. Student voice and subsequent empowerment can only be achieved if the students themselves believe they have been listened to and experience an acknowledgement of their views and opinions that generates a degree of change or transformative action within their learning environment. Whether the experience has been 'authentic' and how to measure any consequential

change, may be determined only by the children and young people in the process as it has also been demonstrated that there is an inherent danger in this type of research whereby wholly adult interpretation could '***adult***erate' the findings. From the outset, one of the stated objectives of this study was to determine the impact on the participants when their voices are listened to and they are encouraged to become 'active agents' in transforming their experience of school through this project. Ivor Goodson (2002) observed that it was dangerous to believe;

> ...that merely by allowing people to "narrate" that we in any serious way give them voice and agency. Transformation requires an interruption to the regularities of school life – a rupturing of the ordinary – that enables teachers and students to "see" alternatives; and requires, ultimately, a coherent institutional commitment (In Fielding and Rudduck 2002, p.5)

This partnership of "interruption" and "seeing", according to Rudduck and Demetriou (2003), is about responding to the insights of young people and changing the power relationship between teachers and students so that learning, and attitudes to learning, become more of a shared responsibility (Rudduck and Demetriou 2003, p.154). However, facilitating "a coherent institutional commitment" necessitates an obligation to promote demonstrable and ultimately, "political" change (Flynn et al. 2012, p.251). Shevlin and Rose (2003) contend that researchers;

> ...who work for the improved condition and status of children and who base their work on providing teachers and others who work with young people with the means to work more effectively, must accept that such engagement is inevitably political (Shevlin and Rose 2003, p.5).

A commitment to PVR and transformative action implies confronting those existing institutions where children and young people are unhappy, disadvantaged, marginalised and even victimised. 'It is the normative goal of student voice work to challenge those structures and processes of power which curtail the opportunity to embed equality of voice for all in the life of the school' (Robinson and Taylor 2007, p.12). Cook-Sather (2006) similarly argues that it is incumbent on this kind of research to carry these convictions towards reform 'about the sound, presence, and power of students in education' (2006, p.383).

This sub-section emphasises that facilitating 'student voice' and 'empowerment' cannot of itself, effect change; a resolution; or conclusion to this journey. The response to the

students and consequential actions that are taken within that response, determine if the process produces transformative action.

> Until teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the wider public see that there is value in this particular kind of change prompted by attending to, responding to, and following the lead of students, and indeed embracing the threat these actions carry, efforts that aggregate under the term "student voice" will not get very far. Even though this work of listening to, responding to, and being guided by student voices is not about succeeding – not about "getting there" but rather about changing in response to what we hear, it is a challenge to convince people of the value of the paradox that to listen to students, to build relationships, is to better understand, to be more engaged, to be more successful (Fielding 2004, p.381).

Summary of Section Three

This section has drawn evidence from the literature which links negative and challenging behaviours to disempowerment, boredom, frustration and passive learning environments. The benefits of consulting students within a model of consultative participation have been contrasted with models of participation, especially when they are perceived as tokenistic. 'Power Relations' have been demonstrated as significant for all students but especially to the target students within this research as they pertain to their relationships with their teachers and their peers. As there is evidence from research that relationships with teachers are important to their experience of school, it is an essential theme in the context of this thesis. The potential for transformation in the pursuit of student voice and empowerment has been identified as an objective of this research, however, it has also been pointed out that this depends on 'changing in response to what we hear' and the challenge inherent for adults in this task to bring about 'a coherent institutional commitment'.

CONCLUSION

This chapter of the literature review has concentrated on the themes, 'Student Voice' and 'Empowerment' and illustrated their significance in the context of the thesis. The three sections have interrogated those themes relative to:

- the context, rationale and socio-political landscape within which this study is located
- the challenge of 'listening authentically', engaging students in the research, different perspectives on PVR – including the views of students already

expressed in previous research projects, student voice; a rights perspective or a legal imperative

- the benefits of consulting students, impact of power relations on relationships with teachers and peers, the reproduction of 'hierarchical power relations' and the objective of empowering students for transformative action

An additional two research questions have been added to the original focus of the enquiry as they reflect issues which have been incorporated as a result of emergent themes within this review of literature. The three questions are as follows:

- What is the impact on the student participants when they engage in this student voice research process?
- What is the impact on the wider school community?
- What are the implications from this research for creating a more inclusive learning environment in schools?

The last two questions are necessary to this enquiry in order to determine what impact the students' engagement in this research has on their environment, and if the learning outcomes from the process can inform future policy and practice in our education system and structure.

> Given the challenges faced by young people in the new millennium, it is essential that the views of children are used proactively to inform policy and practice… Only by incorporating the views of this group of "educational outsiders" can schools genuinely be termed effective and democratic (Davies 2005, p.313).

This research is dedicated to learning from the participants in an effort to promote social justice and equality in their education system for students with SEBD. Committed to these objectives, the study is located within a transformative paradigm and consequently, chapter four will elaborate on this and present the theoretical framework of the study.

Shor (1992) encapsulates in the pronouncement below, the motivation inherent in the description and detail in the subsequent chapters to this review:

> Empowering education is thus a road from where we are to where we need to be. It crosses terrains of doubt and time. One end of the road leads away from inequality and miseducation while the other lands us in a frontier of critical learning and democratic discourse. This is no easy road to travel (Shor 1992, p.263).

CHAPTER 4 -PARADIGMATIC STANCE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

'*Nowhere have rights to have a say in one's own affairs been won without serious struggle'*

(Qvortrup, 1997, p.85)

INTRODUCTION

Qvortrup's acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in the pursuit of having 'a say in one's own affairs' resonates with the commitment to student voice which is implicit in this study and the experience as a researcher involved in the process. This chapter clarifies the theoretical framework within which this study is situated and exposes the pertinent reflexive insights from the journey as they relate to 'struggle' and empowerment.

My theoretical framework is aligned to the transformative paradigm and as such, this research is positioned within an emancipatory framework of inclusion, voice and empowerment (Creswell 2003; Mertens 2010). The transformative paradigm is referred to as 'critical theory et al.' by Guba and Lincoln (2005) and 'emancipatory' by Lather (1992). Grbich (2007) uses the term, 'critical emancipatory position' and lists the major characteristics of research in this tradition as; focus on questions of **identity**; clashes between those in **power** and those with limited power; and desirable outcome of **social transformation**. Mertens (2010) changed the terminology for this paradigm from 'emancipatory' to 'transformative' to 'emphasize that the agency for change rests in the persons in the community working side by side with the researcher toward the goal of social transformation' (Mertens 2010, p.8). Researchers who position themselves within this paradigm believe that their research must contain an action agenda for reform 'that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life' (Creswell 2003, p.9-10). Mertens (2010) points out that it is necessary to recognise, acknowledge and expose the frames that dominate our view of reality when we embark on research (Mertens 2010, p.18). Acknowledging our philosophical viewpoints on the construction and interpretation of knowledge uncovers the "baggage" we possess and the biases we hold which are lenses that influence how we gather and interpret the data in our research.

The sections that follow, illustrate that the transformative paradigm underpins: theoretical assumptions; the approach to research; and the reflexive nature of the study.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

My theoretical understanding and vision of 'Inclusion' is one that is transformative, emancipatory and empowering. A society and/or education system that aspires to be irrefutably inclusive should directly challenge marginalisation and marginalising behaviours, while affording opportunities for active citizenship and participation. I believe this must be facilitated through 'voice' and 'authentic listening' by providing for all stakeholders to make valid contributions on matters that are relevant and significant to them. This perspective and understanding of inclusion is about recognition and respect for difference, as well as actively engaging 'voice' to promote a positive experience of empowerment and 'care'. My theoretical perspective of inclusion informed the manner in which I approached this research and, as this is my vision of the 'inclusive school', it underpinned my outlook and commitment to the research process.

The theoretical relationship between 'inclusion', 'voice' 'empowerment' and 'care' within this framework resonates with some feminist theorists and pedagogues (e.g. Held 1993; Baker-Miller 1988; Noddings 1995). However, 'emotional work' and 'caring' as significant to fostering inclusion in education and society have not been prioritised by commentators and indeed have been dismissed in intellectual thought internationally (Lynch and Baker 2005; Lynch 2010; Noddings, 2003; Nussbaum, 2001). Gillies and Robinson (2013) contend that differences in terms of conceptualisations of care in the classroom and attention to the well-being of students often correlate to broader experiences of inclusion and exclusion suggesting 'greater attention should be paid to teacher-pupil relationships in order to better understand the production and reproduction of inequality'(Gillies and Robinson 2013, p.53). Theoretically, the potential relationship between 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'transformation' is clearly established in the literature (Cook-Sather 2006; Fielding 2004; Shor 1992). Baker-Miller (1988) and Held (1993) define the transformative or empowerment-based conception of power from a feminist perspective as an alternative to the more masculine, 'power-over' conception. Miller argues that 'there is enormous validity in women's not wanting to use power as it is presently conceived and used. Rather, women may want to be powerful in ways that

simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others' (Baker-Miller 1988, p.9).

My understanding of 'inclusion' is intrinsically linked to a pursuit of empowerment and transformation through an engagement with voice, within an ethos that challenges hierarchical power relationships and replaces them with relational care. This understanding reflects my vision of inclusive education and in order to achieve this, I believe educational environments need to be democratized (Lynch and Baker 2005) and transformed in order to represent stakeholders, as well as prioritise care and the relational context. This pursuit may provide a framework that further recognises and respects difference while challenging marginalisation. These are my declared biases but also my commitments, which have informed and influenced my approach to this research process.

THE APPROACH TO RESEARCH

This student voice study was designed to be 'inclusive' in approach, which required my role as researcher to be one of collaborator with the participants; above all, prioritising their insights as experts on their own experience (Cooper 1996; Gersch 2001; James et al. 1998; Leitch et al. 2005; Rose and Shevlin 2010). This entailed positioning and valuing the young participants as consultants in this course of action (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007), and fundamentally focussing on empowerment with the objective of enabling them to become 'active agents' in positively transforming their own educational and social experiences of school (Fielding 2004).

The theoretical assumptions integral to this research pursuit are 'the right to voice' and the potential within an experience of authentic listening to that voice to generate 'empowerment', which influenced the planning, design, implementation and analysis of this study. Consequently, the methodological approach was emergent, flexible, participatory and primarily, consultative. This corresponds with Lather's (1991) contention that 'Through dialogue and reflexivity, design, data and theory emerge, with data being recognized as generated from people in a relationship' (Lather 1991, p.72). The student participants collaborated on the decision making and reflective process through the various stages of the research and through that collaboration chose their individual and group levels of involvement, as they assumed power through the duration of the study. Freire (2005) argues that education and communication processes are

imbued with power and suggests 'dialogics' within education in order to break down structures of oppression. He contrasts this dialectical model with that of the knowledge transmission and 'banking' model of education which sustains hierarchical power relations in schools, and recommends 'critical thinking' among students so that they may become 'creative' and 'active' agents in order that they become 'transformers of that world' (Freire 2005, p.54). This position of critical thinking, however, was one that Freire contended was necessary for both sides of the dialogue; educators and students alike, or, as relevant to this research process; the position of researcher and research participants:

> True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking – thinking which perceives reality as a process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. … For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality (Freire 2005, p.92).

In her analysis of Freire's work, O'Brien (2011) argues for the necessity of an ethic of 'care relationality' as vital to the conditions necessary for dialogue to bring about a realisation of transformation. The gradual assumption of power and confidence on the part of student participants through this research process was generated through a consistent experience of dialogue and being met with a reflective and authentic response to that dialogue. This engagement with 'care' and building of 'caring relations' was in direct contrast with hierarchical power relations to which the participants were more accustomed. Lynch et al. (2012) point out the necessity to substitute 'dialogue for dominance' and 'co-operation and collegiality for hierarchy' in the resolution of inequalities of power in school and the democratization of pedagogical and organizational relations of schooling (Lynch et al. 2012, p.149). Similarly, Lather (1991) emphasises the role of 'voice' and the 'dialectial, reciprocal shaping of both the practice of praxis-oriented research and the development of emancipatory theory' (1991, p.72) as methods of empowerment that contribute to transformative social action.

Just as the transformative paradigm influenced the design and approach to this research, it also impacted on the choice of conceptual lenses which guided my review of the literature in chapters two and three for this study, and ultimately the attempt to make sense of the findings and analysis of the data in chapter seven. The theorists and authors drawn upon in the compilation of the review, provided insight on 'inclusion',

'difference', 'care', 'empowerment' and 'voice', and established a framework for a study which promotes the recognition of a marginalised group to speak and be heard.

THE REFLEXIVE PROCESS

Facilitating the students to be at the centre of this research design and to have a strong driving role about the extent and nature of their participation, is fundamental to research situated within the transformative paradigm. Throughout this experience, it was necessary that I took a role in which I deliberately divested myself as much as possible, of some of the power and authority that I might otherwise have had as researcher in my relationships with the participants. Cruddas (2007) challenges researchers to find ways of 'redressing' the power balance that naturally exists between adult researcher and young participants. However, she warns that we cannot render the role of researcher as 'invisible' and must accept that within aspirations of 'empowerment', there are limits, which must be acknowledged. Gore (1992) similarly cautions that we 'might get it wrong'. Cognisant of this, I made every effort to relinquish and share power with the participants in order to highlight my position as a collaborative participant and partner within the process. This was fundamentally with the objective to maximise the opportunity for the students to experience a sense of empowerment through engagement with 'having a say' and controlling the direction of the study. Within this reflexive section, I examine the impact of this stance on me, emotionally and professionally.

Our perception of any individual or group of people as 'powerless' 'excluded' 'marginalised' or 'at risk' is a view which is taken from the position of being part of the majority culture or mainstream (Jahnukainen 2001). The inherent danger in this perception is one of condescension or a charity/pity model of empowerment. It is important that the process of trying to facilitate 'voice' or 'empowerment' does not in fact; perpetuate 'relations of domination' (Ellsworth 1989, p.298). Ellsworth points out the importance of unlearning 'positions of privilege....dependent on the Others/others whose presence – with their concrete experiences of privileges and oppressions and subjugated or oppressive knowledges – I am responding to and acting with' (Ellsworth 1989, p.323). I was duly aware of the imperative need to avoid any potential for condescension within this research process and to attempt an 'unlearning' of my privileged position as outsider and potentially as a representative of the powerful position to stigmatise and 'name' difference. This involved a willingness to disempower

myself in a way that was at times destabilizing and potentially risky to the entire research process and outcome.

The use of a reflective journal to track my intimate engagement with this study presented me with the opportunity to reflexively question my own role in the process and to acknowledge the struggle that was engendered in me as a result of the intentional giving up and sharing of power. This stance was essential to my commitment to the form of research I had chosen to undertake, however, I was also conscious of the risks I was taking since this study was the essential part of my doctoral research studies and my pursuit of this, obviously necessitated and involved a desire to sustain the study through to the analysis of outcomes. The participants had the option, power and latitude to dismiss or leave the process at anytime they chose and yet, it was inherently crucial that they had this power and awareness of it. In the earlier stages of the study, my intentional divestment of power had a negative impact on perceptions of me amongst some of the school staff especially with regard to convincing some adults of the benefits of engaging within this student voice process. At times this manifested in scathing comments, accusations and insults (some of which are evident in the cases studies in chapter six). However, the experience served to acknowledge that taking a deliberately 'powerless' stance in school, especially when the choice is made to divest power to students among whom is represented some of the most problematic, marginalised and even despised students in the school, can leave a person open to distrust and positioning of 'outside the group'.

As the study progressed, this negative perception substantially, although not exclusively, became more positive, especially when relationships amongst the staff with students involved in the research also improved. Teaching staff began to perceive my role as one that was supportive, not just of the students, but the establishment of positive relationships and caring relations for the participants throughout the school. Consequently, the positive impact on their classrooms meant that I also came to be seen by many of the teachers, as a support to staff also, which is conveyed in feedback from both the principal and the SENCO[4].

The professional operation of establishing caring relationships with young people some of whom were unfamiliar with this experience, also presented as a challenge for me,

[4] Appendices N and O

especially when it was necessary to withdraw and deliberately make myself in many ways redundant to a group that I had become very familiar with. It is difficult following such an intense process to remove from it and hand it over with trust that others will sustain a system which has required an emotional investment.

However, the learning and pleasure that emanated from this reflexive role far outweighed any discomfort experienced throughout the process. The process positively impacted on the participants but also my work with them transformed me professionally, such that there was a relational and reflexive outcome for us as collaborative partners. A commitment to conducting research of this nature and within this theoretical paradigm involves a significant giving of the 'self' especially as it is integral to the approach that in terms of the care and relational dimension, one must be able to walk away in the end satisfied in the knowledge that you are no longer needed. It is important that the attempt to facilitate empowerment is truthful and sincere at every stage of the process, including the point of departure, knowing that genuine empowerment equates sustainable structures and an appreciation of being dispensable.

"Empowerment" may be liberating, but it is also a lot of hard work and new responsibility to sort through one's life and rebuild according to one's own values and choices' (Kathy Kea, Feminist Scholarship Class, in Lather 1991, p.76).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has acknowledged the positioning of this research approach within a transformative paradigm and identified the significance of 'inclusion', 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'care' relative to the theoretical framework of the study. The commitment to the paradigmatic stance of this research underpins the theoretical assumptions, research approach and reflexive nature of the study.

Fundamentally, this research study has been an attempt to listen to students 'whose voices are most seldom heard' (Tangen 2009, p.13) in the pursuit of 'empowerment' and 'active agency' on the part of the participants in positive transforming their experience of school. Qvortrup's (1997) declaration on the struggle associated with the objective 'to have a say in one's own affairs' pervades the journey which has been alluded to in this chapter and is elaborated upon in the ones to follow.

> We do not posit a single ideal for everyone and then announce ‘high expectations for all’. Rather we recognize something admirable, or at least acceptable, struggling to emerge in each person we encounter (Noddings 1995, p.192).

CHAPTER 5 – DESIGN OF RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This research is an example of engagement with student voice, conducted by means of consultative participation with a sample group of students in mainstream education. It operates within a transformative paradigm as it aims to precipitate change and subsequently inform a discussion to influence policy. These positions are evident in the objective of this undertaking which is to address the following research questions: With a sample group of students, all of whom have been identified as presenting with behaviours or difficulties encompassed within the broad spectrum label of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties;

- What is the impact on the student participants when they engage in this student voice research process?
- What is the impact on the wider school community?
- What are the implications from this research for creating a more inclusive learning environment in schools?

In addition to these questions it is integral to this enquiry to determine if the experience of being listened to for the student participants is one of empowerment and if that subsequently encourages them to become active agents in positively transforming their experience of school.

The final two questions reflect the necessity to determine:

- If a change in the experience of the students through 'student voice' can generate any identifiable change in experience, attitude or practice (as appropriate) for peer students, teachers, administration and parents/guardians
- If there are implications arising from the analysis and results for future policy and practice, especially in relation to inclusive education.

The approach to this study was designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the young participants, mindful of the uniqueness of each individual participating and respectful of their preference with regard to methods of contact and data collection as well as frequency of communication. One of the most important aspects of the

relationship between researcher and participant for this project is that these communications had to encounter meaningful acknowledgement through 'authentic listening'.

This chapter outlines the philosophical basis for this research, the ethical considerations, approach, methods of collecting data and method of analysis.

PARADIGM, EPISTEMOLOGY AND ONTOLOGY

From my earliest experience of teaching, I have wanted to learn more about the social and educational challenges experienced in particular by children with difficulties described along the spectrum of needs within the umbrella descriptor of EBD, SEBD, Emotional Disturbance or Severe Emotional Disturbance. There are a number of reasons that prompted me to pursue that ambition and most of them are due to individual children I have met who struggled or rebelled or cried or even failed in a system they believed to be unfair and lacking in understanding of their difficulties. Preliminary discussions with children, parents/guardians and teachers on the topic prior to embarking on this research journey clarified that although there are multiple perspectives on the relationship between children with SEBD and their learning environment, the one thing that was agreed upon was that for ***some*** children, the experience of mainstream school was very difficult and these difficulties can culminate into extreme examples of disengagement and/or social exclusion. For that reason, I am conscious of these influences on me and biases I hold with regard to the need to support and understand challenges experienced by some children. I bring these influences to this research which contribute to framing the design as well as the theoretical framework and paradigm within which this study is located.

Goffman's (1974) notion of frames and framing which 'are the principles of organisation that govern social events and the actors' subjective involvement in them' (Goffman1974, p.10), identify ***how*** we see the world and influence our participation in and understanding of the world. A firm objective of this research is to contribute evidence which may inform a discussion towards influencing and promoting equitable opportunities for children who are experiencing difficulties in schools. It is the position of this thesis that treating every child in mainstream education equally does not implicitly mean they are being treated with fairness. Providing for and meeting 'additional needs' requires understanding more than definitions and terminology that

categorise specific special needs; it requires eliciting the voices of children and young people in order to learn from their perspectives and acting upon what we learn. It is integral to this study to advance a different form of learning; that of learning from students through authentic listening, and by means of that process to encourage an experience of positive empowerment such that the participants may precipitate a change in their educational environment. The validation of this aim is to promote this process as a social justice requisite which firmly situates the research within a transformative paradigm. The purpose of this study is not just to describe the world in which the research takes place, but to attempt to change it.

The ontological assumption associated with the transformative paradigm 'holds that what we can know of what exists, or the reality that we accept as true, is socially constructed' (Mertens 2009, p.53). However, this stance also recognises the impact and influence of power and privilege in determining the definition of what exists. Mertens (2010) argues that accepting differences in perceptions as equally legitimate ignores the damage perpetrated by factors that give privilege to one version of reality over another; 'such as the influence of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender and disability lenses in the construction of reality' (2010, p.32). This ontological position is evident and influential within this research which is cognisant of the systemic power that imposes a label to categorise the students who are targeted for this study. The approach is deliberately designed to prioritise the participants' perceptions and perspectives of what is real and what is significant from their unique, informed and expert position on their individual experiences. The transformative ontological stance acknowledges the consequences of marginalisation within power relations that stigmatise and/or render difference as invisible or deficient.

'The transformative paradigm's epistemological assumption centres on the meaning of knowledge as it is defined from a prism of cultural lenses and the power issues involved in the determination of what is considered legitimate knowledge' (Mertens 2010, p.32). Mertens (2009) explains that in order to achieve an understanding of what is valid knowledge within research, there needs to be a close collaboration between researcher and participants throughout the research process in which the relationship should be 'interactive and empowering' (Mertens 2009, p.56). It is fundamental to this research to understand the relevant power relations and provide a practical description of the physical and environmental context of this study. However, the essential knowledge that

informed the data was that which culminated as pertinent, 'real' and highlighted for analysis by the participants themselves. Every stage of this process was designed to be flexible in order to facilitate opportunities for the participants to develop active agency both in their response to the experience of the process and in driving the stages of the data collection. Case studies and a summary of analyses were read and approved by most of the young participants and amendments were made if they believed an adult interpretation had influenced the thesis. Topics that were included for analysis and discussion which had emanated from my observations or feedback from key adults in the study were also presented to young representatives from the participant group and agreed upon before inclusion.

This section has identified the philosophical assumptions associated with the paradigmatic stance within which this study is located and acknowledged that the paradigm influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. 'It is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research' (MacKenzie and Knipe 2006, p.194).

ETHICAL CONCERNS

'Ethics has to do with the application of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair.' (Sieber 1993, p.14)

From the beginning of this research undertaking, ethical considerations related to working with the student participants for this study have been paramount to the research approach. Those issues are relevant when engaging children and young people in most forms of research; however, they are particularly significant when working with children identified with special needs, as 'they are considered to have a higher degree of vulnerability' (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p.152). In line with the Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2004) this study was conducted within an ethic of respect for: The Person, Knowledge, Democratic Values, The Quality of Educational Research and Academic Freedom (6). Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin prior to engaging in data collection from September 2009 while the pilot study was conducted with the approval of the Education Department of the National University of Maynooth under supervisory guidance. In accordance with guidelines 11 – 14 and 23 of the

Guidelines and also in accordance with the Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003, the following process was conducted:

After the initiation of a pilot study with one student in a primary school from October 2008, I made contact with six co-educational post primary schools by introducing myself and the objectives of my research in a letter[5]. The schools I contacted were within a fifty kilometre radius from where I live to ensure that the distance was close enough for me to visit on a regular basis but no closer than fifteen kilometres from my home to prevent too much familiarity outside the research process. I considered this to be an important consideration as from the outset, I anticipated that research of this nature could potentially expose sensitive issues for the young people involved and I wanted to preserve a space between us outside our contact in schools for that reason.

I attended introductory interviews with principals at the first three schools that responded to my initial letter in December 2008 and chose to situate my research in St. Bernadette's Post Primary School for reasons outlined in section two of chapter six. I conducted the major study in one school only, in order to spend as much time as possible with the participants. The principals in the other two schools I visited were not amenable to the idea of piloting or facilitating any interventions that might be generated through the study and wanted to impose a limit to the number of interviews which could be conducted with any student over the course of a school year.

The principal and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) in St. Bernadette's Post Primary School identified students they believed might benefit from participating in the research who had either been identified with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties through psychological assessment or by the SENCO. The SENCO initiated contact by letter[6] with parents or guardians of the students explaining about the research and asking for consent to pass their details and details of their children to me. Subsequently, preliminary individual interviews were conducted with twenty one students between 18th March and 2nd April 2009 during which I explained the purpose of the research and the reasons for inviting the students to participate. I asked each student to decide if they would like to become involved and if they did, to read and sign a consent form or to compose their own. [7] Twenty students agreed to participate and it was

[5] Appendix B
[6] Appendix C
[7] Appendices D and E

explained to each that they had the right to withdraw at any point without the necessity to give an explanation for withdrawal. I made initial contact by phone to parents and guardians and followed up later in the summer (2009) with a letter[8]. By September the number of participants had been reduced to nineteen.

Every participant and correspondent, (student, teacher and parent/guardian) was advised that data collected would be treated with respect and confidentiality; data and participants would be anonymised in the written presentation of the research; and any resources collected or used during the process, such as documents, digital recordings and creative pieces would be kept safe and secure until either returned or destroyed before the end of the project. Participants were given the choice of having their interviews recorded or not. In the process of the data collection, the decision to record was usually made on the day of interviews, and students were offered the opportunity to listen to the recordings or read transcriptions on request. They were also invited to be part of the process of analysis of themes and interpretations of data. In total, there were twenty student participants, one in primary school as part of the pilot study and nineteen in St Bernadette's as part of the major case study.

Sikes (2004) suggest that a useful 'acid test' when undertaking research with participants is to ask yourself how you would feel if either you or your close family were 'researched' in this manner. They identify a list of issues or questions that need to be addressed prior to undertaking research which include[9]:

- If you are intending to do covert research of some kind, can you justify this?
- How do you regard the people you're going to be researching?
- Do you make the research process appear to be neat and unproblematic?
- Are informants sufficiently protected in written accounts?

(Sikes 2004, p.25)

In addition to these considerations and also in line with 'Children First-National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children' (DHC 1999) students were advised that they could speak to me in confidence but if they indicated that they were in any kind of danger, I had a duty of care to report my concerns. The following examples

[8] Appendix H
[9] Appendix U provides answers to these questions which were addressed 12th October 2009

in line with the guidelines were given as reasonable grounds for concern by gatekeepers in the schools and reinforced by me throughout the process:

- A specific indication from a child that s/he was abused
- An illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse
- A symptom which may not in itself be totally consistent with abuse but which is supported by corroborative evidence of deliberate harm or negligence
- Consistent signs of neglect over a period of time.

(DHC 2009, p.16)

Tangen (2009) recommends that student voice research conducted with children and young people with special needs in 'regular' schools should be conducted within a methodology which;

> ...must be open, flexible, participatory, interpretive and contextually sensitive. Special attention should be paid to ways of accessing voices that are seldom heard; like pupils who face great communication barriers or pupils who tend to express themselves in ways that are normally perceived as "disruptive" or disturbing (Tangen 2009, p.840).

The methodology outlined in this chapter was designed to be participatory and as flexible as possible. Where students indicated that they had distressing or sensitive issues to discuss, I listened carefully and sympathetically, without offering guidance or advice but facilitated contact with their consent to appropriate internal and external agencies to the school. Very sensitive issues that were disclosed are not incorporated in the data unless explicit permission was given by the participants to do so.

An important ethical consideration when conducting research of this nature is to take steps to protect oneself as researcher. While working closely and consistently with young people who are presenting with emotional or behavioural difficulties, it is essential that there is an outlet to 'let go' of some of the potentially upsetting information that may be shared. Cognisant of 'the dangers of parachuting in and out of people's lives, especially if some of these lives are lonely' (Stalker 1998, p.17), boundaries must be observed and respected. This is primarily for the protection of the young participants and to avoid transference of dependence and attachment on the part of the young person to the researcher. This may develop if a young person is either not used to getting a lot of attention or has few or no friends, or is living in difficult domestic circumstances. During preliminary interviews with the participants, I explained that I was neither a psychologist

nor a qualified counsellor so that regular contact and individual interviews would not be misconceived as counselling sessions. This important detail was reinforced where necessary throughout the student voice process so that unreasonable expectations of me would not be established for the sake of all participants in the study, myself included. However, when students expressed the wish to engage in counselling, with their permission I passed their request to the school guidance counsellor who either followed up on this himself or arranged contact with an external service to the student and or family.

Finally, as part of the research design, the intention was always to encourage the development of support structures around the participants in order to ensure that sustainable mechanisms would be in place once the study was completed. After an intensive school year of gathering data between September 2009 and May 2010, I intentionally reduced contact with students gradually through the course of the following school year (2010-2011) in order to reduce dependency without withdrawing support too quickly. However, support structures were also established between the student participants as part of the consultative process of engagement[10] and key adults[11] undertook responsibility between them to sustain and support the process of 'student voice' and engagement.

This section has demonstrated the importance of observing ethical considerations in undertaking research with young participants and most particularly children who may be vulnerable within the spectrum of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

'Transformative researchers who work with communities with disabilities, place high priority on developing relationships with members of the community, building trust and recognising the expertise the community members have' (Mertens 2010, p.227). In order to develop these relationships, Mertens (2010) believes that qualitative research methods are the most appropriate for this type of study. Qualitative research is rooted in different philosophical traditions including the interpretive/constructive, phenomenological and also the transformative/emancipatory, according to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004). Just as the assumption that reality is socially constructed is relevant to

[10] Chapter 6, ***I'm Me***: Pupil Ownership
[11] The SENCO, SGC and Chaplain/Year Head

constructive/interpretive paradigms, it is also important in transformative/emancipatory paradigms but with a greater emphasis on the impact of social and cultural determinants. From a disability or special needs perspective, the focus in qualitative research rests on ways to identify the constructions from the viewpoints of those with special needs within a larger cultural context, e.g. the school and the wider community. The importance of an interactive relationship between the researcher and participants is also significant (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004, p.99-101).

McDuffie and Scruggs (2008) recommend the use of qualitative research methods when working with students with special needs because of the necessity to appreciate and understand requisite approaches for individuals. Feminists 'believe that qualitative methods are the only truly "feminist" choice in research because they include the use of open ended interviewing and ethnographic data collection to focus on interpretation, allow the immersion of the researcher in the social setting, and facilitate intersubjective understanding between the researcher and participants' (Reinharz 1992).

This study involves working with student participants, all of whom have been identified with varying degrees of emotional and behavioural difficulties and many with additional learning needs and challenging circumstances. The research design for the study is a mixed methods, qualitative approach in order to generate and present a rich contextualised picture of the experience and expert voice of the participants. The approach combines ethnographic and narrative case studies using individual interviews, focus groups, creative workshops and a reflective fieldwork journal as resources for collecting data.

ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Hammersley (2006) describes ethnography as 'a form of social and educational research that emphasises the importance of studying at firsthand what people do and say in particular contexts. This usually involves fairly lengthy contact, through participant observation in relevant settings, and/or through relatively open-ended interviews designed to understand people's perspectives' (Hammersley 2006, p.4). He acknowledges the emergence of variations on ethnographic approaches such as 'critical and feminist ethnography' but believes that;

> ...these orientations greatly increase the danger of systematic bias [because] the essence of ethnography is the tension between trying to understand people's perspectives from the inside while also viewing them and their behaviour more distantly....recent developments in ethnographic work seem to have lost that tension, and the dynamic it supplies (Hammersley 2006, p.11).

However, Mertens (2010) argues that critical ethnography has the potential to interrogate dimensions of diversity related to those in power and those who suffer oppression within a theoretical framework that pursues social, educational and political issues by prioritising the voices of participants (Mertens 2010, p.232). Grbich (2007) clarifies the distinction between the roles of classical ethnographer and critical ethnographer. She explains that in classical ethnography, the role of the researcher is traditionally that of a "neutral" distant, reflective observer, dialoguing between the research process and product, meticulously documenting observational and visual images in order to identify, confirm and crosscheck an understanding of structures, linkages, behaviour patterns, beliefs and understanding of people within a culture or grouping. She contrasts the role of the 'critical ethnographer' as a more 'active analytical position' where terminology such as 'ideology', 'hegemony', 'alienation', 'domination', 'oppression', hierarchy', 'empowerment' and 'transformation' become important (Grbich 2007, p.40-52).

The decision to take an ethnographic approach to this research was made because of the intention to spend as much time as possible in the participating schools and with the students engaged in the research process. The motivation behind this was in order to be a familiar figure in the schools and to generate and present a detailed and contextualised picture of the experience and expert voice of the participants. However, rather than assuming an 'entirely neutral stance' within the project, it was also my intention to have an interactive relationship with the participants such as to encourage activities for the purpose of promoting motivation, self confidence, empowerment and transformation and for that reason, I chose to take on the role of 'critical ethnographer' where possible. As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is not just to describe the world in which the research takes place, but to attempt to change it, a position which justifies this stance and approach to the research.

Other studies, which used similar approaches within disability/special educational needs issues include: Mertens (1992); Keller, Karp and Carlson (1993); and Benjamin (2002). Benjamin (2002) argues that;

> ...ethnographic strategies, which involve the active participation of the researcher in meaning making with participants over time, enable us to interrogate the working through of schooling reforms at the level of the interpersonal, and examine the interpersonal in the context of wider social and political power relations (Benjamin 2002, p.23).

In total, twenty students from two schools contributed to and participated in this research study. The pilot study involved meeting with one student, his parents and teachers between 16th October 2008 and 12th May 2010[12]. The post primary school allowed me unlimited access to spend time on the school premises for the duration of this research. Preliminary interviews were conducted in March/April 2009. The most intensive period of data collection occurred between 4th September 2009 and 3rd June 2010. Less frequent visits were made between 15th September 2010 and 2nd June 2011. Final interviews with teachers and two students occurred on 13th January 2012. Appendix T presents a breakdown of the breadth of the major case study, which includes a summary of meetings and contact followed by a breakdown of all contact with students individually and in their case study groups[13]

The advantage of this level of access facilitated an opportunity for me to become familiar with the administration of the schools and the day to day life for the school community which provided an authentic context for me to engage with the participant students and monitor changes from multiple perspectives that occurred throughout the year as they were happening. That 'familiarity' worked both ways because my regular presence in those schools and particularly in the post primary school meant that I was 'part of the furniture within months of the project', (Ms Gray, Principal of St. Bernadette's Post Primary School 21st January 2010). For this reason, the research approach to the project within the post primary school may be legitimately described as ethnographic using a combination of research methods. Inherent in the approach, is a narrative analysis in eliciting the voice of the participants.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

'Wherever there are humans, there appear to be stories'

(Cobley 2001 in Leggo 2004, p.97)

[12] Appendix S outlines the breakdown of meetings and contact with participants in the pilot case study

[13] Appendix T: Summary of major case study, including embedded case studies: 'Legends', 'Jigsaw', Blood Brothers' and 'Lonewolf'

Narrative Inquiry as a methodological approach uses related but diverse methods including biography, action research, case studies and life-writing in order to represent life experiences (Leggo 2004, p.97). Cortazzi (2007) points out the increasing recognition of the importance of narrative analysis as an element of ethnography, since 'narrative' is one of the fundamental ways that humans organise their understanding of the world and therefore complements other ethnographic strategies. He explains that this approach give researchers access to meanings of key events in the lives of the narrators within a community and cultural context and suggests four major reasons for doing narrative analysis as part of ethnography: concern with the meaning of experience; voice; human qualities or personal or professional dimensions; and research as a story (Cortazzi 2007, p.384-385).

Clark (1998) contends that 'one of the strengths of using 'narrative case studies' is that it offers possibilities for making visible (and central) those whose voices have been erased from the landscape and for those who have been silenced it offers the platform for them to speak in their own words about their experiences' (Clark et al., 1998, p.67).

The decision to choose a 'narrative analysis' approach as part of this project was made, based on the opportunity to present the experiences of participants from an 'insider perspective' within the concept of 'student voice'.

CASE STUDY

The data from this study was collected from a variety of methods using a fusion of ethnographic and narrative approaches. The presentation of the data is in the form of case studies. Case studies may be based on a single person, a group or a school (McDuffie and Scruggs 2008; Mertens 2010; Sikes 2004) and in design, may be singular, multiple or embedded (Yin 2009).

Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) highlight the important role of case studies within special education research because they are part of an ethnographic approach that involves intensive and detailed study of an individual or group. Examples of case study research in special education are Koppenhaver and Yoder's (1992) literature review of case studies related to individuals with physical disabilities; Ferguson's (1992) study of six students with severe autism; and Evans' (1995; 1998) study of one deaf girl in a

hearing family. Sellman (2009) also used a case study approach in his research with boys in a special school for students with SEBD.

What is most important in using case studies to present data according to Yin (2009) is that care is taken when specifying what the case actually is. Within this research, the use of case studies is to represent in detail the impact on specific students over a minimum of one school year when their views are elicited through student voice research and also to provide a format to present their stories. The degree of commonality between the participants is that they have all been identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties/SEBD either through psychological assessment or by the principal and SENCO at their school. Participating schools were mainstream and co-educational.

For the purpose of analysis in this study, the post primary school is presented as a major case study with four embedded case studies in chapter six. Each case study is presented under a name that was chosen by the participants[14]. The case studies are entitled; '*Legends*' comprised of six students; '*Lonewolf*', one student; '*Blood Brothers'*, two students; and '*Jigsaw*', ten students. Further context for the major case study is provided in chapter six with general details about the school and gatekeepers; an outline of the development of student voice and ownership of the research process in '***I'm Me***: Student Ownership; and an elaboration of perspectives and insights from relevant adult participants and school personnel in '*The Glass House*'.

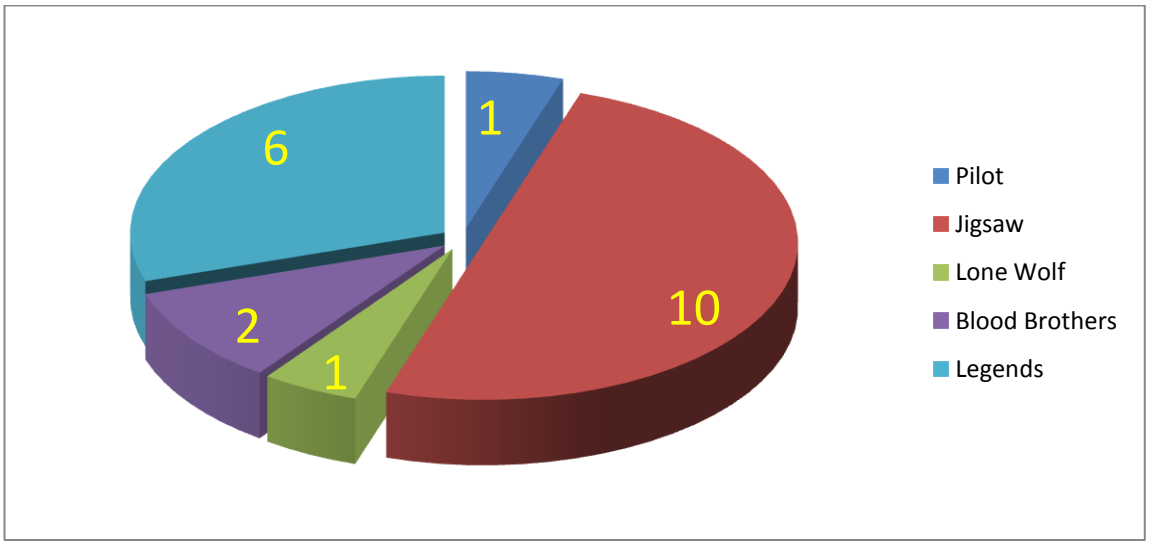

Figure 3 – Division of Participants in Case Studies

[14] Summary of contact for each case study provided in Appendix T

REFLEXIVITY

Sikes (2004) challenges researchers to ask themselves; 'Do you "own" your research in your writing up?' (Sikes 2004, p.31) She argues that she feels strongly about the use of "I" in research because she believes that the use of "the researcher" or "the author" are distancing strategies and so, 'researchers should be prepared to "own" their work and the most immediate and obvious way of doing so is to say "I" (2004, p.31). I am convinced of this argument, especially because I was using a reflective diary and field work journal to keep a track not only of my schedule, but also to reflect on and react to the activities and events that were unfolding during the process of my research. I found this resource to be an invaluable opportunity to voice my excitement, frustration, delight, sadness and even anger at different stages which, when put together in conjunction with my other data sources, provided a multi-layered context from which to assimilate and digest the complexities of the process of which I was an interactive participant. This resource was a constant reminder to me of my biases and attitudes and the fundamental assumptions that I hold, and provided an opportunity for me to critically evaluate how these might influence my thinking and practice within this research.

> This is about being a reflexive and reflective and, therefore, a rigorous researcher who is able to present their findings and interpretations in the confidence that they have thought about, acknowledged and been honest about and explicit about their stance and the influence it has had upon their work (Sikes 2004, p.19).

For this reason, I am reluctant to 'hide behind the text' and would rather position myself with the subjective "I".

Sikes and Goodson (2003) contend that research cannot be disembodied as it is impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or at any stage of the process. 'Reflexivity should be an inherent and ubiquitous part of the research endeavour' (Sikes and Goodson 2003, p.34). Finlay (2002) argues also for reflexivity within the design of research because by making the process transparent, we make it public and therefore accountable. Locating our motivation for pursuing research within a specific paradigmatic stance and theoretical framework facilitates reflection on how we frame issues and why we investigate or pursue them within a specific design. In this way therefore, we expose any preconceived ideas or biases which must be addressed and acknowledged in any interpretation of the data.

MIXED METHODS

This section outlines the different methods used with students to collect data, in an effort to generate different perspectives through these resources in order to detect contradictions and reinforce reoccurring themes.

Interviews

Some commentators have suggested that interviews conducted with the intention of encouraging voice amongst marginalised groups can be conducted as part of participant observation or even as a casual conversation, and typically carried out within an unstructured or minimally structured format (Mertens 1991; Mertens and McLaughlin 2004; Morse 1994; Swain and French 1998). Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) suggest that questions should emerge as the researcher is sensitised to the meanings that the participants bring to the situation (2004, p.102-103).

The pattern of interviews which occurred between September 2009 and June 2010 varied in structure as determined by the individual participants. Depending on the experiences of the day or events leading up to that time, sometimes the students were unresponsive and unwilling to talk and on other occasions, anxious or happy to chat. What was most important to my role was to be in a position to recall issues that had been raised or information shared to continue a train of thought or establish a sense of continuity from one meeting to the next. Where I was in a position to use a digital recorder, having been given consent to do so by parents/guardians and students, that was quite easy to accomplish. However, in interviews with students on a day that they were reluctant to be recorded, (e.g. if they were reticent or shy or having a difficult day), it was difficult to take notes as it was more important to put the young person at ease. This meant that at times it was more challenging to recall everything that had been said or discussed once the meeting had concluded. However, with familiarity that became less difficult throughout the process[15].

Most of the interviews conducted were primarily ‘chatty’ and ‘conversational’. They had a semi-structured but relaxed and flexible format as preparation for each interview involved consulting notes on previous interviews with each participant and continuing a train of thought or following up on ideas, stories or comments from the previous

[15] For breakdown and schedule of interview, see appendices S and T

occasion. Structured questions which underpinned the enquiry were intended to ascertain the participants' opinions and insights with regard to supports or obstacles to positive behaviour, engagement and learning and also to encourage opinions and ideas to improve their experience of and engagement in school. However, it was integral to the pursuit of student voice to retain a relaxed conversational structure within the interviews in order to encourage the participants to guide the discussion and remain as comfortable as possible within the process.

Focus Groups

In total there were seven focus group meetings in the post primary school; four with the 'Legends' group[16] and three with 'Jigsaw'[17]. I facilitated the discussions with the younger group (Legends) and encouraged the conversation that ensued. In the case of 'Jigsaw' a different member of the group chaired each focus group interview and asked questions or led the discussion based on a topic we had agreed upon, while I observed and recorded the interviews without contributing.

Mertens (2010) claims that one of the benefits of 'focus group research is the additional insights gained from the interaction of ideas among the group participants' (2010, p.370). In particular, the opportunity to observe the older group's discussions as a non-participant was interesting as I was in a position to focus on body language and expressions more than I was able to when I was leading the discussion and encouraging contributions with the younger group.

I found it to be a very valuable exercise to discuss or listen to general ideas and emerging themes of interest to all the participants. However, one of the disadvantages of the focus group interview was that less confident students were unlikely at first to make their views heard and sometimes when they did with some encouragement, they were keen to agree with their more vocal peers. This difficulty I observed was less prevalent in both groups after the first focus group interview.

[16] 10th Dec 2009; 7th May 2010; 15th Sept. 2010; 4th May 2011
[17] 16th Dec 2009; 7th May 2010; 13th April 2011

Creative Workshops

> Creative methods are those that draw on inventive and imaginative processes, such as storytelling, drama and drawing. They can serve as constructivist tools to assist research participants to describe and analyse their experiences and give meaning to them...the aim is to facilitate reflection, debate, argument, dissent and consensus, to stimulate the articulation of multiple voices and positions, and, through the process, to lay the foundations for empowerment (Veale 2005, p.254).

Veale (2005) draws on her own research in Rwanda with children and young people, in which, creative workshops were used to engage the participants in an analysis and articulation of their perspectives. She utilised a wide variety of methods in workshops that incorporated activities which were engaged in spontaneously by children, such as storytelling and drawing. Vygotsky claimed that children's drawings can serve as a cultural tool for the mediation and transmission of experience (Vygotsky 1935, 1978). Among the methods used by Veale in her research was the use of drama, which provided the participants with opportunities to develop a story and enact it. Although she admits that this was at times frustrating and time consuming, an interesting adaptation was providing a forum to re-enact 'scenes' to explore alternative solutions to a situation through the drama (Veale 2005, p.255-266).

As part of the major case study, sixteen of the students became involved in a mentoring programme which allowed them the opportunity to meet on a weekly basis between 29th January 2010 and 14th May 2010. The group comprised of eight junior students in 2nd year and eight senior students in 5th year.[18] As part of their weekly meetings, the students suggested that they would like the opportunity to get involved in creative and/or team games or activities. As a consequence, they decided that some of their meetings would take the form of workshops and we discussed suggestions of what they might entail. I organised the first two (painting and sculpture) after which the students decided between them what they would like to do and if they wanted to repeat any activity. The workshops became an opportunity for the junior and senior students to get to know each other and engage in 'fun' and creative experiences to break down communication barriers and foster trust and team building.

[18] See Appendix M

- One workshop gave the partnerships an opportunity to create a painting between them and afterwards they formed a circle and created a team story with each student adding a new line (5th February 2010)
- Two of the workshops were facilitated by an artist who taught the groups to sculpt artistic pieces of their own choosing from 'aerated concrete blocks' (26th February and 19th March 2010[19])
- One workshop involved creating a replica of a social networking page on a poster on which all of the participants wrote 'friend messages' and contributed to profile building on each other's posters 7th May 2010).
- One workshop involved a combination of activities which included the mentoring partnerships either composing a song or choosing a piece of music which had some significance for them and presenting it to the rest of the group. Two of the partnerships on that day chose to compose a story between them instead (26th March 2010)
- Three of the workshops gave the students an opportunity to engage in drama, including mime and role play. This was the most popular activity as voted on by the majority at the end of the year. It was used as an opportunity for groups to suggest 'hypothetical' situations that included some degree of conflict. The groups alternated roles to convey different possible methods of conflict resolution or to access an alternative perspective based on an episode from their own experience. The alternative perspectives they chose to act out were those of teachers, parents or (unidentified) peers who had bullied, confronted or upset them, and on one occasion one student took on the role of a child he admitted to have bullied in an attempt to understand how the child had felt (5th March 2010; 16th April 2010; 30th April 2010)

Feedback at the end of the school year indicated that the workshops and the mentoring scheme had been a very enjoyable experience and comments both in discussion and written feedback yielded a lot of data on the impact the experience had had on the participants' self esteem and sense of belonging/attachment to the school.

[19] See appendix P

Field Work Journal/Reflective Diary

As discussed in the earlier sub-section 'Reflexivity', the use of a field work journal, which also became a reflective diary, became an important resource which helped me to reflect on and react to the activities and events that were unfolding during the process of my research. It also served as a constant reminder to me of my biases and attitudes and the fundamental assumptions that I hold, providing me with an opportunity to critically evaluate how these might influence my thinking and practice within this research. Marshall (2006) calls this process of journaling, 'the inner arc' and recommends that researchers pay attention to their assumptions, repetitions, patterns, themes, dilemmas and key phrases 'to capture inner streams of inquiry' (Marshall 2006, p.335). She also suggests pursuing these reflective processes in terms of 'exploring outer arcs' by 'actively questioning, raising issues with others, or seeking ways to test out (our) developing ideas' (Marshall 2006, p.336).

I used this resource to keep a record of factual events of each day in school, recording appointments, interviews and any observations or information that were relevant to the student participants. Once I had taken note of factual details and information that I needed to keep track of future appointments and events, I used the journal to debrief about the events of the day. Some of the days spent in St. Bernadette's Post Primary School were intense, busy and at times quite emotional so by the end of January 2010 I changed my format of recording events from note taking in a hard back journal to recordings on my digital recorder. I used the journey home by car every day to talk out loud about what had happened during the course of that day, including my impressions, personal reflections and emotions. As a source of data I found it invaluable, as journaling in this way allowed me to contextualise a number of incidents over the course of the data collection with greater insight and depth. Within the ethnographic nature of the study, my regular visits meant that I was in a position to observe developments and responses to the student voice process on a holistic level within the school and also to take opportunities to interview staff on an unscheduled basis, especially if they had a spontaneous or strong reaction to the process. As a reflective and 'debriefing' tool, journaling in this way allowed me to vent my annoyance and disappointment at negative attitudes towards the students, which, during analysis, clearly conveyed my own biases. However, as an opportunity to triangulate data results, tracking the journal entries corroborated the changes that were occurring both in the lives of the participants and on

a whole school level as indicated through interviews and feedback from students and key adult participants in the school.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF DESIGN

In total, twenty students and seventeen adults[20]contributed to this research study between October 2008 and January 2012. Fifteen of the student participants had psychological assessments indicating difficulties within the spectrum of SEBD. These included: Depression, Emotional Disturbance, Severe Emotional Disturbance, EBD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Anxiety Disorder. Five students were recommended by the principal and special educational needs co-ordinator for inclusion although they had not had formal psychological assessments but whose behaviour was disruptive or challenging and/or they were presenting with consistent and prolonged, depressed, detached, disengaged or apathetic behaviours[21].

The young people were not chosen by me to participate, rather, they were identified in their school as potential candidates for the study and following the process of obtaining consent from parents/guardians and the students themselves, if they wished to become involved, I immediately accepted them into the research process. The pilot study involved one student at primary level, the experience of which informed and guided my approach to the design of the research process. The first case study in chapter six gives details of that experience.

During preliminary interviews conducted with the post primary students (all of which took place between 18th March and 2nd April 2009) in conjunction with interviews in September 2009, together we negotiated and agreed upon the methods I would use to engage with the participants and collect data. All of the students were happy to be interviewed on a one-to-one basis at regular or staggered intervals.

Alex, who was the student in my pilot study (October 2008 – May 2010) agreed to being interviewed alone and with his class teacher when he was in 6th class in primary school. We met in his home on two occasions after he had left primary school; 14th August 2009 and 12th May 2010 to discuss his anticipated transition to post primary school at the former meeting and finally in May 2010 for feedback on his first year in the new school.

[20] See appendices S and T for breakdown
[21] More details per individual in Chapter 6

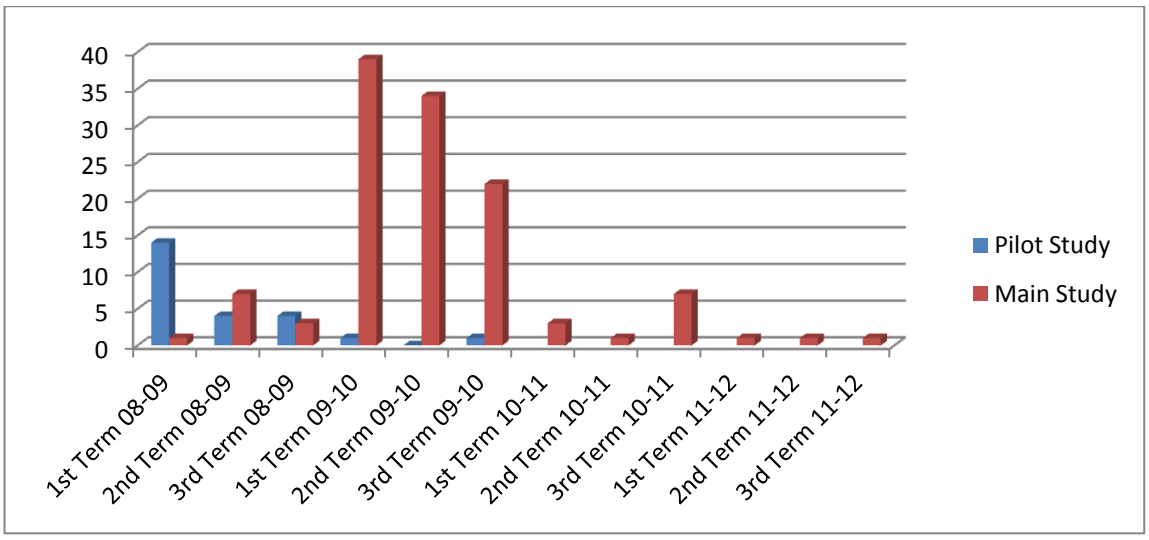

Figure 4 – Temporal Breadth of Study: Number of Days in Each School per Term

Contact with the student participants in St. Bernadette's began with preliminary interviews March/April 2009. Intensive data collection was conducted between September 2009 and May 2010 in the form of; interviews, focus groups and workshops. Follow up focus group meetings and teacher interviews occurred between September 2010 and May 2011. A final interview with two students and feedback individual interviews with teachers were conducted in January 2012[22]. Seventeen of the nineteen students in the major case study contributed to the analysis of the study and contributed feedback and themes which are presented in chapter six. Four students[23] asked to read their case studies and on the same occasion were given a summary of the final analysis to comment on and contribute to, which was facilitated by the school on 17th October 2012.

ANALYSIS

Grbich (2007) recommends a combination approach of preliminary data analysis as an ongoing process which is undertaken every time data is collected and an engagement in 'data reduction...This approach to qualitative research insists that the data should speak for themselves initially before any predesigned themes are imposed' (2007, p.25-31).

Throughout the research process, I engaged in preliminary data analysis by:

a) Consulting with the students to check my interpretation of what had been said on an individual basis or providing opportunities for discussion on emerging themes in focus groups

[22] For detailed breakdown of contact and interviews with all participants, see appendix T
[23] Pseudonyms: Cassie and Frank (from Legends), John (Lonewolf), Harry (Blood Brothers)

b) Drawing together the resources as they were compiled and looking for repetition and/or contradiction of ideas and themes

The chosen method for final analysis of the combined data was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for: '...identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.79). Within the data corpus, the data sets are drawn from the supporting material from multiple sources which provide evidence within specific themes for analysis. The themes which emerged for analysis within this study were identified as important to the participants through feedback in interviews and focus groups. 'A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.82). The themes were also identifiable from transcriptions of interviews and focus group meetings, notes taken in the absence of recordings, my reflective diary and most importantly feedback provided by the students and compiled into data sets.

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that within a research approach which purports to 'give voice' to its participants, there is the potential for the researcher to 'select, edit and deploy to border our arguments' (2006, p.80). They insist that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher sets out 'to know' and most importantly that s/he acknowledges these decisions and recognises having made them. Within the theoretical framework of this study, a commitment to student voice underpinned the approach taken both to the collection and analysis of data. Therefore, the participants primarily identified either individually or collectively the critical themes. Within my role as researcher, I compiled this evidence, searching for multiple sources to support it across the data sets and created a format to present this evidence for analysis. The initial presentation of data within 'case studies' was authenticated and approved initially by the participants and then a summary format of the analysis was offered for comment and amendment. My own assumptions that impacted on the process of analysis were influenced by the research questions I had initially set out to answer. Although these questions had been set aside to a certain degree during the data gathering process in order to allow the genuine emergence of issues which were important to the participants, their influence was more obvious in the interpretation of the data for analysis and particularly in the links drawn towards implications and conclusions relative to the data. In an attempt to prevent these

influences from generating an 'over interpretation or *adult*eration' of the data, a summary of the final discussion was offered to the participants who had volunteered to be involved in reviewing the analysis for conversation, comment and amendment.

The Process of Analysis

The process of analysis which was engaged for this study involved searching for multiple and repeated patterns of meaning to support themes identified by the student participants. Notes were kept throughout the process in a reflective journal to acknowledge repetitions of interest as they emerged across the methods of data collection. These were compared to the themes identified and submitted by all of the case study groups as data collection terminated for each group respectively. After writing the case studies and receiving feedback from the participants, I then engaged in a review of the literature influenced by the themes which had emerged from the data process.

The review of literature is presented in two chapters; the first of which (Chapter Two) was written after data collection and the second (Chapter Three) written prior to data collection. The process reflects the combination of 'deductive' and 'inductive' approaches taken to this study as the chapter written about 'Empowerment and Voice' precipitated and provided a theoretical underpinning to the approach taken to this study. This reveals a deductive assumption to the study as I began from the premise that 'student voice' represents a theoretical approach and hypothesis from which I wanted to prove or disprove the potential benefits for student participants engaging in this process. However, this approach also highlights researcher bias on embarking on a process from which there is an aspiration to prove the potential benefits of engagement in 'student voice' both for 'empowerment' and 'active agency for positive transformation'.

The first literature review chapter was written after data collection and was therefore influenced by the themes which emerged from the research process and consequently reflects the inductive nature of the study; 'a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame...this form of thematic analysis is data driven' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.83). Rutherford (2008) acknowledges that a general inductive approach to analysis can often involve a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches in order to produce a systematic and straightforward procedure for analysing

data that is in part at least, guided by the research questions while at the same time prioritising the voice of the participants.

Concluding Analysis

The analysis of data is presented as major and sub themes which draw links between the data from this study and the literature. This discussion seeks to determine if the data supports or contradicts earlier research or contributes any new perspectives. These positions inform the final conclusions and discussion relevant to the initial research questions and implications for future policy, practice and research.

Credibility, Authenticity and Dependability

Mertens (2009) points out that Guba and Lincoln's (1989) concept of credibility as the qualitative parallel to validity in quantitative research, informs how we think about measurement and data collection in a transformative sense. The essence of credibility is that it must be demonstrable between the way research participants perceive and construct their realities and how these are portrayed by the researcher. She recommends strategies taken from Guba and Lincoln (1989) to demonstrate credibility in qualitative research (Mertens 2009, p.195 and 237):

- **Prolonged and substantial engagement**
  Periods of consultation with the participants in this study ranged from a minimum of one year to contact over a period of three years
- **Peer debriefing**
  I chose to discuss the process of the research with my supervisors and with an impartial 'critical friend'
- **Progressive subjectivity**
  Persistent self-reflection through the use of reflective journal entries, which were used to evaluate subjectivity, biases, hypotheses and emotions throughout the process
- **Multiple data sources**
  Individual interviews, focus groups and reflective journal

Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) define 'authenticity' as the presentation of a balanced view of all perspectives, values and beliefs. In order to ensure that this example of student voice research was conducted as a model of consultative participation, the

students were engaged from the earliest opportunity in negotiating the methods used to acquire their insights, views and opinions. Strategies and interventions that were used or trialled during the process emerged from interviews and focus group meetings. Preliminary findings and emergent themes were discussed in focus groups and/or checked for interpretation with individuals during interviews. The individual case studies (Pilot – Alex and Lonewolf – John); pairing (Blood Brothers – Harry and Ian); and the two group case studies (Legends – 6 students; Jigsaw – 10 students) were all engaged in contributing feedback and analysis with the exception of two students in 'Jigsaw' who were not attending the school on the occasion of the last focus group meeting. Some of the students asked to read the final account of their case studies; Lonewolf, Blood Brothers and two students from Legends, which were made available to them for comment.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify 'dependability' as the qualitative parallel to 'reliability' in quantitative research. Reliability of quantitative data is defined as a measure of stability or consistency in a measurement instrument (Mertens 2009, p.234). However, in qualitative data, insights based on data can change as 'the picture becomes more complex' and therefore details of data collection need to be tracked 'providing a publicly inspectable audit trail of when and how understandings change based on the data that are available at any point in time' (Mertens 2009, p.236). This audit trail is central to the case studies presented in chapter six and the relevant appendices to support.

The motivation for undertaking this research was to learn from children with SEBD within their expert role with respect to the knowledge and understanding of what it is like to be a student in a particular school, (Cooper, 1996; James et al., 1998; Gersch, 2001; Leitch et al., 2005); what they identified as supports and obstacles; and to ascertain the impact on the participants when their voices are listened to and they are encouraged to become 'active agents' in transforming their educational experience through this project. Within the context of the engagement with 'student voice', I also wanted to determine the impact on the extended school community and based on the analysis and implications of this study, consider the implications from this for the development of the inclusive school.

This process required credibility, authenticity and dependability in the presentation of a transparent engagement and representation of the children and young people in this study.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the methodological approaches to this research process as Ethnographic, Narrative and Case Study and the data collection methods; interviews, focus groups, workshops and field work journal/reflective diary. Triangulation of methods within data collection enhances research credibility (Janesick 2000; Patton 2002; Scaife 2004), and consistency of evidence across sources of data (Mertens and McLaughlin 2004). This process is imbued with a commitment to present the views, opinions and stories of the student participants, without adulteration or over-interpretation and the stance that 'unintended outcomes are as valid and interesting in research as intended outcomes'[24].

From the outset, this research process was mindful of the uniqueness of each individual participating and respectful of their preference with regard to methods and frequency of communication. The study was designed to be flexible and responsive to the input and needs of the individual student participants and fundamentally to facilitate meaningful acknowledgement of that input through an experience of 'authentic listening'. This was achieved through follow up between interviews and conversations on stories shared, opinions expressed and when suggestions were made by the students on what they believed might support their behaviour, engagement and learning, feedback was sought on whether or not their ideas might be trialled or used. Most importantly, if it was believed that their suggestions were not feasible or appropriate at that time, a sincere response and explanation was ascertained and shared with the students from the relevant parties in their school.

In accordance with the ontological and epistemological stance of this theoretical framework, the most significant knowledge that informed the case studies and data analysis in this research was that which emerged as pertinent, 'real' and highlighted by the student participants. Opportunities were facilitated for the participants to develop active agency both in their response to the experience of the process and in driving the stages of the data collection. The position of this thesis is that a commitment to student voice requires active consultation of the student participants at every stage of the process from design to analysis and in accordance with that standpoint, the students were invited to contribute to the various stages of this process from choice of data collection tools as

[24] Appendix U

they related to each individual participant, to design of emergent interventions and stages of analysis from preliminary identification of themes through to the final stages of thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 6 – THE JOURNEY

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter is an outline of the contextual information relevant to this research project in the form of descriptive case studies. It begins in Section 1 with a discussion of the pilot study, followed in Section 2 by a delineation of the research process in one post-primary school. The aim of this chapter is to situate the case studies within their respective timelines, introduce the student participants, gatekeepers and other relevant adults with respect to the data gathering process and to recount the story of the journey which took place within the research. Thematic analysis of the data generated from these case studies is presented in chapter six.

SECTION 1

Case Study 1 – The Pilot

The pilot study for this research project began in October 2008 with one 11 year old boy, Alex, who was in 6th class in primary school (Cliff National School) at that time. His parents, Eileen and Kenneth, had contacted a colleague of mine because they were concerned about his behaviour and particularly worried that he might be expelled from school. My colleague subsequently suggested they contact me and I spoke over the phone at length with Eileen on 16th and 18th October. I met both parents on 20th October and after they had spoken with Alex and he had agreed to meet me, they introduced me to him in their home on the following day, 21st October 2008.

During my first meeting with Alex I asked if he would be interested in working with me over the course of the school year to help me understand his experience of school and most importantly, to learn from him about what could improve that experience. He agreed to participate in my research and gave his consent for my attendance on his behalf at a forthcoming conference meeting which was being held to discuss his future at the school.

Background Details

Alex was born in 1996 and has one sister who is two years younger than him. He commenced playschool at the age of 2 and appeared to be happy there until he complained to his mother one day that the playschool teacher had hit him and subsequently, Eileen confronted the teacher. The outcome was fractious, with threats of civil action from both parties until finally, Alex was taken out of playschool by mutual consent. After that, he attended Montessori school. On many occasions while he was there, he hit out at his friends, however, when he was reprimanded or confronted about this behaviour he tended to get very upset, especially at the idea that anyone would believe he had hurt a friend intentionally.

He began to have problems at home from the age of 3. In May 2001, Eileen visited the local healthcare nurse and said that she wanted her to put Alex into the adoption or foster care system as she could not cope with him any longer. At that time he was fighting, kicking and hitting out at home; his behaviour was aggressive and upsetting. Family outings were often cut short because of arguments and physical outbursts but when Alex spent time alone with his father his behaviour was much calmer and rarely confrontational. Both parents agreed that he had a more positive relationship with his father and he was more likely to do what Kenneth asked of him. However, his relationship with his mother was fraught with mutual distress and belligerence and he constantly disobeyed her. In response to Eileen's distress, Alex was referred to a consultant psychiatrist for assessment and he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in July 2001. Eileen also has a diagnosis of ADHD. The psychiatrist recommended that the family take part in Marte Meo[25] therapy to improve family interaction. After that diagnosis, Alex had biannual visits to review his medication and ADHD symptoms. However, a rotation system within the health care clinic meant that he was attended to by a different psychiatrist at least every two years. Alex was prescribed Ritalin within months of his ADHD diagnosis; 30 mg on school days and 20 mg at weekends and holidays.

[25] 'Marte Meo is a video-based programme that provides concrete and practical information to parents and carers on supporting the social, emotional and communication development of children, adolescents and adults. It offers support and advice for parents of children who are experiencing developmental delay, behavioural difficulties, have a diagnosis of autism, Asperger's, ADHD or because of other social or family problems' (source: http://dcu.ie/news/2011/oct/s1011k.shtml, accessed 20th January 2012)

When the family attended an information day prior to Alex's enrolment in their local primary school, (School 1), Alex told the principal of the school to 'fuck off' when she tried to reprimand him. At the recommendation of the psychiatrist who had assessed Alex, the school provided him with access to a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) until 3rd class. The withdrawal of the SNA by the Special Education Needs Officer (SENO) led to concern on the part of his parents and some confusion with regard to his eligibility which was ongoing for the remainder of his time in primary school.

From preschool through to 5th class in primary school, Alex's behaviour was sporadically aggressive and volatile but it was agreed between his parents and teachers that with the passing of each year in school, he became progressively more volatile and his behaviour more challenging. He had a good relationship with Ms. Damson, his class teacher for 3rd and 4th class, who was aware that he was being bullied; 'most particularly in relation to being poor and small'(Eileen, 20th October 2008).

At the age of 9, Alex attempted suicide in his home. This led to a period of counselling organised with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) as well as sharing of information between his parents and the school especially in relation to bullying incidents experienced by Alex and/or aggressive outbursts and behaviour perpetuated by him. Ms. Damson began a system of letter writing from her students to her, to highlight if they were being bullied or if they were aware of anyone else being bullied. Alex availed of this opportunity to keep his teacher informed and was commended for his initiative when he wrote a letter to the Board of Management about bullying in the school. The positive response to his letter may have influenced his decision to write another letter in October 2008 which was part of a series of events leading to: 1) a conference meeting to discuss Alex's future in the school; 2) his participation in this pilot study.

6th Class

From September 2008 a new teacher to Cliff National School, Ms. Caramel, took over Alex's class for their final year at primary level. Alex disliked his new teacher intensely and believed that she 'hated' him because he had ADHD. This impression arose from an introductory session between teacher and students where Ms. Caramel circulated around the class asking each student to share some personal information with her. When she came to Alex he told her that he had ADHD and according to him (Alex, 21st October

2008), she appeared quite agitated at this. Subsequently, both Ms. Caramel[26] and Alex admitted that they did not get on and their relationship deteriorated rapidly over the first half term of school. He wrote a number of unpleasant notes to her in which he expressed his dislike of her in very graphic terms. On one occasion, Alex stood up in class and called her a 'bitch' and told her to take a 'chill pill'. Following her response to this behaviour, which included meeting with his mother Eileen and reporting his behaviour to the school principal, Ms. Amber, Alex wrote a letter of complaint about his new teacher to the Board of Management. The letter exposed his anger at how he felt he was being picked on and was vitriolic in his request that she should be dismissed from her position. At the same time, Alex was being bullied quite regularly in school and his mother reported that he had 'nasty' bruises on his arms (Eileen, 20th October 2008).

As a consequence of all these factors, Alex's parents were notified that their presence was required at a conference meeting to be held on 3rd November 2008 to discuss his future at the school. Consent was also given from the school for the attendance of the child psychiatrist and clinical nurse from the local health care centre who were both familiar with Alex. Following my first meeting with Alex and with his permission, it was agreed that I should also attend the meeting as his advocate, that I might ascertain multiple perspectives of his situation on his behalf.

School Meeting; 3rd November 2008

Present with me at the meeting to discuss Alex's future at Cliff National School: the principal (Ms. Amber), 6th class teacher (Ms. Caramel), 3rd/4th class teacher (Ms. Damson), Learning Support/Special Needs Coordinator (Ms. Brown), resource teacher (Ms. Emerald), parents (Eileen and Kenneth), child psychiatrist (Dr. Andrews) and clinical nurse from CAMHS, (Ms. Clarke).

It was agreed at that meeting to pursue alternative strategies to exclusion to help Alex overcome his difficulties in school, which included allowing me to become involved in this process by offering support both to Alex and his teacher as we pursued solutions that might help him engage more positively in the school environment. All parties at the meeting consented to my request for access to Alex in school to withdraw him from class for interview and to observe him in class or in the playground. The request was premised

[26] Confirmed by Ms. Caramel at school conference meeting on 3rd November 2008

by consent to pursue this application, which had already been given to me from Alex at our first meeting in his home. Ms. Caramel, Ms. Brown and Ms. Emerald agreed to work with me to support Alex especially in response to any initiatives or suggestions which might arise from his engagement in this consultative process in the pursuit of more positive behaviour for learning and a better atmosphere between Alex, his peers and his teachers. The child psychiatrist was supportive of Alex's participation in this research and insisted that 'it can only help!' (Dr. Andrews, 3rd Nov 2008). She also agreed to write a letter in support of the school's application for SNA hours to be allocated to Alex[27]. As a consequence of the meeting, it was agreed that Alex should be allowed to stay at the school, however, any repeat of preceding behaviour towards Ms. Caramel, in particular the name calling or unpleasant notes, would result in exclusion.

A Process of Consultation and Participation

During our initial meetings, Alex's attitude towards school and particularly his main teacher was consistently negative. Further discussion elicited aggressive language and reaction but most apparent was a consistently hurt and depressed tone when chatting about every matter related to school and learning. Alex and I met on a weekly basis between 5th November and 19th December 2008, and on eight occasions between 14th January and 10th June 2009. Ms. Caramel attended five of those meetings over the course of the year. I also conducted 5 observations of Alex in class and two in the playground between November 2008 and June 2009.

On 19th November, Alex and Ms. Caramel talked about their difficult relationship and both promised to be more tolerant and respectful of each other. At Alex's suggestion, it was agreed at that meeting that they would write a letter which they would read aloud at the next meeting to explain 'what's her problem with me an' why I don't like her an' em...if we think of stuff to sort it' (Alex, 19th Nov 2008). It was agreed that this might be a good opportunity to determine how misunderstandings may have arisen in their relationship and to make suggestions about how they could work together in the future. Ms. Caramel suggested that they should make a list identifying areas in which she and Alex believed he was having difficulties in school with a view to addressing how to support him. At our meeting on 26th November 2008, they took turns reading their letter to the other aloud in which they both asked for 'respect' and 'to be listened to'. In their

[27] The response to this application resulted in a Special Education Needs Officer (SENO) visiting the school in April and agreeing to the allocation of an SNA to Alex for his transition to post-primary school.

observation notes, each identified areas where Alex appeared to have particular difficulties that had led to aggressive outbursts or confrontation between Alex and his peers or Alex and his teacher. Interestingly, they had noted the same issues but Alex had the greatest insight into why these particular situations had arisen. Alex's teacher was struck by the fact that he was very quick to point out examples of his own challenging behaviour but astounded when she realised that quite often some precipitative action or situation that she was not aware of had arisen first. In most cases and to some varying degree, the triggers he identified that led to outbursts and/or confrontations were:

Frustration;

- because he hadn't understood an instruction fully
- because he felt he wasn't being listened to
- because he was conscious of his own lack of organisational skills
- because he had achieved something or done something well but nobody had noticed

Alex and I discussed specific examples of the frustration he felt and the most resounding image I got from this discussion was how exhausting it was for him to feel the way he did, especially when he was angry or got into trouble or a confrontational situation (26th November 2008). He was very conscious of his diagnosis of ADHD and prefaced a lot of his explanations around difficulties he was having with; 'because of my ADHD'. He explained that because his mother had the same diagnosis, there was a lot of conversation around the topic at home. I asked him to explain what it was like to have ADHD and why he believed that this condition was responsible for a lot of his difficulties, especially in school:

> Because I have ADHD, teachers think I'm gonna be trouble like even before they know me...maybe it's true *sometimes* cos I know I can lose the head. But then that's cos everyone thinks I'm bold an' like everything's my fault.....I have ADHD and it's a pain in the hole but as well as that, *I'm me* [28]
>
> (Alex, 26th November 2008).

Alex compiled and wrote a number of suggestions of what he felt he could do and what he thought his teacher could do to help both of them avoid confrontational situations particularly related to frustration and misunderstandings. One of his suggestions was that Ms. Caramel find a way to make timed exercises easier for him as he invariably found

[28] Italics in this passage indicate emphatic tone

that when they were given specific short periods to complete an exercise or task in class, quite often, he was still thinking about what he had to do when the others had finished and time was up. At Alex's suggestion (26th November 2008), his teacher agreed to use an egg timer which was placed in close proximity to him as his own personal timekeeping device. She began changing the timed activities into multiples of three minutes to accommodate this experiment and to her astonishment; Alex wholeheartedly engaged with it and found that this tangible device helped him both to stay on task and to complete it on time. Ms. Caramel concluded that this visual aid was more appealing than the face of the clock on the wall but it was also important not to underestimate the satisfaction he felt when he realised that this experiment had been implemented as a direct result of his own suggestion and concern (from feedback meeting with Alex and Ms. Caramel on 25th February 2009). Alex, quite evidently, was empowered by the fact that his identification of a problem had led to this solution.

Alex also identified his own difficulties with organisation which constantly led to reprimands and arguments both from and with his main teacher and his resource teacher, Ms. Emerald, who he worked with for half an hour every day, Monday to Friday. In order to help him with this and to provide opportunity for positive behaviour acknowledgment, we created a sheet with Alex (26th November 2008) as a daily check list to complete with his learning support teacher which included;

- punctuality
- homework
- materials
- attention
- new learning

Each day Alex and Ms. Emerald ticked the boxes to indicate the efforts he was making to arrive on time with the specific books and materials he needed for the different lessons, his homework completed from the previous day and a positive effort to pay attention and learn something new. If he didn't succeed in any or all, the trialled strategy dictated that he ***wasn't reprimanded*** but simply the sheet wouldn't include a tick in the appropriate box or boxes. To begin with, a reward system was offered in which he chose an activity that he and his resource teacher would concentrate on for the 2nd half of their Friday class. Alex was very excited about the daily check list and as we monitored them over a period of three weeks coming up to the school break for Christmas, there was a very obvious

improvement in the number of ticks on the daily sheets[29]. Interestingly, the sheets were used from the beginning of the new term in January until Easter without any rewards on offer but Alex continued to make consistent efforts to keep up the standards on the check list. In the final term of school (20th April – 25th June 2009), the check lists were completed on a weekly basis rather than daily and both Alex and his learning support teacher agreed that the excellent efforts he had been making in the previous term had been maintained (Alex and Ms. Emerald, 10th June 2009).

Alex and I sat down with Ms. Caramel on 25th February 2009 to review his progress and to discuss any further interventions that they might agree on. He explained to us that sometimes he could feel a burning sensation rising from his tummy to his head and that when this happened he wanted to throw something or kick something very hard. Both Alex and his teacher agreed that when he felt this happening to him, he should signal to his teacher by putting his hand up and turning it in a specific fashion so that she would understand how he was feeling. Her response to their agreed signal was to give Alex a task which always involved leaving the classroom for a few minutes. These tasks varied from carrying a note to either the learning support teacher, Ms. Brown or the principal, Ms. Amber, who would allow him to spend some time in her room until he felt calmer or bring him for a walk or to the gym hall if it was unoccupied until he was ready to rejoin his class. Everyone involved in this intervention, including Alex, reported to me, (13th May 2009) that this had proven to be very successful with fewer incidents of confrontation or inappropriate behaviour in class as a result.

The last intervention was very simple but particularly important to Alex. When I had met him first, he was very negative about school and believed that nobody liked him, including his classmates. There was only one boy in the class he was friendly with and he had made the point that he always felt a bit lost and more vulnerable whenever this boy wasn't reasonably close at hand. I discovered that Ms. Caramel had a policy of changing the students' seating arrangements on a monthly basis and as the students sat in groups of six, Alex asked his teacher to help him with this concern (4th March 2009). She agreed to accommodate him and arranged in her monthly seating plans for March, April, May and June 2009 that the two boys would always sit within the same group although in different seats. Alex claimed that this arrangement had given him renewed confidence (feedback

[29] Feedback on last Friday before Christmas 2008, 19th December

from Alex on 10th June 2009) and as it was managed very discreetly, remained unobserved or noticed by any of his peers, including Alex's friend himself.

I conducted interviews with Alex and his teacher, Ms. Caramel on 3rd and 10th June 2009 in which both were adamant that the school year had turned out to be much better than either had anticipated in October/November. Ms. Caramel provided written feedback on her experience of the pilot study which she emailed to me on 25th June 2009. She explained that the position of 5th/6th class teacher in the school had been her first as a qualified teacher. She had felt quite intimidated by Alex earlier in the year especially because of his diagnosis of ADHD as she had not taught a student with this condition before:

> I knew a little about ADHD from my teacher training but only enough to dread having a student with this in my class. To be honest, *Alex*[30] was the epitome of my worst nightmare because he was so rude and confrontational especially in the first half term of the year. When I look back on that experience though, I'm ashamed to say that a lot of his aggression towards me was probably as a direct result of my suspicion and dread of him from the first day that he told me out straight that he had ADHD (Ms. Caramel, 25th June 2009).

Ms. Caramel confessed that once she had the opportunity to get to know him, that situation had changed completely and instead she felt that she owed the child a debt of gratitude for showing her how to help him in the classroom. She also made the point that having the opportunity to discuss her concerns and worries in the context of this research and then to analyse and track the impact of interventions, had boosted her own confidence (Ms. Caramel 25th June 2009). Alex's parents, the learning support teacher and the principal (contacted between 27th May and 3rd June 2009) all agreed that what had begun as a rather destructive relationship between teacher and student had turned into a very positive one for both. Alex agreed with this assessment ***but*** was quick to point out that his abiding memory of primary school would be a very negative one. Despite this, he believed that his confidence and optimism had grown as a result of his involvement in devising strategies to help him manage his own behaviour and learning (Alex, 10th June 2009).

[30] Name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity

Post Primary School

In September 2009, Alex began his first year in St Andrew's Post Primary School. We met on 14th August to discuss how he felt about the move and he admitted to being very nervous especially as he did not know any students going to the same school and he was concerned that he had difficulty making friends. He was also anxious because he had not increased in height. As his small stature had been a recurring theme in the teasing and taunting he had experienced amongst his peers at primary school, he was worried that he might be a target again. We spoke about what he might do if this happened and he told me that he knew from having attended an information evening at St Andrew's with his parents earlier in the year that there was a buddy system organised by the school between groups of first year students and 6th year prefects. He indicated that he would probably be more comfortable speaking to the prefect assigned to him than one of the teachers if the occasion arose (14th August 2009). We agreed to meet at the end of his first year at post primary level so that he could give me some feedback on the year and we could also discuss and identify together the most important themes from our work together.

Our last meeting was on 12th May 2010 during which Alex summed up the experience of his first year in post-primary school:

> I'm gettin' on grand now. It was hard in the beginning because I didn't know anyone and I didn't trust any of the teachers, any of the adults at all. Primary school was a horrible time for me, nobody ever listened to me – not until the end when things came alright with *Miss Caramel* [31]but they were rank with her in the beginning 'n then she listened to me and we finished up alright but that was because of the stuff we did with you really. I was afraid when I started in secondary school...afraid of everything, like making friends cos I'm not good at making friends and I was afraid that there'd be someone like *Graham*[32] who'd make my life hell bullying me 'n all, especially cos I'm shorter than everyone in my year. And then I ***was*** bullied 'n I was really sad 'n scared, 'specially cos no one seemed to care and cos I thought that this was it, this is the way it's going to be (Alex, 12th May 2010 – italics to indicate emphatic inflection in tone).

Alex unfortunately was bullied by one particular boy in his class and had not been met with the support he had anticipated from the prefects. This had made him very depressed and troubled and one day in the school yard when the bully came after him again he decided to hit back and punched the boy in the face. Because the boy was bloodied from the impact, their class tutor and the principal brought the boys to the principal's office for interview and punishment was levied at Alex while the other boy was comforted and

[31] Name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity
[32] Name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity

taken care of. Alex was subsequently suspended for two days. His fear and distrust of the adults around him was perpetuated by this as he felt unprotected until he found an ally amongst the adults in the school. I asked him how this had happened:

> Well one of the girls in my class was being bullied by the same creep and her mother talked to the school guidance teacher 'n I think she mentioned my name as well cos then *Miss Fern*[33] asked me if I was having any problems 'n she said I could talk to her about anything. I didn't believe her in the beginning but she's really nice and she kept talking to me. She was really patient 'n all and then eventually I told her about this boy in the class and what he was doing and she told me I was very brave and that it wasn't my fault and she would deal with it (Alex, 10th May 2010).

The school guidance counsellor, Ms. Fern, acted as an advocate for Alex and explained to the principal and his class tutor what had been happening for him and how he had been afraid and unsupported. Alex was reassured that if he was ever afraid of anything that he would be listened to and most importantly that he would be believed in future. She met with him on a weekly basis for regular chats about everything that was happening in school until they both agreed that he was happier and stronger and meetings could gradually be reduced.

With her help, some of the initiatives he had orchestrated as checks on his own behaviour and engagement at primary school level were trialled for a short period between three of his teachers at his new school until he felt that he did not need them again.

Finally, from my first initial meeting with Alex and his parents and through 6th class in primary school, there had been a lot of preoccupation with the fact that Alex had ADHD. Both Alex and his mother had attributed the experience and perception of ADHD as the reason for most difficulties he experienced and often the explanation for challenging behaviour perpetuated by him. I was curious to know if this was still the case and therefore our interview concluded with his thoughts around this topic:

> Me: Last year in primary school you spoke a lot about having ADHD and you believed then that ADHD and in particular, other people's opinions of ADHD, were the reason why you were having problems in school. Did it have any effect on you this year in secondary school?
> Alex: Not as much...I kinda had to figure it out. I have a friend John[34] an' he's dyslexic. He says it's not a big deal...he's just a bit different that's all. It's the same with me really. I know I'm a bit different and if everyone else knows and understands then it's not a big deal...well that's what I think. I don't think about it anymore,' (10th May 2010).

[33] Name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity
[34] Name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity

Alex's insights into his own circumstances and challenges are ultimately what initiated changes within his school environment both in primary and post primary school, once he was given the opportunity to take responsibility for his own engagement and behaviour for learning. When he was given a 'voice', adults in both schools were surprised at his honesty and intuition, which consequently impacted on the building of trust and positive relationships between him and significant adults in his schools. Alex, when empowered to do so, was the primary instigator of positive transformation within his own educational experience.

Conclusion

Alex and I identified the most important themes from this study (10th May 2010):
The significance of;

- having opportunities to succeed and being noticed when making an effort
- having a positive relationship with at least one of the teachers, especially someone who trusts and respects the student
- being listened to and knowing that there will be a response even if it is not always the response the student is hoping for; what is most important is being heard and acknowledged
- perspectives of ability/labels and the negative connotations that can be generated either by internalising those perspectives on the part of the student or fear of generalised assumptions on the part of the teacher (this theme was reiterated at our last meeting but first introduced by Alex on 10th June 2009 and supported in written feedback by his primary school teacher [already cited from 25th June 2009]).

These are reoccurring themes within the major case study, however, further themes emerge for analysis in the next section and all of these are interrogated in chapter six. Alex's sentiments and explanation of what it was like to have ADHD from one of our earlier interviews[35]was reflected in the title of the study which I introduced to the participants as ***The I'm Me Project*** with ***I'm Me*** serving both as an acronym for 'Inclusive Methods in Mainstream Education' as well as a reminder of the uniqueness of every young person, notwithstanding labels.

[35] 'I have ADHD and it's a pain in the hole but as well as that, I'm me' (Alex, 3rd December 2008)

SECTION 2

Introduction to the Major Case Study

While still engaged with the pilot research project, I set out to find one post primary school within which I could locate the major study for my research. I initiated contact with a number of post-primary schools by writing letters to principals and Boards of Management outlining the aims of my study and requesting opportunities to set up interviews so that I could introduce myself and answer any questions or concerns arising from my request[36]. The schools targeted were co-educational, second level schools within a radius of 15 to 50 kilometres from my home. I visited the first three schools that invited me for interview and chose to conduct research in one of the schools, St. Bernadette's Post Primary School, for the following reasons:

- The enthusiasm expressed by the principal and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to engage in the student voice project
- The concerns which they expressed in relation to challenging behaviour at the school
- Identification of a number of students at the school who were at risk of educational and social exclusion.
- The willingness on the part of the principal and SENCO to facilitate access to the students and staff in the school and their resolve to participate and acknowledge the consultative process necessary within student voice research

General Details about St. Bernadette's Post Primary School

This school is an urban based, co-educational, DEIS[37]post-primary school with a wide social and geographic catchment area, enrolling children from families in the small town and the rural outskirts. Over the three years of my involvement with the school, the total enrolment figure of students ranged between 547 and 562 with the number of teachers increasing from 41 to 42, not including the principal and deputy principal. The percentage of students identified with special educational needs (SEN) varied between 12 and 16 percent, with an average of 14% across the intake noted between 2008 and 2011. There

[36] See appendixB
[37] Designated disadvantaged status by the Department of Education and Skills within the 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS) Action Plan for Inclusion

were five full time SNAs attached to the school while I was conducting research but this allocation was reduced to four in 2011because of recent cutbacks directed from the Department of Education and Skills (DES). The mean average percentage of students at St. Bernadette's Post Primary School who had been identified with SEBD after psychological assessment for the duration of this study was 5%[38] according to records kept by the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO).

Students at this school are assigned to their class groups in 1st year within a mixed ability setting. They remain within that class group with a designated tutor for the Junior Cycle[39] until completion of the Junior Certificate examinations. The class tutor is responsible for: daily registration, monitoring the use of the School Journal and checking attendance and punctuality.

Before the end of their third year in school, students indicate their preference to pursue Transition Year[40], Leaving Certificate Applied[41] (LCA) or the Established/Traditional Leaving Certificate (TLC) Programme. Students who indicate an interest in the Transition Year (TY) programme are interviewed and chosen on the basis of a number of criteria, including their behavioural record. Senior cycle students[42] are divided into generic class groups on a mixed ability basis but are separated for some subjects depending on whether they are pursuing honours or ordinary level for the leaving certificate examinations. Each class group is also assigned a tutor for the duration of the senior cycle. Up until and during my period of research with the school it was customary for the majority of students with SEN who had been allocated resource hours during the junior cycle to transfer into the LCA programme, especially if they were exempt from studying the Irish language or had sat 'Foundation Level' Mathematics in the Junior Certificate exams.

'Year Heads' are assigned to every year group in the school and 'Co-ordinators' to the Transition Year and LCA 5th and 6th year students. These incumbents are responsible for pastoral and behavioural issues specific to students in their care and liaise with other teachers, parents/guardians and the principal or deputy principal when necessary. The

[38] This number is predominantly made up of students who have been assessed with ADD/ADHD, Mild to Moderate General Learning Difficulties or Specific Learning Difficulties such as Dyspraxia or Dyslexia identified with co-morbid EBD
[39] Usually 3 year duration unless a student needs to repeat a year
[40] Limited number of places available, one class group of up to 24 students only per year
[41] Appendix V
[42] Usually 2 year duration unless a student needs to repeat a year

Year Heads are responsible for the same year group from when the students arrive in 1st year to when they graduate at the end of 6th year with the exception of students who repeat a year or choose to take Transition Year, as the latter become the responsibility of a different Year Head once they proceed into 5th year.

Other posts of responsibility within the school include that of the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO), the Learning Support teacher (LST), the School Guidance Counsellor (SGC) and the Home School Community Liaison Officer (HSCLO). The three adults who had the most consistent involvement and interest in this research at the school were; the Principal, Ms. Gray, the SENCO, Ms. Greene and the SGC, Mr. Ash. However, with the progress of this study, consultation of students as part of the study at this school impacted on most of the Year Heads, teachers and SNAs to greater or lesser degrees, which will be elaborated upon later in this chapter; The Glass House.

Gatekeepers

At our first meeting on 11th December 2008, Ms. Gray explained that she would be very interested in my conducting research in her school because of her concerns about what she described as a 'prevalent culture of challenging behaviour'. She explained;

> This is common amongst students here identified with a variety of emotional and behavioural difficulties especially associated with SEN. What also concerns me is that there has been a history of low expectations for students with special educational needs. The perception of this school within the locality is that we accommodate children who don't have great ambition academically. Traditionally, a lot of our students with SEN don't stay beyond the legal school-leaving age (Ms. Gray, 11th December '08).

As a new principal within her second year in this post, she stressed that one of her goals was to tackle the 'negatively charged' atmosphere in the school. She believed this atmosphere to be as a result of the pervasiveness of 'disturbing behaviour in the school' as well as the sense of 'negative identity' which existed amongst a large proportion of the student population. This was reinforced by the perception of the school as one which was chosen by those who could not get into a better school. She described the model of special needs provision which had been pursued prior to her arrival at the school to be one of 'sympathy' rather than 'empowerment and learning'.

The SENCO, Ms. Greene, who had been appointed at the same time as Ms. Gray, was also present at this meeting and reinforced the concerns expressed by the principal,

especially in relation to attitudes around students with SEN which she described as 'patronising and unhelpful' amongst more than half of the teaching staff at the school (Ms. Greene, 11th December 2008). However, Ms. Gray emphasised that Ms. Greene was making strides to address this and had invited representatives from the DES as well as Special Education Support Services to give input and guidance around SEN provision to the entire teaching staff as a whole school response during in-service training days.

Ms. Gray conveyed a commitment to facilitating this student voice research project by promising to provide access to students and staff as necessary for the duration and also to listen to any suggestions that might arise from consultation with the students.

Ms. Greene agreed to identify students with an assessment of SEBD within the school that she believed might benefit from participation in the research project. As I had indicated that I would like to begin the intensive data gathering from September 2009 for one year and follow up with a less intensive schedule during 2010-2011, it was decided that I should focus on students who would not be pursuing state exams in 2010. She pointed out that most of the students on her records with a formal assessment of EBD also had co-morbid special educational needs. The school was entitled to two NEPS assessments per year but because there was a waiting list, she had some students in her care on a discretionary basis who had not been formally assessed but whose behaviour suggested they might have SEBD. She described these behaviours on the spectrum from severe anxiety and low self esteem through to hyperactivity, oppositional and disturbing behaviour. Both Ms. Gray and Ms. Greene were anxious that I might include some of these students in the study as;

> I can think of at least 2 students in 1st year and 3 in 3rd year right now who don't have any kind of formal supports or indeed special needs but are in real danger of exclusion. With my other hat on from my last position[43], I am quite convinced that some of these children are presenting with behaviours that require supports and I believe that with assessment we would probably learn that most of them have specific difficulties related to emotional disturbance. I have folders for some of these children on my desk that are thick with complaints and behaviour reports with no one prepared to speak for them, not even their parents. I'm genuinely at my wits end about some of these kids and I don't believe we should give up of them, (Ms. Gray 11th December 2008).

With my agreement, these children were also included for consideration. Ms. Greene then wrote to parents and guardians of twenty two students, of whom twelve in total were

[43] Ms Gray had established the Special Educational Needs/Learning Support department in her previous school and worked first as a Remedial teacher and then SENCO there over a period of twenty years

considered by her to be at serious risk of educational and/or social exclusion. In the letters she asked for consent to allow me conduct preliminary interviews with them before the end of that school year[44] (2008-2009). 21 out of 22 letters were returned granting me permission to make initial contact with students.

Preliminary Interviews

I met with 21 students for preliminary interviews between Wednesday, 18th March and Thursday, 2nd April 2009. All of the interviews were similar in format as they were intended as introductory meetings and were primarily to explain the purpose of the research, answer any questions the students might have and determine if they would be interested in participating. I clarified with the students that I wanted to learn from each one of them about their experience of school, in particular what they would identify as supports and obstacles to learning and participation and how they might engage in positively improving and transforming that experience where necessary. I also explained that it was important to this study to discover what impact their engagement in a study of this nature would have on them and the wider school community. I advised them that the format of the data gathering would be informed by their input and guided by the progress of the research. The name of the study, ***I'm Me Project***, was introduced to every candidate for participation at the preliminary interviews to general approval. However, one student pointed out that she did not want to be part of a project; 'I don't like the word project, sounds like something bad. But I like '***I'm Me'***...that's cool, yeah' (Cassie, 31st March 2009). From then the study became known as ***'The I'm Me Programme'***.

I took the opportunity with each student to ask how they were getting on in school and of those that were communicative to greater or lesser degrees, eighteen shared that they had difficult relationships with all or most of their teachers and expressed general comments around disinterest/dislike/distress pertaining to their overview of school life. One student refused to speak to me or sit down in the office which was provided to me as a venue for these preliminary interviews and for the duration of the study[45] . He was agitated and aggressive and began kicking the wall and legs of the desk. It transpired that he had been searched earlier that day and a selection of drugs for sale and distribution in the school

[44] Appendix C
[45] The office is an annex to the Resource room. The door was left ajar throughout the interviews in order that we were in view of the SENCO who was working at her desk during these sessions. However, the conversations were out of earshot.

had been found in his socks and underwear. The reason he was still in the school for his allocated time slot for interview (26th March 2009) was because the SGC was waiting for a family member and a member of the Garda Síochána to take him from the school for a blood test which subsequently confirmed that he had taken *methamphetamine* within the previous few days. For these and other anti social behaviours he was consequently expelled from the school.

All of the other interviews transpired without incident, however, two of the students made no eye contact with me during our meetings and showed little enthusiasm to participate in the research although they listened quietly while I explained the purpose of the study. Following the Easter break (April 3rd to 20th 2009) and after giving some thought to the prospect of their involvement, both forwarded their written consent to me through the SENCO. Of the 21 students I met over three weeks, 20 agreed to participate in the student voice project by giving their consent in one of the following ways:

- Signing a consent form on the day we met
- Signing it after giving it some thought a few days later
- Contributing a reason or reasons to explain why they would like to be a part of the study which included their signature of consent[46].

During the summer of 2009 I applied for and was accepted onto the PhD register in the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin. I wrote to parents/guardians and the student participants to explain that my research aims had not altered but that I was now a PhD research student operating within the ethical standards and guidelines as set out by the School of Education in Trinity College, University of Dublin and that I was pursuing my studies under the supervision of Dr. Michael Shevlin and Dr. Anne Lodge[47].

When I began this research project in St. Bernadette's Post Primary School in September 2009, the SENCO explained that one of the students who had consented to participate in the research and who had been under the guardianship of the Health Service Executive, was involved in criminal activity during the summer months and would not be returning to the school as he had been transferred to a juvenile detention centre. The study began with 19 students.

[46] Appendices E and G – sample of student consent form and examples of student comments re consent or what they included in their own version of the consent forms
[47] Appendices H and I - Samples of letter for parents/guardians and student participants

Explanatory Note:

During the course of the data collection process, some interventions were suggested and designed by the student participants and were trialled in the school. They include a positive aims diary which was called '***My PAD***', a record of authorised absences during class for students who believed a short break would be beneficial, the '***Chill Out Card***' and a peer mentoring programme between students who were in the senior cycle LCA programme with students who were in their second year at the school and in the junior cycle. These interventions are explained in greater detail following the student case studies, in the section entitled, '***I'm Me***: Student Ownership'.

Introducing the Student Participants; Embedded Case Studies 2009-2011

This subsection introduces all of the post primary student participants who were consulted as part of this student voice research study. The titles of their stories were chosen by the groups and individuals represented during the feedback and analysis meetings which were held between April and May 2011 and in the case of 'Blood Brothers', on 13th January 2012.

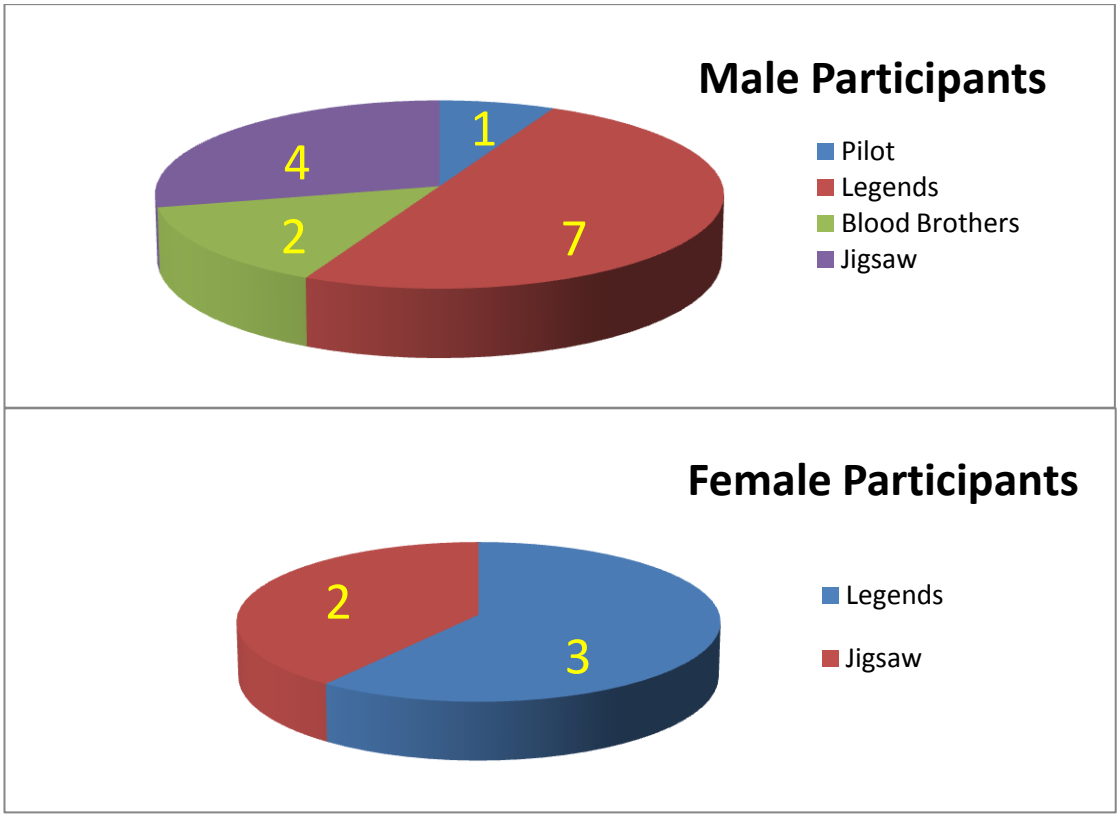

Figure 5 – Gender Breakdown of Student Participants in Case Study Groups

- *Legends* – 6 junior cycle students
- *Lone Wolf* – one boy in the junior cycle
- *Blood Brothers* – 2 best friends in the junior cycle.
- *Jigsaw* – 10 students in the senior cycle

'Legends'

This group of students includes two girls, Cassie and Lorraine, and four boys, Kevin, Eamon, Frank and Gary who were in the same year group. I met all of them individually for the first time at their preliminary interviews in March (18th – 2nd April 2009), and then on 7th May 2009 as a group for an information session to talk about what they would like to get from participating in the study. In the school year 2008-09 the students were in 1st year at the post primary school. Five of the students were exempt from studying Irish and were withdrawn for resource support by Ms. Greene for those timetabled periods which meant that they met as a group every day. This arrangement remained in place from 1st year, 2008-09 through to the end of 3rd year, 2010-11. Kevin was the only student in this group who had not been allocated resource hours which meant that I obtained permission from his teachers to withdraw him from class when opportunities were taken to meet the group of six students together for activities or focus group meetings.

Cassie is the eldest of the group as she repeated 1st class in school due to prolonged absences and slow progress in literacy. While in primary school she was referred for psychological assessment because of concerns regarding learning and emotional/behavioural difficulties. The psychological report indicated that Cassie had difficulties in the areas of auditory and visual processing and sequencing. It recommended clinical services to support emotional/behavioural difficulties as well as attendance in school based or extra-curricular programmes to address poor self esteem and anger management.

Ms Greene expressed her concerns for Cassie as follows;

> My biggest wish for *Cassie*[48] is that she would love herself a bit more. Her lack of confidence and poor self esteem are her biggest obstacles. She gets very nervous and cries easily, she also gives up on everything at the first hurdle and doesn't believe she can do what's asked of her (Ms. Greene 12th May 2009).

[48] Name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity

Lorraine has mild general learning difficulties and an anxiety disorder according to her assessment report from 2006. Ms. Greene believed that Lorraine might benefit from being involved in the study because she did not seem to have any friends and was very shy and withdrawn in class. The SENCO was happy to point out, however, that the general consensus amongst her teachers was that Lorraine was a pleasure to have in class as she was very well behaved and polite.

Kevin's home situation was described as 'difficult' by Mr. Ash, the School Guidance Counsellor, who was very anxious that we include Kevin in this process in the hope that it might be of benefit to him. Mr. Ash elaborated;

> (He)....is a very unhappy young lad. We know that he is on drugs and there are outside agencies and social workers involved in his case as the family is highly dysfunctional. His clothes are filthy and there's usually a terrible stink of BO, which as you can imagine doesn't help in his relationships with his peers. Having said that, they tend to avoid him rather than rise him to be honest because most of them are afraid of him and we know he's fallen in with a bad lot outside school. I'm very worried for his safety (Mr. Ash, 7th May 2009)

The SENCO, Ms Greene reiterated the School Guidance Counsellor's concerns;

> He comes across as very detached from reality, he won't make eye contact with you anyway, but half the time that could be because we know he's taking drugs. In fact he was caught selling drugs a couple of months ago for a known drug pusher in the local area, the JLO[49] called to the school to talk to the principal and guidance counsellor but it was agreed generally that with the difficulties in the home right now, at the very least he needs the security of school so, although another child would have been excluded for everything he's done to date...did I mention that he brought a knife into school one day? It was just antics to be honest but I probably shouldn't be telling you so much about him or you won't want to work with him (laughs). Look, he's abusive and confrontational and badly needs support and of course an assessment...in fact I would put him at the top of the waiting list and make certain that he was assessed but I can't get consent from home to pursue it (Ms. Greene, 12th May 2009).

Eamon has Attention Deficit Disorder, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties and Speech and Language Difficulties according to his Psychological Assessment from 2007. Ms. Greene described him as a 'nice kid but socially vulnerable' because he tends to 'while away a lot of his time in his own little world, day dreaming. He's great on a one to one basis but he's constantly in trouble in class for not doing homework or paying attention' (Ms. Greene, 12th May 2009).

[49] Juvenile Liaison Officer with the Garda Síochána

Frank had Wilm's tumour, which is a type of kidney cancer when he was two years old (1997). His father left home when he was diagnosed. Ms. Greene said that Frank is very close to his mother who is very protective of him. According to his psychological assessments (2001 and 2007), he has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, poor numeracy skills and Emotional/Behavioural difficulties. He was taking Ritalin when he was in primary school but he was withdrawn from it while he was still in 6th class because it was affecting his appetite and sleep. While in 1st year in post primary school, he tried different dosages and types of ADHD medication but suffered a multitude of side effects including nausea, dizziness and extremes from persistent sleepiness to insomnia. His mother insisted on taking him off the medication in February 2009 and Ms. Greene said that his behaviour and attitude had disimproved considerably since then and also reported that his tutor and Year Head had both described him as 'oppositional and confrontational' (Ms. Greene 12th May 2009).

Gary attended a Special School for specific learning difficulties for his primary level education. His combined psychological assessments (2001 and 2005) in conjunction with information provided from the special school, report that he had significant difficulty with acquiring skills in reading and spelling in spite of a high level of support in a school setting. His assessment of Dyslexia indicates his level of spelling and reading comprehension to be delayed by more than three years. Neither his psychological assessments nor the reports of his special school indicate emotional or behavioural difficulties; however, his first year in post primary school was marred by incident reports of temper tantrums, aggressive and confrontational behaviour, fighting, insolence towards teachers as well as severe frustration and despondency (Ms Greene, 12th May 2009).

Over the school year 2009-10, I visited St. Bernadette's post primary school every Thursday and Friday and every second Wednesday also. As five of this group of students had a daily class period with Ms Greene, she accommodated access to the students for observations, withdrawal for individual interviews, group discussions/activities or focus group meetings during her time slot with them on Thursday morning as needed. Kevin spent much of 2009-10 on a reduced timetable so I avoided withdrawing him from the limited number of classes he was attending except when we organised group activities or focus group meetings with the rest of this group. As he had a few supervised free periods, this facilitated an opportunity for us to meet for individual interviews every fortnight on Wednesday mornings. He attended school in the morning only for most of the year for

disciplinary reasons but even with that limitation, there were teachers who refused to allow him into their classrooms despite the reduced hours. I also had consent from other teachers to withdraw the other students for individual interviews during their subject lessons provided I did not target the same subject on a regular basis. Ms. Greene's class period with the 2nd year resource group on Friday, which was the final time slot of the day, was allocated for activities between most of the students participating in the study and provided an opportunity for the 2nd year students to get to know the 5th years and collaborate together in this consultative process from January to May 2010.

I met with all of the six students individually on a fortnightly basis throughout the school year and held four focus group meetings with them on 10th December 2009, 7th May 2010, 15th September 2010 and 4th May 2011. Each one to one interview was specific to the student participant and intentionally planned as a follow up on the previous meeting(s). The topics discussed in these meetings were varied and determined by the individual interviews but some of the ***common*** themes that were discussed at both individual and group level included the following:

Identifying and acknowledging their own successes and achievements, focussing on strengths and talents, discovering aspects of school or subjects that they enjoyed

For most of the students in the 'Legends' group, this was a difficult task. Cassie insisted that she was 'rubbish' at everything. Gary was adamant that everything about school came down to 'reading and writing...even the good subjects or the ones that I have even half 'a chance of doing good at like Woodwork, which is deadly, an' then there's homework and books and I'm the worst in the class again' (Gary 22nd October 2009). Frank made the point that 'even if I try or do good at something, nobody says anything, nobody cares so why bother? Everyone here expects me to be shite so why not be shite?' (Frank, 3rd December 2009). The quietest member of the group who had been acknowledged by her teachers as 'a pleasure to have in class' told me that sometimes she wished she could 'get a really bad sickness just so as I don't have to come in here, I hate every minute, I don't have a good class, I'm not good at anything 'n I don't care cos I just want to get out of this place' (Lorraine, 4th February 2010).

Obstacles and supports in learning and engagement

Gary made the point on many occasions throughout the year that only one of his teachers ever asked him to produce homework or to answer questions in class. He said that in the beginning it was because of his dyslexia and teachers had been directed not to ask him to read aloud in front of his peers but ultimately they did not ask him anything in class anymore:

> ...because some of them are afraid of me and the rest just don't care about me anyway. I'm glad in a way cos I don't have to do any work or homework but it's boring 'n then I get into trouble anyway cos I'm bored so I have to do something. I'll talk to someone or throw something and then we get into it (Gary, 15th April 2010).

I spoke to some of his teachers to determine their perspective of this and discovered that most of his teachers had decided that it was better to ignore Gary in class in order to avoid confrontational situations. One of his teachers said:

> Doesn't he have Ms. *Greene*[50] to bring him up to speed where necessary? No ordinary teacher should have to put up with the likes of him, I'm sorry now, I know you'll probably defend him but in my opinion he is scum and shouldn't be in this school (Science Teacher 16th April).

Eamon explained that his favourite subjects were History and Maths. Eamon particularly loves military history which he said was probably because his father was in the army. His enjoyment of Maths came about, he told me, because he had a great teacher. Eamon was studying Foundation level Maths with six others in his year group and the teacher never tired of explaining and spending time with each of them if they were having difficulties:

> I never feel stupid in his class, he always has time for me 'n he's very patient and funny. He listens to ya and even if we do something he doesn't shout but we don't really anyway cos we like him so there isn't ever any trouble there. We have a bit of a laugh too you know, it's probably the only class I enjoy' (Eamon, 14th January 2010).

Eamon also made the point that his favourite subject *should* be Woodwork, as he really likes working with his hands. The problem with that class he explained was that there were a few issues between the teacher and his class and regularly one or two of the other boys (Kevin or Gary) were removed. However, the teacher was always in such bad form after a confrontation that she would take it out on the rest of the group and most of the Woodwork classes were conducted in an uncomfortable atmosphere.

[50] Name changed from original conversation to preserve anonymity

Cassie identified one of the greatest obstacles to her learning in school was the fact that she writes very slowly and a lot of her teachers put long paragraphs of work on the board that have to be copied in their notebooks:

> I never get it all down and then they just wipe it off the board. They don't even ask if we're ready but I s'pose everybody else is but my spellin's desperate so I'm always trying to check over what I done and it takes me ages. Sounds stupid I know but then I get really upset and I don't want anyone to know that I didn't get the work into my copybook. And sometimes that will be our homework too so I don't have that done properly either' (Cassie, 22nd October 2009).

Relationships with peers and teachers

At our focus group meeting on this topic, (10th December 2009)[51], Eamon and Frank were the only two students in this group who believed they had any friends in the school or that any of their peers respected or liked them. Apart from Eamon's Maths teacher and Gary's Domestic Science teacher (she was the only teacher who insisted that he do his homework), the students were in agreement that none of their teachers liked or respected them except Ms. Greene; 'but even she has her bad days I s'pose cos if someone gets into it with her before our class then she does be in a right mood with us even though we're ok for her' (Gary, 10th December 2009 – focus group meeting).

The reasons for challenging behaviour

'Possible reasons for challenging behaviour and how to avoid them' was the topic of our focus group meeting on 7th May 2010 at which all of the six students were in attendance. It led to a heated discussion with some of the students citing instances which had generated arguments with their teachers, loss of control, temper tantrums etc. and in some cases physical manifestations of anger. Four of the group spoke about feeling 'frustrated' in class believing that everyone understood the lesson or an explanation of a problem from the teacher except them. All of the students present identified with this experience. Cassie shared the fact that frustration with herself made her angry or upset in class but she stressed that what really upset her was 'feeling different'. Both Gary and Frank admitted that frustration or sense of shame made them very angry and sometimes the easiest way to deal with it was to 'hit out' (Frank) or 'distract the teacher from what we're doing' (Gary). Gary elaborated on this by explaining that he would prefer to get into trouble than to admit that he did not understand something if everybody else 'got it'.

[51] Kevin was not in attendance that day but Ian from 'Blood Brothers' took part specifically to talk about the design and wording of a new positive aims diary that day

Kevin agreed with Gary and related an anecdote in which the teacher, according to him, was determined to 'show me up'. He explained:

> He knew I was on reduced hours so I hadn't been to his last two classes but that's because they're in the afternoon and I was only in school in the mornings that time. Anyways, he asks me all this stuff that I hadn't a clue what he was talkin' about and then starts shouting at me about how I'm a waste of space. So I reefed his book off the desk and threw it at the board and then I told him to fuck himself. Got suspended for three days' (Kevin, 7th May 2010)

Kevin was not usually in the habit of sharing information during group meetings so it was obvious that he had surprised the other students but he was even more surprised at their support as they were immediately sympathetic towards him and scathing of the teacher. Kevin told me the following week (13th May) that it had meant a lot to him.

Frank made the point that he hated when teachers held grudges, 'you just know that they're never going to forgive you for something you said or did' and he was able to give some examples. Eamon agreed that he had had similar experiences but he pointed out that usually he was not the one who was most likely to get into serious trouble in his class but that he hated when teachers shouted at any of the students because it was really humiliating and embarrassing.

The general consensus around the table was that the only way to avoid some of these situations escalating into serious or unnecessary incidents in the classroom was to have a positive and/or honest relationship with the teacher so that they could explain in a one to one conversation what they were feeling or why they were frustrated/angry. By that stage of the study, some efforts had been made through emergent strategies[52] to foster more positive relationships between the student participants and their teachers. There had been an improvement in some of the relationships as a result of the students' efforts, however, they all believed that 'it will never happen' with a number of their other teachers.

The students' perceptions of what needs to change so that they can feel more comfortable in school or want to engage in all aspects of school life

This was the topic of our focus group meeting after the summer break on 15th September 2010 at which I asked the group to agree on a list of things of particular importance to them. The intention was to draw on the students' participation and reflection on *The I'm Me Programme* in 2nd year as they were embarking on 3rd year. The issues which they

[52] Discussed later in this chapter

agreed upon as being most significant around their sense of comfort in school and willingness to make an effort included:

- believing that they were worthwhile and deserving of respect
- being acknowledged and praised for making an effort
- getting a second chance/wiping the slate clean
- being listened to and somebody paying attention
- feeling that they belong and even being a little bit 'different' doesn't have to be a bad thing

Cassie concluded the meeting by saying, '...being part of this group '***I'm Me***' is a bit like being in a club, I've never been part of anything before' (Cassie, 15th September 2010).

At our final meeting on 4th May 2011, the students took the opportunity to reflect on their three years of school in the junior cycle as they approached the upcoming Junior Certificate Examination. As I asked them what they would take from their experience of being part of the ***I'm Me*** student voice research and all of the students commented favourably on some of the strategies they had contributed to during the student voice process. The students were very keen to talk about ***My PAD***, the ***Chill Out Card*** and the Mentoring Programme. Cassie said that getting the opportunity to use ***My PAD*** had given her more confidence:

> Even just to talk to some of me teachers, I used to always be nearly first out the door if I could but now I talk to some of them. They never used to give me time a day before but now I even have nice chats with a few of me teachers and they're alright. One or two of them really care how I'm getting on and that's lovely' (Cassie 4th May 2011).

When I asked the rest of the group if they believed their teachers cared about them, Kevin laughed and said 'no chance' but the other five were in agreement that some of their teachers did, 'some more than others but even one or two is a hell of a lot better than all of them not getting ya' (Gary 4th May 2011)'.

Frank said that he had particularly enjoyed the experience of being part of the mentoring programme[53] in 2nd year, especially the involvement of the senior and junior students together in the creative workshops and that he would like the opportunity once he became part of the senior cycle to be a mentor to a younger student in the school. Cassie, Eamon and Gary agreed with him that they also would like to be mentors. Although Lorraine and

[53] Detailed in the ***I'm Me*** section of this chapter

Kevin agreed that they had thoroughly enjoyed being part of the mentoring programme and the creative workshops, Lorraine was undecided as to whether she would have the confidence to be a mentor in the future while Kevin said 'no way, I wouldn't be let anyway, could you imagine me as a good example or lookin' out for anyone? It'll never happen' (Kevin, 4th May 2011).

To conclude, I asked the students to decide on a name for the group under which I could write their story and they came up with the name 'Legends' because 'Sure Paula, we're only legends, we are!' (Lorraine 4th May 2011).

'Lone Wolf'

John does not have a psychological assessment report or allocation of resource/ learning support hours. However, the principal of St. Bernadette's and the SGC were both anxious that he should be included in this study because of their unease about his behaviour and attitude in school. Ms. Gray expressed concerns that he was quite isolated and experiencing a degree of social exclusion which was 'completely self inflicted' as he had no interest in making friends or engaging in any aspect of school life either socially or academically. She emphasised that she believed that he had the potential to do very well in school because he was obviously very intelligent. However, he had been excluded already by a number of teachers and was 'quite literally, moving from one class and teacher to another with total apathy and a level of disinterest that is very worrying' (Ms. Gray, 7th May 2009).

My first meeting with John was at our preliminary interview on 2nd April 2009 when he was still in his 1st year at secondary school. In a similar approach to the interview schedule I had agreed with the other students who were in the same year group as him (Legends and Blood Brothers), we decided to meet fortnightly while he was in 2nd year on Wednesday mornings from 16th September 2009. This arrangement remained in place until May 2010. For our first few meetings in September, October and early November, John did not speak to me at all. He invariably sat on one of the chairs opposite me in the little annex office to the resource room and put his feet on either another chair or the desk between us. He never looked at me and responses to questions such as 'How are you today?' or 'Would you like to talk to me today?' were usually met with sighs, grunts or absolute silence. On those occasions I kept him in the office between five and ten minutes at the longest and then asked him to return to class. The first time he spoke to me was on

25th November 2009 and that was in response to my query about whether or not he would like to continue our meetings. He admitted to me that he had only agreed to meet me as part of the research project in the hope that he could 'escape a few classes' because;

> ...the teachers here just wreck my head. What's the point in me being here anyway? It's a waste of time, I don't do anything anyway. I just put my head down on the desk and nobody comes near me in most classes anyway (John, 25th November 2009).

A conversation with John's tutor, Ms. Honey, confirmed that many of John's teachers were quite nervous of him and were afraid to antagonise or confront him so she was not surprised to hear that John spent most of his class periods with his head on the desk unchallenged. She also confirmed that he had few if any friends in his class as his peers were afraid of him;

> No one wants to get on the wrong side of him. He's quiet once you leave him alone but you only have to look at him, he's such a dark lad, definitely volatile and unpredictable. I know it's not exactly best practice but we have to think of the whole class so it's easier to just let him be (Ms. Honey, 27th November 2009).

Reflections in my field work journal indicate a grave concern on my part that my meetings with John were not helping him in any way, nor were they generating any responses from him around his experiences of school. I felt quite intimidated by John even when he was silent and I was very worried that I was out of my depth in meeting him. A number of my journal entries express my anxiety that he was in need of professional counselling or indeed that his meetings with me served only as a break for him from class, (Field journal: 30th September, 14th October, 11th and 25th November 2009). I spoke to Mr. Ash (SGC) about my concerns and he urged me to continue meeting him and just to give him more time to realise that I was prepared to listen to him. Mr. Ash explained that John's mother had passed away on Christmas Day 2007 while he was still in primary school at the age of 11. He also told me that he had arranged for bereavement and family counselling for John but that he had not been receptive. The SGC had also spent a lot of time with John but believed that the boy had not taken to him;

> He seems to see me as the enemy. He certainly doesn't believe that I'm on his side, that's for sure. I'm just hoping that maybe he will eventually believe that you are genuinely interested in him. The fact that you're not a teacher here could make a real difference, I don't know; just give it a bit longer (Mr. Ash 27th November 2009).

John was not in school on 9th December so our last meeting before Christmas was on 16th December. I noted that he looked very tired, with dark circles under his eyes and as I was

conscious that we were approaching the 2nd anniversary of his mother's death, I decided to keep the interview brief and not to press him to talk if he didn't want to (field work journal 16th December). John sat down in the office and after a minute I asked him how he was. He kicked the chair and then told me that he couldn't forgive his father for being alive while his mother was dead (John, 16th December 2009). We sat in silence for ten minutes and then he broke down and cried. I asked him if he would like to meet me again in the new year and he said 'yes please' (John, 16th December 2009).

Over the Christmas break, John was arrested for burglary and referred to the JLO. At the beginning of the new term in January 2010 the JLO and the SGC agreed to keep in contact as they suspected that John was taking drugs. A drugs test however, revealed that he was not.

John was suspended from school for three days between 20th and 22nd January for throwing materials during Woodwork class and directing abusive language at the teacher. The principal and SGC; Ms. Gray and Mr. Ash, told me that they believed John was beyond their help and that they had no choice but to initiate proceedings to exclude him from school because of the accumulation of disturbing outbursts and behaviours since he had first joined the school in September 2008. They invited me to attend a meeting on 25th January to discuss future prospects with John and his father. I phoned John's father and asked if he and John would be agreeable to my attendance and obtained their consent. The participants at the meeting included: the principal; deputy principal; SGC; John; his father; and me.

At the meeting I talked about the student voice research study and that I would like the opportunity to involve John in some of the group activities that were being organised for the rest of the school year. Ms. Gray asked John if he was interested in this level of involvement and he nodded. It was agreed by the principal and deputy principal that John would be given one more chance but that if he was physically or verbally abusive towards any member of staff again that he would be expelled. John's father expressed his relief and said that this was fair but John did not speak except to nod his head in agreement when Ms. Gray asked him if he was prepared to make an effort. The SGC offered to arrange for family counselling for John and his father at a different venue from the service previously attended by the family. Again John was unresponsive. Mr. Ash suggested that I chat with John and his father in private and before leaving the room he asked, 'Do you realise that Paula is probably the only person right now who is one

hundred per cent on your side?' (Mr. Ash 25th January). I spoke to John in the company of his father for a few minutes and asked if he would be interested in becoming involved in a mentoring programme which would be trialled in the school between 5th year and 2nd year students who were involved in my research project[54] and he agreed to come to the first meeting which was being held at the end of that week, Friday, 29th January 2010.

After John left the room, his father told me that John had one sister who is a year older than him but she was attending a different school. John's father explained:

> ...they're both bright but *John* is a worry, he just doesn't care about anything or anybody, including himself. I knew he'd be trouble in secondary school and *Anne* doesn't need that grief so I decided not to let him go to her school. She worries about him you know and she shouldn't have to, she's still only a kid, you'd think he was the only one who lost his mother. It's best she can get on with her own life in *X* school and not have to be linked with her brother[55] (John's father, Monday, 25th January 2010).

From the end of January until April 2010, John attended a weekly meeting which included all of the students between 2nd and 5th year who were involved in the research project. The younger students were paired with the older students as part of a mentoring programme and engaged in weekly activities which included a range of workshops; music, art and drama. Although Les, who was paired with John made a significant effort to get to know him, he unfortunately became ill before the end of the school year and his absenteeism gave rise to concern that John would be without a partner. At one of the sculpture workshops, John, who had shown considerable interest in the first experience of sculpture (26th February 2010), asked if he could also attend the second (19th March 2010). As there was a smaller group in attendance on this occasion, I had agreed that a first year student, Adam, who was not part of the ***I'm Me*** group should be allowed to join on this occasion. Adam has severe visual impairment, cerebral palsy as well as Asperger's Syndrome. John sat with Adam during the workshop and directed his hand to help him create his sculpture. Adam appeared to have a strong impact on John and as a result, Ms. Greene and I organised for the two boys to meet during the same period allocated for the mentoring programme, last period on Friday, so that they could get to know each other and do some activities together under her supervision. This partnership sustained for the remainder of the school year.

[54] Discussed later in this chapter
[55] Italics used to indicate names changed from original transcript to preserve anonymity

For the duration of our meetings between 3rd February and 5th May 2010, one meeting on 15th September 2010 and two meetings between 27th January and 6th May 2011, John shared a little of his impressions of school and why he found the experience of attending so difficult. Conversations were always short and sometimes little was said beyond 'Hello' and 'See you next time'. However, I discovered that sometimes John preferred to write what he wanted to tell me[56]. At our last meeting in May 2011 we discussed the transcripts of our conversations and notes that I had taken on them and he very clearly indicated the important points that he wanted me to write about our time together and the themes which were most significant to him. John gave me permission to include extracts from passages he had written for me which I have put together below indicating the dates that they were submitted. He asked that his story be written under the title 'Lone Wolf[57]':

> My ma used to help me with my homework and she made my lunch every day and asked me how's everything when I came home from school. I miss her and I hate going to school because she isn't with me now. My da misses her too I know but we can't talk about her except when we go to counselling. It's a bit better than it was but me and him aren't tight. How am I supposed to be ok in school because nobody there really knows me or cares? All they want to know is that you have the right shoes on and you don't wear tats or do drugs and you don't speak when you're not supposed to. You think they care if I do my work and bring my books and homework and do exams but they don't really. I never even have a pen and I don't do any homework or anything in class and nobody cares. As long as I stay quiet, everything is ok. (Passage submitted 3rd March 2010)
>
> The teachers like when I am invisible, I used to like being invisible, it's safe but then it gets boring and lonely too (5th May 2010).
>
> The real reason I hated school is because nobody really wanted me there and nobody really wanted to know me or ask me something that mattered. I didn't belong in school, I belonged on the streets. When we did the thing with the 5th years last year[58] it was good because there were other people in the room who seemed to have a clue and they didn't think I was a weirdo and they weren't afraid of me like other people in the school. It was cool and we did some good things like the acting and the sculpture, that was my favourite. The first day we did the sculpture I made an owl and then the second time I met *Adam*. *Adam* is younger than me and he is blind and he has other stuff wrong with him too. Last year when *Les* got sick, I met *Adam* every week instead. He taught me Braille and I helped him with his homework and sometimes we were allowed to do art

[56] John didn't speak at our meeting on 24th March but as he was leaving he gave me a short note which simply said 'Thanks'
[57] Spellings and names in these excerpts are the only changes made from the original submissions
[58] The mentoring programme

> or cooking together. The first word he taught me to make in Braille is my mother's name, *Mary* [59]
>
> I'm not saying that school is great now or that I like it because I don't. I think a lot of teachers would prefer if I just left and maybe I should. But I have a real friend, it's funny because he can't see me but he sort of can. He's different too. I still don't like a lot of my teachers because they don't care about us really but there's two that are ok now and that helps a lot. I know since we did the stuff last year with the 5th years that some of them seem to have more patience and they understand us a bit better now. Sometimes I can't believe I'm still here and I'm doing the junior in a few weeks.
>
> I hope that this helps somebody else who is unhappy in school. Find somebody to talk to who is interested and make even one friend (John, 6th May 2011).

The themes that John identified as relevant to his story are as follows:

- believing that somebody cares about me
- having a friend
- having at least one teacher who is kind to me or gets me
- feeling that I belong even a bit in school

(John, 6th May 2011)

'Blood Brothers'

I met Harry and Ian separately for preliminary interviews on 20th March 2009 when both boys were still in first year at St. Bernadette's post primary school. Each boy named the other that day as his best friend. My last interview with them was on 13th January 2012 at which they discussed their rekindling of that friendship and the significance most particularly for Ian that his friend had not abandoned him despite 'the heavy shit we've come through' (Ian, 13th January 2012).

Harry was diagnosed with ADHD in 2001 according to his psychological assessment dated October 2007. He had experienced a delay in acquiring speech and language skills because of hearing difficulties due to 'glue ear' and was identified with 'complex emotional/behavioural difficulties' by psychological assessment in 2006. The 2007 report refers to 'documented evidence of repeated episodes of self harm' and a 'high level of concern regarding Harry's emotional status and associated behavioural difficulties'. Within the concluding remarks, the psychologist highlights that;

[59] Italics in this passage used to indicate names changed from original piece of writing to preserve anonymity

> ‘There are indications of low self esteem and frustration associated with an inability to cope with class work expectations at school. Frustration and emotional difficulties are leading to anger outbursts and a high level of distress’ (NEPS Psychological Assessment Report, 16th October 2007).

Arising from this report, Harry was allocated 3.5 hours of resource support and an SNA while in primary school, with a recommendation to NCSE that this allocation should remain throughout post-primary school.

Although Harry had expressed interest in participating in the study after his preliminary interview with me on 20th March 2009, his interest had waivered by September and at first he was reluctant to commit to regular involvement. During our first meeting of his second year at primary school (11th September 2009), he was reticent and agitated. When he spoke it was with a pronounced stammer and it was apparent that he was not comfortable. When I asked if he would like to meet me again, his initial response was ‘Maybe, not sure, can I think about it?’ Once I had assured him that he was under no obligation to meet me and that any level of involvement he might agree to was determined by him and could terminate without explanation or notice if he wished, he confirmed at that point that he would come back to me when he was ready. His SNA, Clare Indigo, approached me after the school mid-term break on 6th November and told me that Harry would like to meet me that day.

Our conversation was very general and focussed initially on Harry’s favourite and least favourite subjects. He explained that he enjoyed History, Woodwork, Art and Home Economics but had difficulties with Maths and English. He told me that his SNA had really helped him and that she liked to ‘mammy’ him; she was the only person in school who could tell when he was feeling agitated and knew how to help him in and outside class. He had been resistant to having an SNA in secondary school at first and had tried his best to push her away and upset her, assuming that she would not want to continue working with him. Instead, ‘she stuck with me and although she’s an awful fuss pot sometimes, she’s sound really. Sometimes she’s the only person who gets me here; I don’t think I’d last a day without her’ (Harry, 6th November 2009). He elaborated on the support she gave him which included helping to keep him on task in class, keeping track of his timetable, books and resources; ‘it wrecks my head sometimes, I can be really trying and then I get into trouble for something stupid like not having the right book and

you think what's the point...but I'm lucky cos *Clare*[60] makes sure I'm sorted going into class now' (Harry 6th November 2009). Before he left this interview, I asked why he had decided to see me that day and he said 'I'm lucky to have *Clare*, I just thought I should tell someone' (Harry, 6th November 2009).

I did not see Harry again until 2nd December 2009. I found him kicking a wall on the corridor that day and asked him if he would like to talk. Once he had agreed, I sought permission from his class teacher who said; 'Do what you like; I'm sick of the sight of him. If you're happy to babysit, that's your business' (English teacher, 2nd December 2009). It transpired that Harry had refused when he was asked to read a passage from Shakespeare aloud in class and turned to his SNA and said audibly; 'she can't make me' for which his teacher had excluded him from class. When Harry tried to talk to me that day, his stammer was pronounced. He explained that being upset, nervous or frustrated always impacted on his speech which was why he hated being asked to read aloud in class. I played a CD in the Resource Room Annex and we sat in silence until the bell indicated the end of class. Before he left he said; 'I'll talk to you next time if you're still interested' (Harry 2nd December 2009).

After that day we met once before the Christmas break and at fortnightly intervals between January and May 2010. From January he became an active contributor to weekly activities and workshops that were organised with and between most of the participants of this study as part of a mentoring activity (see section: ***I'm Me***). At first he was not keen to become involved when I invited him to join as part of a mentorship programme involving 5th year students with his year group; 2nd year. 'No thanks, I don't need that cos I have *Clare*[61], I think it's a great idea. I know some of my friends are going to do it and they probably need it cos they don't have SNAs' (Harry, 16th December 2009). With Clare's encouragement, however, he changed his mind.

In February, Harry was very excited because his sister had given birth to a baby boy at the end of January. His best friend, Ian, had just been excluded from school so Harry told me he was relieved to have something cheerful to think about. His sister and new nephew were living at home with Harry, his mother and four other siblings, two older and two younger than Harry. He told me 'Ma is always tired cos she never stops. There's always stuff to do at home and she's a cleaner and works nights. I think she was dreadin' another

[60] Italics used to indicate name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity
[61] Italics used to indicate name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity

child in the house cos *Lucy*[62] hasn't a clue but sure she's mad about him now and we're all givin' a hand' (Harry, 4th February 2010). Later that month Harry told me that his father had not lived with them since July 2009 because his mother had sought legal advice and a barring order against him when she realised her daughter was pregnant. Harry and his three brothers had often received beatings from his father 'when he was tanked' but his mother and two sisters had borne the worst of his father's violent outbursts. 'The last straw was when he burst her[63] face against the wall when she told them she was havin' a baby' (Harry, 24th February 2010).

Harry's excitement about having a new nephew was a recurring theme throughout our conversations for the rest of the school year in 2010. He often spoke about school in terms of positive changes he would like to see in place in anticipation of his nephew reaching school going age. 'I hope that if he gets into trouble that somebody will tell him to wise up and give him a break....just cos he does something wrong, or even if he has a friend who's always getting into trouble doesn't mean that he's bad' (Harry, 15th April).

At the beginning of his third year in secondary school we spoke about the highs and lows of the previous school year and what Harry expected from the coming year. He told me his worst memories of the year were all related to his friend Ian, beginning with the difficulties that had led to his exclusion and his subsequent activities. He explained that he used to feel really sorry for him at first, 'especially cos he missed out on a lot of cool stuff too that he woulda loved. He used to wait for me after school on Friday afternoons and he's see us coming out of the prefab[64] and he sometimes looked a bit out of sorts cos we'd be coming out laughing and stuff' (Harry 16th September 2010). The best thing that had happened during the previous school year he told me was the birth of his nephew;

> I used to have a problem with my temper but I don't want *Paul*[65] to see me like that. I went for anger management classes when I was in primary school but it's really cos of him that I understand now cos I want to be a good role model. I'm his uncle and he doesn't have a dad really (Harry, 28th September 2010).

Other points he made about the previous year included how much he had enjoyed the positive experience of making new friends through the mentoring activities, especially with the fifth year students. He told me that his mother cried the first time he brought home a 'positive aims diary' (***My PAD***) containing a number of positive and encouraging

[62] Italics used to indicate name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity
[63] His pregnant sister – pseudonym 'Lucy'
[64] Used for mentoring activities and workshops in last class period timetabled every Friday between January and May 2010
[65] Italics used to indicate name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity

comments from most of his teachers. Before that occasion, communication from the school was usually to indicate that he was in trouble. Harry told me that seeing her reaction had made him feel 'all grown up' as it had never occurred to him before that his behaviour and actions had the power to impact on somebody else's feelings, 'especially me ma' (Harry, 28th September 2010). He told me that he was 'well chuffed' with the end of year school report from 2nd year because his mother had hugged him and told him she was very proud of him. 'It's not that I'm clever now or nothing, I didn't do brilliant in the tests like but loads of the teachers said nice stuff about me, (laughs) it was deadly and me ma was real proud' (Harry 28th September 2010).

I met Harry on three more occasions during that school year for what he described as our 'check-in sessions'. On each occasion he indicated that he and Clare were still working very well together, and in our final meeting before his Junior Certificate examination (14th April 2011), he told me that he had applied to join the Transition Year (TY) programme from September 2011 although he was aware that most of his friends were hoping to join the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme.

Harry and one other student from his year with Special Educational Needs were accepted into TY that year, which was considered to be a landmark decision according to Ms. Greene;

> This is the first time we have students with SEN in TY and what makes it even more incredible is the fact that one of them has ADHD and indeed a reputation for having been quite a troublemaker in his time. I had to make a case for them, especially *Harry*[66]. But to be honest, we had some terrific recommendations from a few members of staff, especially his SNA as you can imagine, you know she's mad about him of course. Nobody could argue with his improved behaviour and attitude. He's actually a very likeable and responsible young lad...we couldn't see that before (Ms. Greene, 21st September 2011).

Ms. Greene allowed me to read the testimonials submitted to support Harry's admittance into TY. They had been written by his Year Head, tutor, the SENCO, his SNA and two of his teachers. All of the submissions referred to an improvement in behaviour or 'ownership of positive behaviour'[67]; three of the submissions commented on Harry's improved engagement and attitude; two commended his maturity and sense of responsibility. Accepting Harry and one of his peers who had an assessment of 'Mild General Learning Difficulties' into the programme, marked a significant departure in

[66] Italics used to indicate name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity
[67] Year Head testimonial

terms of policy within the school, as until that year, no students with SEN had ever been included in TY before.

Ian was a year older than his peer group because he had repeated second class in primary school due to prolonged absences. His assessment in April 2008 indicated that the referral had been at the request of his primary school principal in order to review his progress prior to starting secondary school in September 2008. Ian was diagnosed with ADHD when he was four years old and prescribed medication which he had been taking since then; the dosage had been reviewed and changed 'several times' according to the report (April 2008). In the assessment summary, the psychologist indicated that Ian had been identified with 'dyslexic tendencies' when he was assessed in 2005 which were corroborated by tests carried out for this assessment, including the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – 4th edition (WISC IV) and Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – 2nd edition (WIAT – II). The psychologist's conclusions from assessment were that Ian was functioning within the borderline range of ability: literacy – 30th percentile; numeracy – 16th percentile and proceeded to recommend detailed strategies to assist him in literacy and numeracy which, it was suggested, should be provided by his teachers. In an interview with the SENCO, Ms. Greene, on 12th May 2009 with reference to this report, she indicated that a lot of these recommendations were unrealistic as they would require significant amounts of time spent on a one to one basis with Ian practising attainment of new words, phonics, and spellings. She felt that it would be impossible, even during withdrawn support within his resource allocation, to spend enough time to practise these skills. She could not confirm that mainstream teachers were 'providing additional time to transcribe information from board to copybook[68]' or indeed incorporating any of the suggested assistance in learning new material as recommended in this, or any of the psychological assessments for students with difficulties in literacy or numeracy.

> I pass on this information, particularly at IEP[69] meetings but I'm convinced that most teachers here don't have the time to give students with SEN that extra attention that they need or is recommended to them, even though the teachers might be sympathetic. The reality is that a lot of teachers here believe that if a student has an allocation of resource hours that their needs are being met within that allocation and therefore the student is the responsibility of the SEN team specifically (Ms. Greene, 12th May 2009).

[68] One of the suggestions in Ian's assessment report from a NEPS Educational Psychologist 2008
[69] Individual Education Plan

In the report summary, the psychologist mentions that *Ian*[70] was prone to 'calling himself stupid' both because of his dyslexia and his need of educational support, especially in Maths. It is also mentioned in the report that although Ian is generally perceived by school and family as a 'likeable and pleasant lad', he has significant temper control difficulties and does not respond well to correction.

When I met Ian for the first time on 20th March 2009, he was fourteen years old and significantly taller and sturdier than the majority of his peers that I had met in first year. He drew attention to this and said that 'some of the other first years think they're tough guys but they're afraid of me cos I'm bigger than them and they know I do boxing. They don't come after me or my friends' (Ian, 20th March 2009). Fighting, however, was the main thrust of our conversation when we met in September, as the previous day Ian had been involved in an 'arranged fight' outside school with a boy from fifth year. Ian was very angry about what he perceived as the 'double injustice' in the situation as the school principal had been informed about the fight and subsequently called in the two boys' parents earlier that day. The boys, it had been decided, would be suspended for two days; 21st and 22nd September 2009. Ian argued that if anyone had listened to him he would have explained that older boys in the school, regularly tried to pick fights with him because he had a reputation for being a skilled boxer but also because if he was caught fighting he would be automatically expelled from the boxing club, which he knew would happen as the principal had already informed the club about the fight. He broke down in tears and said that boxing was very important to him and it had helped him to control his aggression in the past. He explained that the rules of the club were very strict and it was a disciplined sport. 'I stayed home most nights for ages just to make sure I didn't get into a fight cos there are gangs here that come after me, that's how important the club is to me and now it's all for nothing' (Ian 18th September 2009). When I asked him why he had succumbed to fighting the older boy, his response was, 'He said something really bad about me ma, no one does that and gets away with it' (Ian, 18th September 2009).

Ian was very enthusiastic about being involved in the student voice research project and asked if he could meet me on a weekly basis. As he had been excluded permanently from Music, I was in a position to meet him every Thursday morning from 1st October 2009 during the period allocated to Music without disrupting any of his other classes. He

[70] Italics used to indicate name changed from original document to preserve anonymity

admitted that he was very easily distracted in class and regularly got into trouble for talking to other students;

> I get really bored sometimes and I just can't sit still and quiet so I'll talk to whoever's beside me and sometimes I get thrown out of class. But if I'm really in the horrors, I'll throw something or try to rise the teacher, some of them make it too easy, they just lose it and start yelling at me...but actually I hate that, I really hate when someone gets in my face or makes a show of me in front of me mates (Ian, 22nd October 2009).

Ian explained that he had one teacher who he really respected because;

> He knows how to deal with me. If I do something stupid in his class, he doesn't lose the head. He just talks quietly to me or if he really needs to say something, he waits till the end of class. He's sound really and we don't fight. I don't have a problem saying I'm sorry to him because he doesn't make a show of me and then everything's cool. I think he even likes me, sort of, but if he does, he's probably the only one here (Ian, 22nd October 2009).

We discussed what changes needed to take place to avoid confrontations in class and Ian agreed to set positive goals to address his behaviour if we could find a way to ensure his teachers would 'notice' when he made an effort and most importantly, 'they have to promise that even if they need to give out to me that they don't shout or get in my face' (Ian, 22nd October 2009).

After mid-term break (26th – 30th October 2009) we agreed weekly goals, written into a positive aims diary which we created on a weekly basis. Initially the design and wording of the diary changed regularly but Ian was influential in designing the final version of the diary[71] and the wording was negotiated and agreed upon between Ian and the 'Legends' group at a focus group meeting on 10th December 2009. Ian's tutor commented on the impact of the diary in her summation of his Christmas report when she wrote;

> *Ian*[72]made great strides in the latter half of term which is evident from positive feedback I have received from teachers especially in relation to his use the weekly positive goals exercise[73]There is a marked improvement in behaviour and attitude in my class also. Keep up the good work! (Ms Honey, Christmas Report Card 2009).

During our first meeting of the New Year on 14th January, Ian spoke about his family and his friendship with Harry.

> Me and Harry have been mates forever, we're like brothers you know? Separated at birth me ma says because of all the stuff we have going on that's

[71] The precursor to My Positive Aims Diary (My PAD)
[72] Italics used to indicate name changed from original document to preserve anonymity
[73] The positive aims diary which was generated from consultation with the students in this pupil voice research project

> the same. We both have ADHD and we both have arsehole dads (Ian, 14th January 2010).

Ian explained that he had grown up in fear of his father's violence towards his mother. After the worst episode in 2007, his mother had been admitted to hospital with a fractured cheek bone, a broken wrist and a number of cuts and bruises. On that occasion his older brother had physically removed his father from the house and warned him not to return, however, his mother had not pressed charges. I asked Ian why he wanted to tell me about this and he said;

> Lots of people round here know stuff about my family but I won't let anybody say anything or slag me cos then I'll box them. If I want to stay out of trouble sometimes I have to stay at home. I won't ever let anybody say anything about me ma and I won't ever let anybody get in my face or talk down to me like he did (Ian, 14th January 2010)

Ian's father had returned home and his mother had assured Ian that everything would be alright this time. On 20th January Ian contacted the Gardaí when his father attacked his Ian's mother in the kitchen. His father was arrested that night and the following morning Ian went to school as usual. First period on Thursday was usually a small class setting with his resource teacher but that morning she was absent due to illness so Ian was told to join his mainstream Maths class group. When he opened the door, the teacher told him not to come in because she had previously banned him from ever returning to her class. He asked her what he was supposed to do and she told him that it wasn't her problem, 'don't set foot in my classroom, you're not welcome'[74] (Maths teacher, 21st January 2010).

Ian slammed the door and proceeded to kick lockers outside the classroom until he had broken two doors. When a number of teachers arrived to see who was responsible for the noise, he screamed at them, 'don't come near me, I'll kill you'. One of the teachers told the principal that she had felt threatened by his behaviour and appearance. Ian proceeded to leave the school and went home. The principal contacted his mother and after two meetings; 26th January and 1st February 2010 (the latter included a representative from the National Education Welfare Board, NEWB) it was decided that Ian should be placed in another school. Subsequently he was accepted into a Youthreach school in the vicinity.

In December 2011, when Harry was in TY, the principal of St. Bernadette's contacted me and invited me to a school evening event so that I could be in the audience when Harry

[74] This account of the conversation was relayed to me later that day by the principal of the school in explanation for the chain of events which followed.

received an award for a class project. That night Harry introduced me to his very proud mother and sister. Harry had also invited Ian to the event and was sitting with Harry's family. The two teenagers asked if I would interview them one more time together so that I could discover what had happened to Ian since he had been excluded from secondary school. We met on 13th January on the premises of St. Bernadette's Post Primary school with the kind permission of the principal, as well as the teenagers' mothers.

Within months of being excluded from school, Ian became addicted to butane and heroin and was admitted to hospital in July 2010 after taking an overdose. Harry and Ian's friendship dwindled because Ian was keeping company with drug dealers and although Harry begged him to get help, Ian had refused. Harry visited Ian in hospital in July 2010 and promised to keep in touch. They met up occasionally but felt that they now had little in common so gradually lost contact again. Ian was still taking drugs and drinking alcohol regularly to excess. In March 2011;

> Me an' a few of the lads were on a bender only they spiked me drink with ketamine. I was out of it and while I was on the ground they kicked me head in. I was in a coma for weeks... (Ian, 13th January 2012).

When Harry had heard what had happened to Ian he visited him in hospital every day until he was discharged. Harry told me that he was really scared because of what had happened to his friend especially because when they were growing up they had always believed that they were very alike and living in similar circumstances. He said, 'I just looked at him and knew it coulda been me' (Harry, 13th January 2012).

Ian, with his friend's support, was accepted onto a residential rehabilitation programme and told me that he was 'clean' now. He also told me that he wanted to work in the area of drug awareness because he believed that he had a lot to share from his own experiences. Harry asked me to write their stories together and they chose the name 'Blood Brothers' for the title.

The themes upon which they both agreed as significant to their journeys were written by the two boys and as promised, reproduced exactly as they presented them:

- the importance of friendship; school can be a very lonely place when you feel you are different
- the importance of having a good relationship with at least some of your teachers – believing that your teachers don't like or respect you is not nice

- it's really important that teachers notice when you are trying to be good or trying to make an effort
- it shouldn't matter if you are smart at a subject, everyone should be treated the same and get the same respect
- Don't shout at students even if they do something wrong, be calm!
- Give us more than one chance, even more than two
- Adults don't always know everything, we know ourselves better than you...maybe you should listen to us sometimes

Harry said that his SNA and the mentoring programme had been the most positive supports he had experienced in school and that he had volunteered to be a mentor in a new version of the activity earlier that school year. Harry added he was happy that his relationships with teachers had improved mainly through the use of ***My PAD*** but also because he had more one to one conversations with his teachers on his progress. 'I had more going on for me than Ian. I was lucky and cos of those things I believed in myself and some of the people who were there for me' (Harry, 13th January 2012).

'Jigsaw'

The ten students in this group attended individual preliminary interviews while they were in 3rd year in school between 29th March and 2nd April 2009, two months before they sat the Junior Certificate Examinations in June. From September 2009, eight of these students were enrolled in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the remaining two were following the Traditional Leaving Certificate (TLC) programme. The cohort was comprised of three girls and seven boys and they contributed to this research project principally as a group although in different manifestations. The ten participants informed this research through individual interviews which occurred between 7th and 16th October 2009 and as part of a consultative focus group that met on two occasions during the school year 2009/10; 16th December 2009 and 7th May 2010. During the following school year, 2010/11, two members of the group did not return to school and the final eight met on one more occasion; 13th April 2011.

The students who were enrolled in LCA became part of a mentoring programme that met every Friday afternoon between 22nd January 2010 and 14th May 2010 for a variety of

activities and creative workshops which were primarily pursued during the final timetabled class period of the week[75].

Les was born in 1993 and attended educational psychological assessments in March 2001 and December 2005, both of which indicated significant learning difficulties associated with Dyslexia. The general assessment summary in the latter report included indications of emotional disturbance and low self esteem. At our first meeting on 29th March 2009, Les presented as disinterested in becoming involved in the research, however, he signed a consent form which he gave to Ms. Greene a week after our meeting. When we met again on 7th October, he was more enthusiastic and remembered that he had been in bad form at our previous meeting, mainly because he 'hated school, especially 3rd year. It was rubbish then with teachers constantly going on and on about exams' (Les, 7th October 2009). He admitted that the real reason he had consented to become a participant in the research was because he knew that a few of his friends had agreed to it.

Ms. Greene was anxious that **Emma** should be included in the student voice research because

> ...her psychological assessments as well as her primary school report identified her with poor self esteem and introverted behaviour with possible anxiety disorder. But I think her attitude and behaviour is highly inconsistent. Sometimes she is very cheeky and bad tempered with teachers in class and at other times you can hardly get a word out of her (Ms. Greene, 12th May 2009).

Emma told me on the first day that I met her (29th March 2009) that she had been bullied throughout primary school. When I asked her how she had come through that experience she said 'I got like real hard, I don't let anybody mess with me, they know better' (Emma, 29th March 2009).

Kalu is from Ghana originally and told me at our first meeting (30th March 2009) that he had moved to Ireland with his father and younger sister in 2006. Mr. Ash described Kalu as a very popular and likeable lad who had made firm friends amongst his peers but found himself in confrontational situations quite regularly with teachers;

> He has learning difficulties and ODD[76]. We find he has difficulty coping with being told what to do if he doesn't think it's necessary or justified. He divides opinion, a few of his teachers have really warmed to him because he can be such a great character, very friendly when he wants to be but unfortunately there are a number of teachers who have no time for him at all (Mr. Ash 7th May 2009).

[75] Permission was obtained for some of the activities to run for the entire afternoon, e.g. sculpture workshops
[76] Oppositional Defiant Disorder

Mark's last psychological assessment from primary school (February 2005) described him as having mild general learning difficulties, self esteem issues, emotional disturbance and difficult family relationships. School reports from St. Bernadettes's indicated that he had been suspended frequently during his first three years in school for a number of reasons which included challenging and confrontational behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse, fighting and smoking. At our first meeting on 30th March 2009, Mark listened quietly when I explained the purpose of the research and when I asked if he would be interested in participating, his immediate response was 'I'd love to, gimme the form now' (Mark, 30th March 2009).

Owen has four older siblings and one younger. At our first meeting on 30th March 2009 he told me none of his family had finished school so far and that 'nobody' expected him to stay beyond the age of 16**,** 'I'm 16 in November, then I'm outta here, so there's no point in me being in this thing, is there?' (Owen 30th March 2009). When I explained that he was welcome to be part of ***I'm Me*** until such time as he left and that I believed he had a lot to contribute if he wished to participate, even in a short time, he agreed to take part. Ms. Greene explained;

> ...he suffers from bouts of depression which may run in the family. Two of his older brothers also suffer from depression. I'd describe him as very detached from reality; he often seems listless and lacking in energy. Everything is an effort and yet, there are times when he finds schoolwork easy but at the same time he has large gaps in learning because he hasn't clued in. He had very mixed results in his psychological assessment but his overall verbal comprehension was extremely weak (Ms. Greene, 12th May 2009).

Peter is Mark's best friend and at an interview on 16th October 2009, admitted that he had only agreed to participate (30th March 2009) because his friend had convinced him he should. Peter was diagnosed with ADHD when he was five years old, (1998) and was adamant at our first meeting that 'school is stupid and the teachers hate people like me' (Peter, 30th March 2009). When pushed to explain what he meant by 'people like me' he said 'I don't just accept everything I'm told, sometimes I question things, that doesn't go down well. Add to that I have ADHD, teachers really hate that[77]' Peter, 30th March 2009. As he said this he made a cross with his two index fingers and started hissing; 'Ooh ADHD, you vile creature'.

Roger was described as 'a loner' by Mr. Ash;

> ...you see him standing apart from the others at break times and in the yard. It's hard to know what's going on with him, I've chatted to him a number of times but he always says he's grand and he's not being bullied but at the same time, he looks miserable' (Mr. Ash, 7th May 2009).

Roger was undecided about whether he would like to be part of the study when I met him first because he said; 'don't think I'll be much help, I'm rubbish at school, I'm going to fail me Junior' (Roger, 30th March 2009). I assured him that I would be very interested in learning from his experience of school but that if he consented to involvement he was free to withdraw without notice or reason whenever he wished. He decided to 'give it a go' on that understanding.

Geraldine was acknowledged by Ms. Greene as 'a popular girl, with some family issues. Dyslexia has really held her back though she's a very clever girl' (Ms. Greene, 12th May 2009). The Guidance Counsellor explained that her father had been killed in a car accident when she was in primary school and that her mother had turned to alcohol after the tragedy. Geraldine and her younger sister were discovered sleeping rough because they had been locked out of their home when her mother was drinking. Since December 2008, the two girls had been living with their grandmother (Mr. Ash 7th May 2009). I met Geraldine on 2nd April 2009 for preliminary interview and she was very enthusiastic to participate in the study.

Quincy was described as 'very intelligent but disturbing' by Ms. Greene, 12th May, 2009. She had organised his psychological assessment shortly after he started in the school as a matter of urgency. The report indicated 'emotional disturbance/severe emotional disturbance' and recommended a full time SNA and 5 hours of resource support for emotional and behavioural difficulties (December 2006). Quincy's mother had phoned the Gardaí and health services for help on a number of occasions because she was afraid of her son. On one occasion the next door neighbour had called the Gardaí because Quincy had beaten their dog to death with a garden spade (Mr. Ash 7th May 2009). When I met him for the first time, 2nd April 2009 he was living in residential care under the guardianship of the Health Service Executive (HSE). He did not make eye contact but nodded when I asked him if he would like to participate in the study and signed the consent form on the day[78].

[78] Consent had already been obtained from the HSE for him to participate in the study if he was agreeable to it.

Eucharia is from Nigeria and her psychological assessment indicated Developmental Dyxpraxia, Expressive Language Disorder, EBD and low self esteem (October 2005). Her father had been deported shortly before our preliminary meeting on 2nd April and when she spoke about it she broke down in tears. She also told me she was being bullied and consented for me to pass this information to the SGC. At our meeting on 15th October she told me that she was very unhappy in her new class in 5th year and would prefer to be in LCA because the work was too difficult. She explained that the SENCO and the school principal had encouraged her to enrol with the LCA class but that her mother had been very angry and forbade her entry into the programme because 'it is not proper education' (Eucharia, quoting her mother, 2nd April 2009). Eucharia and Quincy were following the TLC programme from September 2009 while the other eight students profiled above were enrolled in the LCA programme.

Individual Interviews; 7th – 16th October 2009

Each of the ten students attended one individual interview in October 2009 during which they discussed their experience of school in the junior cycle and also their impressions of transitioning to 5th year.

By that point, seven of the students expressed that they were happier so far in 5th year, all of those students were in the LCA programme;

> LCA is grand, cos like, everyone in the class gets on. The teachers are different with you, they're more chilled you know, they don't take everything so serious, they'll have a laugh with ya and some of them even ask what's going on with ya if ya have a head on ya or stuff like that. They pay more attention I think, well so far anyways, (Les, 7th October 2009).

Mark admitted that he had surprised himself by doing very well in his Junior Certificate exams. He was encouraged to follow the route of the TLC but said that he was much happier where he was;

> I like where I am, I hated preparing for the Junior. Seriously, it's head-wrecking preparing for exams and I just hated the pressure and the bad atmosphere. It's better in LCA, we do some great subjects, different things you know? And it's not all exams cos you do projects and stuff I think. I was always in trouble, one of the teachers told me I was the worst they'd ever had in the school and I should do everyone a favour and not come in in the morning. Maybe I was but I know a few guys who're worse than me but they're always off their heads, they don't come to this school I suppose. Maybe I am a very bad person underneath? I feel sorry for the younger ones in the school now, I just want to tell them that it'll be

> alright, (laughs) I wouldn't though, sure they'd think I was a mentaler' (Mark, 9th October 2009).

Out of eight students in LCA, only one expressed disappointment with the course at that point. Kalu said that he did not believe that he would get a 'proper qualification' and would prefer to pursue the TLC, however, he was told he had no choice (Kalu, 14th October 2009). I followed this up with the principal and the SENCO and they both agreed that this was the best route for Kalu and would not consider changing him. I tried to meet Kalu on a few occasions in November but he was absent every time I looked for him.

Eucharia on the contrary wished to transfer to LCA but her mother would not permit the move. Quincy told me that he was 'trapped' because somebody from the residential care unit brought him to school every morning and collected him in the afternoon. 'If I even think about going on the hop there's someone on my case, I swear it's like being in prison. I took off one afternoon and the next thing there was a search party and I was brought straight back' (Quincy, 15th October 2009).

All of the students agreed to be part of a senior cycle focus group as expert consultants for this research process. Some of the students asked if they could talk to me individually from time to time, to which I agreed. Owen, Mark and Les arranged to meet me for short interviews on their progress a total of seven occasions between them over the course of the school year between November 2009 and May 2010. Owen told me on 11th December that he had decided to finish 5th year now that he had passed his 16th birthday and he would make a decision about whether or not to return for the final year during the summer. He went on to complete 6th year also, passed his LCA modular programme and exams, and was the first in his family to finish school.

1st Focus Group Meeting – 16th December 2009

We agreed at the beginning of the forty minute session that I would introduce two topics and questions, which I also wrote on the whiteboard and then allowed the students to talk to each other while I sat back and observed. Mark whispered to me as everyone was settling in, 'dya know what I'd do if I were you? Give *Peter*[79] the recorder yoke and make him the leader', when I asked why, he explained that Peter was a bit unsure about the whole idea of the focus group at this point and Mark believed that having a job to do would help him settle into the task.

[79] Italics used to indicate name changed to preserve anonymity

My reflective journal observations note:

> *Peter*[80] looked a bit disgruntled coming into the classroom, reinforced by the way he kicked a chair, sat down and then put his feet up on another chair, all the time keeping his back towards me. While the others were settling in I called him aside and asked him if he could do me a favour and look after the recording of the session. He looked surprised and asked, 'Why me?' I simply replied, 'Why not?' and showed him how to use the device. Once he declared himself confident in how to use it, I explained to the group that for the first session, *Peter* was in charge and would make sure that everyone got a chance to talk. I was conscious as I was speaking that his body language had changed dramatically; he was now sitting straight in his chair and looking around the room very seriously at his friends. Once I had written the themes of the discussion on the board, I sat down and let him take over. I caught *Mark* winking at me and once again I was impressed by the boy's insight while at the same time, delighted that *Peter* was taking his role so seriously. He set down rules for the session, none of which I had suggested, but they were appropriate...' (Reflective journal, 16th December 2009)

The themes and questions for this discussion were derived from my original explanation of the study to all of the participants and preliminary themes emerging from conversations with the younger students from the school who were participating in the study:

1. Obstacles and Supports: What/who helps and supports your learning and general involvement in school? What prevents or gets in the way of the same?
2. What from your experience are the most likely reasons for 'challenging' behaviour?

Quincy did not contribute much to the conversation until Peter encouraged him to join in. 'I have a very simple answer, nothing and nobody helps me in school, teachers and scumbags are always getting in my way' (Quincy, 16th December 2009). Eucharia was also reticent and simply said that she was finding 5th year very difficult and lonely so far. 'Some noisy people in my class, teachers don't see me' (Eucharia, 16th December 2009).

The rest of the group had a lively conversation about the topics and the consensus on the first question was the following:

- It is a valuable support when parents/family are interested in school progress, Roger, Emma, Kalu and Eucharia indicated that they fell into that category while the other six students agreed that nobody at home cared what they did at school. 'I suppose when you hear other people's stories you

[80] Italics used to indicate names in this passage changed from the original document preserve anonymity

know it's probably good that they want to know what you're doing and so on but at the time it just seems like nagging' (Emma)

- 'Some teachers seem to get a kick out of giving you a hard time in school and others genuinely care, that makes a big difference' (Les). The students in LCA with the exception of Kalu were in agreement that at least 50 per cent of their teachers as part of the modular programme were more helpful, relaxed and interested in them than teachers had been towards them in the junior cycle.
- 'Believing that you can do the thing and not havin someone make you feel stupid all the time, that helps. I like when we work in groups, we do that a lot this year' (Geraldine).
- Obstacles to learning are 'boredom', 'just not being bothered', 'not liking the subject', 'thinking you're stupid at it', 'the teacher telling you that you're useless', 'some teachers can make everything interesting, some teachers make everything boring'(general consensus).

The response to the second question around behaviour was dominated by the boys in the group. Kalu pointed out that if he ever gets into trouble it is always with the same teachers, 'I hate when teachers shout. It makes me very angry, some teachers like to be powerful and make you feel small, that does not work for me' (Kalu, 16th December 2009). Roger contributed (when asked directly by Peter) that it also made him uncomfortable when teachers shout. Peter laughed and said 'I have ADHD, I'm supposed to be a troublemaker' (Peter, 16th December 2009). Mark pointed out that he and Les had probably been the biggest troublemakers in second and third year;

> We were always in trouble for one thing or another but in my case, nobody gave a shite and even if they did, I couldn't see it. I wish someone would've just done something to help instead of just suspending me and detention an' all, it was horrible. I'm a lot quieter now I think but I know I'm strong too. I passed me Junior and no one thought I would, makes me feel maybe I *can*[81] do something good, sometimes I used to be head wrecked cos I thought I was rubbish'(Mark, 16th December 2010).

Les made the point that students sometimes have a lot of responsibilities or worries outside school that the teachers would not know about which can also impact on behaviour;

> Teachers don't get it, well some of them don't anyway, there does be other stuff going on that's just wreckin your head and you just can't deal with being treated

[81] Italics to denote speaker emphasis

> like crap and shouted at over stupid things like...I was dealin with some serious stuff goin on at home where I have to be the one looking after everyone and then I come into school and get laid into cos I don't have me homework done...ya want to say are *you* on drugs? D'ya *really* want to know what I had to deal with last night and now you want me homework...get real! Sometimes you want to tell the adults to just *grow up* [82](Les, 16th December 2009).

The session finished with Mark suggesting that they would probably be better placed to understand challenging behaviour amongst the younger students than any of the teachers; this was met with general agreement from the group although Quincy and Eucharia made no comment.

Listening to the recording over Christmas brought about the idea for the mentoring programme between the 5th year students and the 2nd year group.

2nd Focus Group Meeting – 7th May 2010

The themes and questions for this session were derived from the original explanation of the study which had informed preliminary interviews and was included in consent forms signed by the students:

1. What do you need to do differently and what do your teachers and school need to do differently for the experience of school to be a positive one for you?
2. Are you prepared to be a part of positive change in your experience of school and if so, what will you do or have you done?

For the second focus group meeting, Roger was given the task of chairing the session, which he agreed to reluctantly at first but later admitted that he thoroughly enjoyed.

In answer to the first question, Geraldine volunteered that 'just being asked is a start. I don't have all the answers but I got a lot out of this year cos I felt important and like I mattered an' all' (Geraldine, 7th May 2010). Mark agreed with Geraldine and said;

> Some of us never feel like we matter to anybody, this year we got to show we can be responsible, that's huge. I think it means that sometimes you have to take a chance on someone and show them you trust 'em or maybe just give 'em a chance to show they can be something. I'm not sure if I'm saying it right but I think it's about respect, except for some of me mates, I never felt anyone here ever respected me before (Mark, 7th May 2010).

[82] All italics in this passage indicate emphatic tone from recording

Kalu pointed out that it was very frustrating for him when adults have all the power while he felt 'powerless'. He reiterated that although he really liked all the students in the LCA class, he wanted to follow the TLC and not being listened to or given the opportunity had impacted on his confidence and experience of 5th year. Quincy admitted that he didn't know how to respond to the question and that he was tempted to give a smart answer but could see that;

> You're all really serious about this, aren't you? I still hate school, nothing has changed for me, I can't wait to leave but I don't know what could make it better either. Probably if I had less classes and more freedom or could just concentrate on stuff that I like, yeah like that would ever happen (Quincy, 7th May 2010).

In response to the second question, seven of the eight of the ten students agreed that they were prepared to be part of positive change in their experience of school, Quincy, Kalu and Eucharia did not respond to this question. The seven students believed that the most positive change they had experienced in school to date had been from their involvement in workshops and activities as part of the mentoring programme. However, when Roger asked how many of the mentors would like to continue that programme or something similar, all of the students who had been involved, including Kalu, said that they would. Geraldine said that if it was possible to organise a training workshop for new mentors, she would be very interested in contributing to it. Mark, Owen, Peter and Emma indicated that they would like that too. In addition, Emma said that because of that experience she would like to get involved in bullying prevention activities when she left school. Peter and Les pointed out that they had started playing music with a band and they were determined to bring more opportunities for students in the school to encourage each other in creative activities when they returned to school after the summer. Les admitted that he felt very guilty because he had been absent a lot in March and April due to illness so he had missed out on the opportunity to get to know his younger partner, John and had also missed out on some of the creative workshops that the other students had enjoyed. He said that he was very keen to have the opportunity the following year if it continued. Mark said that he was not sure if the mentoring programme would continue the following year but that if it did not, he would try and encourage a similar activity between the senior and junior students because 'I think it would've helped me when I was in 2nd year especially if one of the older students had've been there for me' (Mark, 7th May 2010).

Owen added at this point, that he had decided he would be the first in his family to finish school and 'that'll be a change, won't it?' (Owen, 7th May 2010).

Roger asked Eucharia and Quincy did they think they would have liked to have been involved in the mentoring programme, Quincy said no and Eucharia said she did not know. Peter finished the session by saying that he felt sorry for Quincy and Eucharia because when he was asked to become involved at first, he had only agreed because the rest of the group were doing it but;

> being a mentor was the biggest hugest change I could ever make in my life cos I never cared about anybody except myself but I couldn't believe that someone would trust me and I wanted to, you know, not let them down. It was great for me too (Peter, 7th May 2010).

3rd Focus Group Meeting – 13th April 2011

All of the students in the LCA class returned to school in September 2010 to complete the programme. Quincy was arrested during the summer and moved to a different residential care unit and as a result, did not return to St. Bernadette's school. Eucharia did not return to the school either, as she travelled back to Nigeria with her mother and family where they rejoined her father.

At the final focus group meeting, Geraldine chaired the session and asked her classmates the questions which had been chosen by the group in advance of the recording of the meeting by means of a brainstorming session to present feedback on the student voice experience. The final question was contributed by me:

1. What changes have you made to your experience of school?
2. What are you most proud of from your time in school?
3. What are the most important lessons that you can pass on to this study from your experience of school and the ***I'm Me*** Programme
4. What name do you want to give your joint story and why?

After the session the students asked for the opportunity to listen to the recording and present their answers to these questions as one voice. The following passage is their summary of the meeting and the important points that were made there:

> We finished school even though some of us weren't expected to. We made good friendships and even changed some of our teachers' minds about us. We showed we could be responsible and be trusted and deserve respect. We made a difference to some of the younger kids in the school. There's other mentoring programmes going on now in the school and the principal said it's thanks to us and all we did. We decided to be different in a good way and we helped each other. We are proud of our group because we're a good laugh but we got through a lot together and we're still here.

> Give kids a chance, don't tell anyone they're stupid, give them a little trust and they'll want to deserve it, don't shout at them even if they're giving trouble, you can still help them to behave properly if you deal with it quietly or have a chat. We know what we're talking about.[83]
>
> Our story is called ***Jigsaw*** for two reasons.
>
> 1) We are all different but we fit together to make a good story and picture
> 2) We love the song by Ryan Sheridan and some of the words mean a lot to us[84]
>
> (From the 6th year LCA class of 2011: focus group meeting 13th April 2011, written copy collected, 15th April 2011)

I'm Me: Student Ownership

The preceding case studies convey the breadth of challenges experienced by the student participants as well as their expertise in critically evaluating and analysing their own unique sets of circumstances. This has been demonstrated especially in the themes put forward as significant within their consultancy. The process of consulting student participants for the purpose of this study was entitled the ***I'm Me Programme***, named with the intention of encouraging involvement with and identification to a group. However, the 'programme' was not introduced as a formal structure of activities or interventions but rather as a *process* through which to encourage dialogue, involvement and consultation, with the understanding that if any ideas to facilitate positive change were generated by the students, there would be an authentic response on the part of key adults in the school[85] to trial or pilot them where appropriate.

This sub-section presents the process by which the students proposed strategies that they suggested would promote a more positive experience of and/or engagement with learning, behaviour and school life in general for them. The development of ideas was usually a culmination of suggestions between students once they were challenged to devise solutions or supports. For some of the young people involved, it took up to three months of regular meetings and interviews before they felt comfortable enough to discuss their view of obstacles and supports to learning and positive engagement and to suggest changes either tangible or attitudinal that they believed would benefit their experience of school. It took time to believe or trust that their opinions would be genuinely appreciated

[83] Nothing has been changed from the original written piece except spellings
[84] See appendix J
[85] In particular the SENCO, SGC and Principal

or respected but for some amongst the group, in particular the '***Legends***' and '***Jigsaw***' cohorts, their curiosity about the process encouraged their involvement and contributions much more quickly.

Amongst the most popular strategies that emerged from the programme, are '***My PAD***, 'peer-mentoring', 'student led workshops' and '***Chill Out Cards'***. ***My PAD*** is a 'positive aims diary' which was designed with input from the participants in this student voice study in response to their aspiration to be 'noticed' and 'acknowledged' in their positive efforts and good behaviour. Prior to the initiation of this facility for praise and acknowledgement, communication from the school to their home for many of the students had been mainly as a result of challenging behaviour or non conformance with disciplinary procedures in the school. The language of the diary was negotiated with the students and written from the perspective of the young person ***to*** the teacher(s), e.g.;

- *The reason I want to use this diary is to support me making positive changes in my behaviour and attitude in school*
- *Please take this opportunity to notice me making a positive effort and acknowledge these positive changes*
- *This is not a report card for negative behaviour*
- *Your comments should relate to My Positive Aims only*
- *At the end of the class if I have achieved my aims, please initial the appropriate boxes and feel free to add a positive comment.*[86]

Included in 'My notes for My Positive Aims Diary'[87] are statements agreed by the student:

- *I have chosen and agreed these 3 aims for this week with my coordinator*
- *I will try my best to meet my aims*
- *The purpose of My PAD is to support me in making positive changes so that I can:*
    - ✓ *Achieve my goals*
    - ✓ *Experience success*
    - ✓ *Reach my potential in school*

When using ***My PAD***, three positive aims for one week are agreed upon between a coordinator and student, of which one should be easy for the young person to achieve,

[86] See Appendix K, page 1: Important notes from student to teacher about My PAD
[87] See Appendix K, page 2 – My notes for My Positive Aims Diary

one more challenging and one particularly challenging. Before every class, the student gives the diary to the subject teacher pointing out his/her goals for that week. Before the end of the class, the teacher acknowledges by ticking a box ***when*** the student has realised their goals. Boxes are left empty if the student has not been successful but if the aims have been chosen correctly, at least one aim should be successfully reached with little effort. The justification for this is to ensure that the student will realise success and acknowledgment while at the same time ***striving*** to address the target behaviour/attitude or issue which has been identified as problematic by the student themselves.

The '***Legends***' and ***'Blood Brothers'*** students were primarily involved in suggesting and trialling this strategy. ***My PAD*** had three different designs and formats with input from the second year students before the final version was agreed upon. The final draft was discussed at a focus group meeting with ***Legends*** and Ian from ***Blood Brothers*** on 10th December 2009 and the wording was agreed upon a 'student voice friendly' journal. This was conceived as in direct contrast to behavioural report cards that some of the students had been 'put on' in the past and presented an opportunity to ask teachers to pay attention to their efforts when they tried to meet specific goals. The significant difference between ***My PAD*** and school report or 'behaviour' cards was that this student voice strategy is:

- A record of 'positive' behaviour
- Intended to solicit praise and acknowledgement
- Students decide if they would like to use it rather than being 'put on' report as a punishment – it is student led and initiated
- Its use is not limited to addressing behaviour but providing opportunities for students to realise success or simply to be noticed 'doing what we always did but nobody cared cos they only see when you done something wrong or not good enough' (Cassie, 7th May 2010)

Feedback from the students indicated that having a 'record of good behaviour' encouraged them to make more effort to meet their set goals. They were pleasantly surprised by the positive impact it had on their relationships with teachers as well as the response from parents/guardians, who are encouraged to sign the diary on a weekly basis and include an encouraging acknowledgement of effort;

> My ma cried the first two times, specially the second one cos there was lots of real good comments in it. The first week I wasn't that good but you see no one could say anything bad so it looked good anyway and then I wanted real good stuff so I really tried then, it was cool. I think everyone should do it (Frank, 7th May 2010).

A record of goals or behaviour in schools is not a new idea; however, what is different about ***My PAD*** is first and foremost the emphasis on acknowledging 'positive behaviour' but most importantly, the contractual language which is presented from the perspective of the student. The format of the booklet is colourful and glossy which also appealed to the participants. Initially a black and white photocopied version of the booklet was used but many copies 'went missing' or were misplaced, whereas teachers commented on the fact that students are quite proud and protective of the newer, more attractive and sturdy version.

The peer-mentoring programme differed from similar strategies already in place in many schools as it involved mentors in the senior cycle who had previously presented with challenging behaviours in school and/or who had been identified as having an EBD. This idea was developed from Mark's comments when he conveyed his understanding of difficulties experienced by the younger students in the school who were similar to the person he had been at their age, (Mark, 9th October 2009) as well as a similar suggestion from him and agreed upon by most of the others during a focus group meeting with ***Jigsaw*** on 16th December 2009.

On 13th January 2010, I discussed with Ms. Gray, Ms. Greene, Mr. Ash and the LCA coordinator, Mr. Briar, the feasibility of facilitating an opportunity for the 2nd year students and 5th year students to meet on a regular basis. They were dubious at first but Ms. Greene suggested that her last timetabled period on Fridays which was scheduled with the 2nd year group (which included 5 of the students in ***Legends***) could be used for activities if the opportunity arose. The LCA co-ordinator explained that 5th year LCA finished early every Friday and it was extremely unlikely that they would stay in school for any activity. It was agreed that the decision should be made by the students whether to organise a meeting in that time period and what activities or construction would be instigated within the time available.

I approached the LCA group while they were in class with their co-ordinator and invited the two students from TLC who were also members of ***Jigsaw*** for the short meeting (13th January, 2010). Eucharia and Quincy immediately said that they were not interested and went back to class and to begin with, the 8 members of LCA argued with each other about the 'point' of such an exercise especially when they did not need to be in school. Mark stood up and relayed a few stories from his time in the junior cycle when with hindsight he believed it would have been really useful to have an older student in the

school ‘not a goody goody who didn’t have a clue what I was on about but someone like me who I could believe in but wasn’t off the rails neither’ (Mark 13th January 2010). Finally, he convinced the group of 8 to try meeting with the 2nd year students from 29th January 2010 which gave them just over two weeks to decide how to prepare for these meetings and what the meetings should entail. The LCA Co-ordinator agreed that they could use his time periods with them as preparation provided they turned the experience into an academic exercise and wrote about it before the end of the year. He pointed out that the experience could also be used if chosen for their ‘Personal Reflection Statement’[88].

I took Mr. Briar’s class periods with the students between 13th and 28th January as an opportunity for the students to discuss, tease out and brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of the junior and senior students meeting regularly. It was agreed that the exercise should be a ‘mentoring’ one without ‘pressure, cos we’re not experts and I wouldn’t have a clue what to say to one of ‘em if they were having real problems’ (Peter, 15th January 2010). The LCA group agreed that the mentoring activities should not involve too much time for one to one conversations beyond getting to know each other and making the younger students feel comfortable and relaxed within the larger group. Emma made the point that:

> It should be more about us telling them how we used to be pretty messed up and in trouble and all, sometimes and look at us now, we’re still a bit messed up (laughs) but we’re alright we’re not completely mentalers or screwed up, more cos we’ve a different vibe going on now an’ we have a group that kinda accepts us and looks after each other. Don’t get me wrong, we kill each other sometimes too and we don’t know it all either but Jaysus, I remember some of us were in a real bad way and there was constant agro and grief (Emma, 18th January 2010).

Mark was keen to insist that their role should be one of reassurance and not ‘talking down to’ or ‘telling them what to do cos we all get enough of that’ instead, ‘let’s just get together once a week and do some fun stuff so maybe we’ll all go home smiling for a change’ (Mark, 18th January 2010).

Some of the preparation for meeting the second year students involved role playing in order to emphasise how important it was for the senior students ***not*** to make any attempt to act as counsellors to the younger students nor to take on responsibilities beyond offering friendship and an opportunity to chat on a very general level about the

[88] A compulsory exercise which is part of the formal assessment process within the LCA Programme – 5 of the students took the opportunity to submit an account of their involvement with the mentoring programme as part of the LCA assessment exercise

experience of school. Mr. Briar and I initiated the role playing activities by dramatising conversations for the participants based on suggested ideas from the students, after which they discussed we elicited their feedback and criticisms. As a group they drew up a list of responsibilities which I printed for them and everyone signed[89]. As part of the same activity, the group of 8 students completed a short questionnaire prior to initiating the programme[90] .

1. What in your opinion is your most important responsibility as a mentor in this programme?
2. If your younger partner discloses that they are very upset or troubled about anything, what will you do?
3. If your younger partner discloses that they or anybody else they know is in danger, what will you do?
4. Do you think it would have been helpful for you if you had had a mentor when you were in 1st 2nd or 3rd year?
5. If the answer to the question above is yes, how do you think it might have helped?
6. Do you believe that your own experience of junior cycle in school will help you to understand and help the student you have been assigned to[91]? If yes, please elaborate.

In response to question 1, seven out of eight students replied 'to listen'; one student replied 'to make them comfortable'.

In response to question 2, the answers were: 'I will listen'(8/8), and 'tell them to talk to Paula or *Mr. Ash*[92]if the problem is bad'(5/8), 'tell them I understand'(6/8).

In response to question 3, all of the responses were a variation on the following words: 'I will tell them to talk to Paula or *Mr. Ash* or *Mr. Briar*'[93].

In response to question 4, all of the students wrote 'yes' while some wrote additional comments including; 'I think it good to let all your problems out'; 'I think it would of been really helpful'; Yeah' they would of been great to help with stuff'.

[89] See Appendix L
[90] See Appendix L
[91] Appendix M – List of partnerships between students
[92] Italics used to indicate name changed from original documents
[93] Italics used to indicate names changed from original documents

In response to question 5 the students wrote the following:
'I not sure', 'they would of be someone to talk to', 'if someone like us, they know what is like to go through stuff', 'help with things maybe', 'just to listen to me woulda helped', 'depending on who it is, it could of helped me to talk things though (sic) with someone who knows what I have going on', 'someone near our age knows what you talking about better and doesn't just give out', 'I didn't have no one at home or in school to talk to'.

In response to question 6 the students wrote the following:
'I think maybe', 'I don't know everything they go through but I listen and understand anything', 'Yes, I found it very frustrating in the Junior Cycle and the teachers do not help by saying every time you do something wrong, your Junior Cert is important', 'Yes, I think I'll be able to understand because I went through a bad 1st to 3rd year as well', Yes, because the Junior Cycle does be very stressful', 'Yes', 'I think listening is the only thing I can do', 'I hope I can'.

The Friday afternoon meetings between 29th January and 14th May 2010 became a combination of games, chat and workshops. Initially I suggested some activities until the older students felt more confident to initiate their own suggestions or ask for advice around organising input from guest experts. Time was given during some of these sessions for the partnerships to chat and share ideas around what helped them succeed and what they identified as obstacles to successful participation and engagement in school. A number of the suggestions which emerged from these conversations were offered as scenarios which were acted out and analysed by the participants during 'conflict resolution' in drama workshops. Students took opportunities in groups to put together a scenario based on a real life experience from which they distributed roles to participants in the larger group and these were acted out in an unrehearsed setting. After the improvised drama, time was given for a feedback session to determine what else could have been done or why something had gone wrong[94]. Some Fridays were devoted to team work exercises involving art or music. For one session, the lead singer of a popular Dublin band was invited and the principal allowed the students to devote the entire afternoon to singing and song writing with him. Two afternoons were allocated to learning how to sculpt from a small concrete block.[95]Another idea which emerged from the mentoring programme was modelled as peer led team building workshop afternoons

[94] Examples of these conflict resolutions sessions included experiences of bullying or distressful situations involving arguments with family and or teachers.
[95] Appendix P – photograph of completed sculptures from one of the sculpture workshops

which the participants organised with their class tutors to cultivate positive relationships and boost morale amongst their class groups. The initiative was particularly effective in classes where the students who took leadership roles in these workshops had previously been the perpetrators of behaviours that had impacted on class morale.

Another intervention which emerged and was refined as an idea during the mentoring group meetings was that of the '***Chill Out Cards***[96]'. Students were given a card which indicated a designated allocation of time that could be used in different 'chunks' over a term or school year. If a student believed that s/he was about to lose their temper or felt particularly anxious, disruptive, hyperactive or upset, they could 'spend' a specified chunk of their allocated minutes on the card with the agreement of their teacher and the student had to find either a coordinator within the ***I'm Me programme*** (which could be a year head, guidance counsellor, resource teacher etc.) or else they had permission to contact their senior mentor in the case of junior students. At first the strategy was met with some resistance within the school from teachers and Year Heads and it was suggested that the students would abuse the privilege and use all of their allocated time within a week or perhaps even a day. On the contrary, evidence from the data collected proved that none of the students used up **all** of their allocated minutes over either the term or year as relevant and out of four students, two never attempted to use the card at any time but in feedback said that they were happy just knowing that it was available to them (***Legends*** focus group meeting, 4th May 2011).

To conclude, some of the student participants acknowledged the enjoyment and benefit they experienced from strategies such as the mentoring programme and ***My PAD*** within their stories, however, the process of consulting the students and listening to their suggestions in order to give them opportunities to become agents of change in their own experience is what encapsulates the essence of '***The I'm Me Programme***'.

'The Glass House'

This section focuses on attitudes and responses to some of the changes that occurred as a reaction to student initiatives within this research on the part of key adults in the school.

Ms. Gray introduced me formally to the teaching staff of St. Bernadette's Post Primary school on 4th September 2009 and gave me the opportunity to explain the purpose of the

[96] Appendix Q

student voice research and in particular to identify the students I would be consulting for the duration of the study. The principal apologised after the presentation for what she described as 'the lukewarm unenthusiastic response.' She pointed out that apart from the fact that I was proposing to work with some of the most unpopular students in the school, this was also happening against a backdrop of resentment and ill-feeling owing to budgetary cuts to teachers' pay and school allowances. 'There is a palpable sense of ill-feeling and resentment in the staffroom right now. I think some people see you as a nuisance and perhaps even a damned interfering pest, in fact, a few will definitely see you as a do-gooder probably here to defend the most unworthy' (Ms. Gray, 4th September 2010).

Over the next two years in the school I had reason to give a number of presentations to the school staff especially to give updates on some of the interventions that were being trialled and an opportunity for feedback from teachers on engagement and behaviour. These whole staffroom discussions were supplemented by many one to one chats during break times and after school hours as gradually, teachers became more familiar with and accepting of my presence in the school. Initially, a few teachers took the opportunity to complain bitterly about the extra workload that was generated from the completion of ***My PAD***s at the beginning and end of classes, however by February there were few complaints and mainly positive feedback about the enthusiasm and improved attitude they were producing. One teacher who had been absent when the diaries were first introduced and explained on 16th December 2009, complained to the principal because a student who had given her ***My PAD*** to complete was annoyed when she had written a negative comment into it, (5th February 2010). In his feedback on the research process, Mr. Ash pointed out:

Students were far more conscious of this strategy[97] as a 'student owned intervention', but it was a slower process for teachers to come to terms with. There were some problems that had to be ironed out quite honestly but they were all tied up in the fact that a few teachers were maybe a bit resistant to it, I think they saw it as an erosion of power in their classroom, especially because they had the kids telling them that they couldn't just write whatever they liked in it. When some of the kids who're facing you down in your own classroom are not exactly your favourites, I guess that's a bit hard to take at first. That important element of not being able to write negative comments if they wanted to, had to

[97] ***My PAD***

be spelled out a number of times, you know? I mean the fact that it was *not* there to replace the disciplinary tools that we already have in place....I think it also came as quite an eye opener to a lot of people around here that kids who had *never* been badly behaved wanted the opportunity to use it also and this perhaps was when the realisation began to dawn on many teachers that it was actually not about 'behaviour' exclusively. This 'penny dropped' when shy or quiet students who were hardly noticed wanted to be acknowledged quietly for what they had always done without a drum roll in the classroom. That's probably when you won me over too you know [98](Mr. Ash, 2nd June 2011).

Ms. Greene observed that ***My PAD*** was a tool which students 'covet' and consider 'cool', reinforcing the SGC's point that it was not exclusively for students with challenging behaviour but used more widely 'to promote praise from teachers and bring about effort, involvement and serious changes in attitude and confidence on the part of the students' (Appendix O).

Follow up feedback in 2012 on the sustainability of the student research process and some of the emergent interventions however, reinforced the need for an understanding behind the 'use' of ***My PAD***. Ms. Magnolia commented that although she still found that students were benefiting greatly from using the diary, especially students from the junior cycle, she was disappointed that it had not helped with one young first year who was presenting with very challenging behaviour in school. She pointed out that the young girl had been '***put***' on ***My PAD*** on at least three occasions to date but had defiantly refused to cooperate or use it. After some discussion around the origins of the intervention the coordinator agreed that it had been presented to the young student as though it were another version of a 'behaviour report card' with little or no conversation around why it might be helpful or any agreement on objectives/aims or sense of ownership within the process from the student (Ms. Magnolia, 13th January 2012). The success of ***My PAD*** is firmly rooted in the process from which it was designed as part of a consultation opportunity and negotiation between designated coordinator and student must be presented as an opportunity for success and acknowledgment (reference NAPD Executive Report and ESHA online magazine).

[98] Italics used to indicate emphatic intonation in recording

The idea for the mentoring programme was met with some resistance and angry comments when it was introduced to the teaching staff and the specific students in 5th year LCA were named in partnership with their younger counterparts from 2nd year[99]. Some of the responses included:

- 'Most of the LCA students are brats and far from responsible enough to be mentors for younger kids'
- 'Oh well done, that will give them (the younger students) more ideas on how to make our lives miserable around here'
- 'Outrageous'
- '***Mark and Les***[100] are thugs and you think they should be mentors?'

(Staffroom responses, 27th January 2010)

Ms. Greene remembered the first day the students were put in pairs and Gary was really angry because of a confrontation earlier that day which had resulted in his mother being called into the school (29th January 2010). While the other partnerships were introduced to one another in a class room setting, Mark and Gary were brought into the resource room office (an annex to the main classroom) where Mark told his younger mentee 'don't worry mate, there's nothing you could even think about doing wrong on your worst day that I haven't done, but I'm ok, no angel but ok. Hang in there and I'll look out for ya if ya let me' (Mark, 29th January 2010). She recalled being 'so taken aback' by the older boy's sincerity and honesty and in hindsight believed that Mark blossomed in confidence and maturity because of the opportunity to act 'as a sort of big brother for *Gary*[101]' (Ms. Greene, 15th April 2011). Ms. Greene believed that the transformation in terms of teacher attitudes and confidence in the student voice research was slow and not one hundred per cent successful, '

> ...but where you had more than half of the staff thinking you were crazy to begin with, well it was certainly a lot less by the end of the 1st year and to be honest, I think that even more are won over now and that's because we've managed to keep up some of the success without you having to do all the work. You'll always have naysayers and even though some people had to admit eventually that kids they'd written off were surprising everyone, you'd still have the few who'd say ah well that's because Paula is overseeing it...so you see I'm not sure that they were convinced in the kids' own potential or even *our* potential as a school to sustain

[99] See Appendix P
[100] Names changed from original comment to preserve anonymity
[101] Italics to indicate name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity

> that. Now though, I believe this school has changed dramatically, and in fact *Ms. Gray*[102] and I are in complete agreement on this one, the ethos of the school has changed. We don't just say it, we believe that children are the experts on their own experience and if there are problems, they know better than anyone how to help *us* help *them*[103] And now what has changed the opinions of the staff around here is that we have managed to convince people that it wasn't just for show or a once off, we're invested in this and we're doing our best. A lot of this programme is sustainable and we're proving it (Ms. Greene, 15th April 2011).

The ***Chill Out Cards*** which emerged from discussions between the students during the mentoring group activities were also met with uncertainty in the staffroom when the concept was first introduced. The idea behind them was that students were given a time allocation, for example one hour, which they could spend over the course of a school year or term as agreed between student and co-ordinator and 'spending this time' meant that they would be allowed to leave class with their teacher's permission, who signed and noted time of departure and return on the card, deducting this time from the overall allocation. In response to the explanation of their use, one teacher said 'what will happen is the full allotment of time will be used up in a day or a week' and another contributed, 'or, they'll target the same teacher or class just to get out of it' (Staffroom, 22nd February 2010). In fact, just four students asked to use the card; John, Harry, Frank and Gary and each was given an allocation of one hour which they could use between 24th February and 28th May 2010. John and Harry never used it but Harry said that he liked knowing he could (7th May 2010), Frank used it once for 15 minutes and never used it again, Gary used it on two occasions to meet and talk to Mark using 35 minutes in total from his allocated hour. He told me that he was conscious of the trust that had been placed in him and Mark, and wanted the opportunity to prove that they had earned it, (Gary, 7th May 2010).

Ms. Magnolia offered her insights on the student voice research and student led strategies which she believed had 'given children opportunities to shine' (Ms. Magnolia, 30th April 2010). At time of this interview she was 5th year Year Head and knew the 5th year students in LCA very well having been their Year Head since they had started school in September 2006. Mark, Les and Quincy had been the most difficult students she had ever worked with but she had seen a lot of potential in Mark and tried very hard to 'cajole and

[102] Italics to indicate name changed from transcript to preserve anonymity
[103] Italics used to indicate emphatic intonation in recording

convince him' especially when he was in 2nd year and the early part of 3rd year. She admitted;

> He broke my heart and I find it hard to let go of that resentment now. I put everything into trying to help him, it took up so much of my time and I just didn't want to give up on him...now I look at him and I know I should be proud. He's shown himself to be so insightful and caring, I've heard great things about him, and sure I can see it myself, especially in the mentoring programme. He's a regular hero and I want to be happy for him, for everyone, yet I can't forgive him, I almost don't want him to be this good, because then it's like it never happened (Ms. Magnolia, 30th April 2010).

Ms. Magnolia, however, was and still is one of the strongest advocates of the ***I'm Me Programme*** as demonstrated in her final feedback interview, and together with Ms. Greene and Mr. Ash has taken responsibility for overseeing that the student voice approach is;

> ...maintained within the fabric of the school. Between us, we oversee some of the kid's ideas and we've now established three different mentoring programmes and each of us runs one of them. I look after the peer model, *Ms. Greene* runs a parent student version and *Mr. Ash* oversees a teacher student version, all of them are voluntary but they're having a big impact on the attitude of everyone in the school community, especially around listening to kids and finding out how to get out of the holes we dig for ourselves (Ms. Magnolia, 13th January 2012).

In the principal's feedback on this research, Ms. Gray pointed out that she had been especially impressed by the student led 'team building workshops' which she believed were most responsible for changing teacher attitudes around the positive impact of 'student empowerment' (13th January 2012). These workshops were an unanticipated outcome of a favour that Ms. Gray had asked me to do for her because one of the 2nd year tutors, Ms. Honey, had expressed her distress about her role as tutor and admitted that she couldn't cope any longer and thought it might be better if somebody else took over the position. The principal was anxious for the tutor and asked me to talk to her promising to accommodate any suggestions or strategies that emerged (5th February 2010). As two of the students in Ms. Honey's tutor group were part of the ***I'm Me Programme***, John (Lone Wolf) and Harry (Legends), I offered to take the class group with Ms. Honey for an afternoon and try some morale boosting and team building activities.

The afternoon (25th February 2010) was divided between teamwork activities and round table discussions which finished with a plenary class discussion. For all of the activities and discussions, Ms Honey sat with the students and became a member of different teams for the afternoon. For one of the games, I asked the students in groups (one of which included their tutor as a member) to tell each other three things about themselves; one which had to be false and the other two true; the game for each of the other team members was to spot the lie. At the end of the group activity, the teams had to choose one of their members to represent their group for a similar plenary activity, revealing the same information. Ms. Honey's three statements were as follows:

1. I got into trouble when I was a teenager in school for 'mitching'
2. I box in my local club to keep fit
3. I used to live in Australia.

The most laughter in the room was heard when Ms. Honey revealed that she had never lived in Australia and the other two statements were true and she was volunteered by her team to represent them in the plenary game. In the final feedback discussion, one student in the class told her that they thought she was 'so cool' not because she had 'mitched' but because she had trusted them so much to admit it. Other comments included that the class discussion was 'savage', and Ms. Honey was 'a legend/great fun/almost human'.

Ms. Honey told the principal that she felt a bond with her class following the activities of the afternoon which had also included a class discussion eliciting every student's opinion on how to improve morale, behaviour and engagement and recommended that other class groups should have the opportunity to do similar activities with their tutors. However, before the principal could suggest this to any other teacher, Harry shared the experience of the afternoon team bonding exercise with the 2nd and 5th years during the mentoring programme activities and suggested that they would really enjoy it too (Harry, 26th February 2010). He was encouraged by his friends to suggest to the principal that he would like to take my role with one of the other 2nd year students and organise something similar with another 2nd year group. She duly gave permission with the result that by the end of the year, three further 2nd year class groups had the experience, all facilitated by students on the I'm Me Programme and always with the tutor and at least one other teacher who had to become one of the students for the afternoon and take part 'on the same level'. The LCA group took the lead from their younger counterparts and held a similar afternoon and 8 of their teachers including the LCA co-ordinator joined them in

the activity. Ms. Gray said that of all the activities that had been generated from this programme, this was the one that she was most proud of and believed had had the greatest impact on students and staff alike (Ms. Gray, 13th January 2012/interview – also see Appendix N).

When I asked Ms. Gray and Ms. Greene to recommend a title for a section on 'teacher attitudes', Ms Greene suggested 'The Glass House, because we need to learn to stop throwing stones' (Ms. Greene, 13th January 2012).

CONCLUSION

Chapter six has provided a contextual and temporal outline for data collected through this student voice research project between 2008 and 2012. The story began with Alex in his final year in primary school and followed him through to the end of his first year in post primary school. The major case study presented the journey taken in one post primary school with nineteen participating students and followed the impact on them and their school community as they engaged in this consultative process from their preliminary interviews in 2009 to the conclusion of data collection between May 2011 and January 2012[104]. The story of this journey taken with the student participants by means of the consultative process has provided insights into challenges that they had experienced and/or perpetrated prior to and during the study; what they brought to the research and what they took away from it as indicated from the feedback and analysis sessions.

The participants highlighted issues and themes of particular significance to their stories which will be discussed and analysed in chapter seven within the theoretical framework and paradigmatic stance that has informed the direction of this study.

[104] The two students in Blood Brothers asked to meet for a feedback interview in January 2012. Consent was given by each of the boys' mothers for the occasion and the principal kindly gave permission for the interview to be held on school premises.

CHAPTER 7 – DATA ANALYSIS

THE SPACE BETWEEN

> As qualitative researchers we are not separate from the study, with limited contact with our participants...We cannot retreat to a distant "researcher" role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p.61).

The purpose of this chapter is to present and interpret the themes that emerged in collaboration with the young participants through this research journey in the context of the literature and lenses identified in the theoretical framework and the review of literature. Interpreting data within this process required consultation with the student participants as well as a collaboration of insider and outsider perspectives experienced from being in the position of researcher. In particular, my regular visits to St. Bernadette's Post Primary School over a sustained period of time led to a familiarity with and acceptance of my presence there, which was acknowledged by staff and students through this ethnographic approach. This provided a unique opportunity to experience and witness changes or consistency with respect to behaviour, attitude and culture within the school from an 'insider' perspective, while at the same time, being neither staff nor student in the school meant that I was also an 'outsider'. That stance afforded important distance for reflection on the research as well as a broader lens through which to contemplate the significance of the data as relevant to policy and practice. However, the overwhelming experience as researcher was neither that of insider or outsider, but one referred to as 'a state of limbo' in my reflective diary. Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explain that qualitative research can be an intimate experience which does not allow us to remain either true outsiders or complete insiders to the experience. Instead, we occupy the space between (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle 2009, p.61).

THEMES FOR ANALYSIS

> There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing (Rose 1985, p.77).

Throughout this thesis, the commitment to student voice has prevailed. The collection of data was deliberately conducted within a flexible format in order to allow relevant topics of interest to emerge and a natural journey of questioning and responses to transpire through the process. However, despite that flexibility, the nature of the enquiry was transparent at all times to the student participants, as they were aware that the overriding enquiry related to;

- engaging their voices as experts on their own experience of school
- determining their experience of supports and obstacles
- trying to discover their vision for a supportive environment which would positively transform their experience of school
- establishing whether or not they would be empowered to become active agents in pursuit of this transformation.

The participating students were invited to contribute themes for analysis and to comment and give feedback on my interpretation of these and any additional themes that I included from my experience and perspective of this research journey. I am conscious that my biases impact on my interrogation of the data, just as the participants' biases, experiences and perceptions of their individual and combined 'realities' are also significant, However, the theoretical commitment to an authentic presentation of student voice justifies the ontological stance of this analysis, since the presentation of themes prioritises the perspectives of the student participants. All of the students who participated in this study had been identified with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties through psychological assessment or by relevant personnel in their school as a result of consistent and sustained apathy, disengagement and/or challenging behaviour. Similar to Garner (1995), this research set out to close the "reality gap" between what the students actually think and 'what teachers and others think they think' (Garner 1995, p.20).

The issues which emerged from the data and were highlighted as significant by the participants have been grouped within four major themes. These serve as conceptual lenses through which to analyse the data and consider what information this analysis generates, especially in the context of the literature that was consulted in those specific topics. The four themes are: Voice; Perspectives of Difference; Care; and Leadership.

VOICE

This sub section examines the theme of 'voice' relative to 'the act of listening'; 'empowerment and change'; and 'voice; a research approach'.

The Act of Listening

Evidence from this study concurs with the contention that young people want to be heard (Rudduck and Demetriou 2003). The importance of 'being listened to' is repeated across the data sets and identified as one of the most important aspects of the participation process for many of the students. In the pilot study, Alex and Ms. Caramel associate 'respect' with the act of 'being listened to'. Similarly, in the ***Jigsaw*** case study, both Geraldine and Mark reinforce this association by sharing that the experience had made them feel 'important'; 'like I/we mattered'; 'but I think it's about respect, except for some of me mates, I never felt anyone here ever respected me before' (Mark 7th May 2010). Those members of ***Jigsaw*** who agreed to become mentors to the younger participants stressed that primarily it should be an exercise in listening and many of them pointed out that if they had had a similar opportunity in junior cycle it might have been beneficial to them then, e.g.; 'I didn't have no one at home or in school to talk to[105],

Robinson and Taylor (2007) caution the implication within student voice research that the participants have only one voice or that their degree of commonality with respect to the research enquiry will be reflected in the interpretation of their realities. The experience of this process was neither equal nor the same for the participants, which was an essential feature of the research design as the students made the ultimate decision on their individual levels of involvement in and contribution to the process. In his case study, ***Lonewolf***, John did not prioritise being listened to as an important issue in his experience and also chose his own method of communication. Kalu, Eucharia and Quincy as part of ***Jigsaw***, indicated different levels of interest in the research and in the case of Eucharia and Quincy, chose limited involvement and engagement with the process. Quincy remained unconvinced at the value of the research collaboration throughout and was at times scornful at the level of interest expressed by his peers. Kalu and Eucharia, however, both expressed disappointment at the fact that neither was pursuing the certificate programme that they had favoured and this impacted

[105] Response to Question 5 of Mentoring Questionnaire, Appendix L

significantly on their demeanour and enjoyment of 5th year in school. It is possible that the opportunity to be a part of a student voice initiative had less impact when something they really wanted to change was not addressed and their opinions and voice had been ignored either in school or at home as relevant.

On the contrary, experiencing an authentic response to their contributions in the research process rather than what could be perceived as 'tokenistic listening' (Cook-Sather 2006; Fielding and Rudduck 2002; Flynn et al. 2011; Lundy 2007; Robinson and Taylor 2007) when realised, was acknowledged by the participants as very important. This was at its most apparent when the students' suggestions of strategies to support their engagement, behaviour or learning were facilitated and trialled in both the pilot and main case studies. The participants also recognised generally through the process, the impact on them because of 'somebody paying attention' (Legends 15th September 2010) and 'just being asked is a start' (Geraldine 7th May 2010).

Contributions from some of the teachers in the main case study, support research which indicates that teachers are less favourably disposed towards the inclusion of students with SEBD in their classrooms[106] (Cooper and Jacobs 2011; Farrell 2000; Lindsay 2007; Scanlon 2007; Shevlin et al. 2012; Winter and O'Raw 2010) and indeed these students are 'the least listened to, empowered and liked group' (Cefai and Cooper 2010, p.4). However, it is also clear that the engagement with 'student voice' and the opportunity to clarify what the participants 'really think' impacted on teacher perceptions of the students. In the pilot study, Ms Caramel was surprised at Alex's honesty about his behaviour and impressed at his insights into the identification of precipitating factors and measures to address cause and effect. Similarly, the opportunity to communicate with the school guidance counsellor (SGC) after his transition to post primary school, positively impacted on Alex's relationships, trust and general experience of school. In St. Bernadette's Post Primary School, Ms. Gray, Mr. Ash, Ms. Greene, Ms Magnolia and Ms. Honey all[107] took the opportunity to express their approval of the initiatives driven by the student participants and the experience of engaging in a student voice approach to 'finding out how to get out of the holes we dig for ourselves' (Ms. Magnolia, 13th January 2012). The principal, SGC and SENCO in particular acknowledged that the students' engagement in the research process had impacted positively on attitudes of

[106] Evidence in 'Legends', 'Blood Brothers' and 'The Glass House'
[107] The Glass House

teachers towards the students and the approach, although it had not changed the opinions of all the teachers[108].

Through their suggestions, design and successful engagement with strategies they believed would support their experience of school, the student participants corroborated the position in much of the literature that young people have an expert role with respect to the knowledge and understanding of what it is like to be a student in a particular school (Cooper 1996; Gersch 2001; James et al. 1998; Leitch et al. 2005; Rose and Shevlin 2010). Ms. Caramel acknowledged this in response to Alex's insights on his own experiences; both Ms. Gray and Ms. Greene were in agreement with one another that in recognition of this, '...the ethos of the school has changed. We don't just say it, we believe that children are the experts on their own experience and if there are problems, they know better than anyone how to help us help them' (Ms. Greene, 15th April 2011).

The position of the students on this issue reinforces that assertion; Harry and Ian offered this opinion in their feedback, 'Adults don't know everything, we know ourselves better than you, maybe you should listen to us sometimes' (13th January 2012).

Empowerment and Change

Advocates of student voice research contend that such engagement for student participants can potentially empower them to participate meaningfully and collaboratively in positively transforming their experience of school (Fielding 2004; Robinson and Taylor 2007; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007). The experience of this study supports the *possibility* of this objective. However, just as the word 'potential' implies that the outcome is subject to conditions, a combination of circumstances determined the impact of this engagement for 'active agency in transformative action' on the part of the student participants.

For many of the young participants, their journey towards empowerment and being the instigators of positive change in their experience of school was generated from active involvement in the participative and consultative process of this research study. Regular conversations and the building of trust and relationships led to individuals reaching a position of belief that their opinions 'mattered' and a point at which they were comfortable sharing ideas and discussing their experience of school. This happened at a

[108] The Glass House and Appendix N

different pace for all of the participants. For some students it transpired over a number of weeks, for others, the same process took months and for others still, it hardly happened or never happened at all. Ian[109], was making great progress and enjoying his participation in the student voice research experience but family circumstances precipitated consequences that meant he was excluded from school and consequently from the study. However, through his friendship with Harry, he made an enormous contribution to the learning within this study when he shared his story through ***Blood Brothers***. Quincy chose to have limited participation within this research which was not helped by the fact that most of the other student participants in his year group were together in one class and following a different certificate programme. Despite his inclusion in the research grouping, he remained apart from the other participants and although invited to become involved in the mentoring programme, he declined the opportunity. Quincy shared his frustration at his experience of being 'trapped' and feeling like he was in 'prison' because he was constantly under scrutiny both in school and the residential care centre in which he was living during the school year of intensive data collection. Similarly, Eucharia was not part of the LCA group, which was unfortunate since she had expressed that she would rather study within that modular programme but her mother had objected and insisted that she could not. Like Quincy, she was frustrated by her circumstances both within and outside school, and at the end of 5th year she returned with her family to Nigeria. It is regrettable that within a study which set out to empower students who were marginalised, two of the participants continued to be isolated, not just within the larger environment of the school but also within the smaller group. The physical reality of not being in the same class group as the majority of their age peers who were part of the student voice study was undoubtedly a factor, however, their feelings of frustration and 'powerlessness' relative to other circumstances in their lives seemed to impact on their willingness to take part or increase involvement in the research process. Quincy's response to questions in one of the focus group meetings (7th May 2010) conveyed a sense of despondency at the possibility of positive change in his experience of school.

Lynch and Lodge (2002) highlight the sense of injustice felt by students who experience negative power relationships or whose lives outside school may represent different degrees of responsibility. This injustice is further perpetuated if they have negative experiences of power, control and authority in their relationships with teachers (Lynch and Lodge 2002, p.164). Some of the participants criticised their teachers for

[109] ***Blood Brothers***

undermining them or shouting at them over issues they felt were insignificant compared to other difficulties they might be experiencing at that time. They gave examples such as not wearing the right shoes or not having homework done, especially when:

> I was dealin with some serious stuff goin on at home where I have to be the one looking after everyone and then I come into school and get laid into cos I don't have me homework done...ya want to say are *you* on drugs? D'ya *really* want to know what I had to deal with last night and now you want me homework...get real! Sometimes you want to tell the adults to just *grow up* [110](Les, 16th December 2009).

Kalu, Harry, Ian, Gary and Kevin also shared examples of feeling angry, undermined or powerless in confrontational situations with teachers[111]. There is some agreement in the literature however, that the empowerment of students with SEBD can contribute to the resolution and prevention of some of the associated difficulties experienced by these students in school (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Kroeger et al. 2004; Leitch and Mitchell 2007; Norwich and Kelly 2006). Cefai and Cooper (2010) suggest that barriers to engaging in student voice work for the purpose of positive empowerment of students with SEBD lies in the concern that teachers have in 'giving away their power' and the belief that eliciting student voice may compromise the teacher's authority in the classroom (Cefai and Cooper 2010, p.195). This concern was evident amongst some teachers during this study, with the initiation of changes and interventions that had been suggested and designed by students in St. Bernadette's. When he was reflecting on the experience of the student voice journey, Mr Ash explained that a few teachers were resistant to what they saw as an 'erosion of power' in their classrooms, especially with the use of ***My PAD*** because the students were telling the teachers that they could not write anything negative into it. He made the point that the students were more conscious than the teachers that this was a 'student owned intervention' (Mr. Ash, 2nd June 2011). For the SGC and other teachers in the school, a greater understanding of the experience of positive empowerment and the importance of providing opportunities for the students to engage in such a process, was only realised as the students themselves made clear that this strategy was not 'just' about behaviour. Similarly, suspicions and doubts around the ***Chill Out Card*** and the potential abuse of the strategy, were alleviated because the students were determined to prove that they had earned the trust that had been placed in

[110] All italics in this passage indicate emphatic tone from recording
[111] Jigsaw, Blood Brothers and Legends respectively

them in orchestrating the strategy[112]. Goodson's (2002) observations that 'Transformation requires an interruption to the regularities of school – a rupturing of the ordinary – that enables teachers and students to "see" alternatives' (in Fielding and Rudduck 2002b 5) are supported by the persistence of the students in proving that they were determined to engage in what was fundamentally a 'power-sharing' activity. Their resolve and initiative in this pursuit is what convinced teachers to the contrary who had previously harboured doubts about their motives within the changes they were making to their educational and ultimately social environment in school.

When asked if they were prepared to be a part of positive change in their experience of school, seven out of ten members of ***Jigsaw*** responded in the affirmative. Again, it is significant that the three students who did not, were students who had indicated an experience of 'powerlessness' in their lives[113]. The other seven were eager to give examples of proposals they would like to be involved in as a result of their experience of initiating positive change in the process up to that point. Interestingly, all of the suggestions they made, involved establishing positive opportunities and caring relations for other young people[114]. After their final focus group meeting, this group insisted that they would present their feedback as one voice at which time they chose the name ***Jigsaw***, which demonstrated their commitment to the unity they had experienced as a group and the sustainability of their empowerment within that group one year on (13th April 2011).

This collaboration with the student participants, presents a journey which most of them made from 'powerlessness or frustration' to 'power-sharing' which fundamentally led to an experience of 'empowerment, ownership and responsibility' within their experience of school. Just as Fielding and Bragg (2003) suggest that partnerships and consultation with students can lead to their assumption of the position of "change agents" and "producers of knowledge' most of the students involved in this study were instrumental in actively generating positive change in their own experience of school. For those who realised positive experiences, their pace, level of commitment and degree of change was uniquely related to their own needs and engagement.

[112] ***I'm Me***: Pupil Ownership
[113] Kalu, Eucharia and Quincy
[114] ***Jigsaw***, 7th May 2010

Voice; A Research Approach

The ethnographic nature of this student voice approach was a significant factor relevant to my experience both as researcher and participant in this process. The opportunity to witness any significant change in terms of attitude or benefit for the participants required consistency, sustained presence, consultation and contact. Being cognisant of the changing dynamics of power relations in the school and a witness to these relations from the perspective of the students in their transformation from positions of powerlessness to power sharing in the pursuit of empowerment, was integral to the theoretical underpinnings and commitment of this approach as a critical ethnographer (Grbich 2007; Mertens 2010). Cruddas (2007) argues that the purpose of student voice research is to challenge power relations and the privileging of one voice over another. She reinforces that it is important for the researcher to have a reflective awareness with respect to the power in that relationship to represent the young participants. It is not possible to deny the implicit power that exists in relations between adult researchers with young participants, nor is it possible to reject the position of power in relation to the data which is held by the researcher. However, it was integral to this research approach to make every effort to hand over or share power with the participants. As such it was fundamental within my relationships with them to constantly reinforce their 'power' to determine the direction of the study; suggest, pilot, design interventions; withdraw from or reduce participation if they wished; and choose to contribute to or comment on the analysis of the data.

An important consideration within student voice research relates to the media used to engage in the process (Robinson and Taylor 2007; Tangen 2009). For the most part, building relationships with the students was conducted through regular individual or group conversations. However, it transpired through the process that participation in activities and creative workshops was integral to the establishment of supportive, communicative and caring relations, which many of the students[115] at junior and senior levels, confirmed through their feedback, impacted on their enjoyment of the process. Seven out of eight senior students who had been involved in the mentoring programme

[115] All students in ***Legends;*** Harry in ***Blood Brothers;*** 7/10 participants in ***Jigsaw***

believed that their involvement in activities as part of the programme had brought about the most positive change that they had ever encountered in their experience of school[116].

However, it is also important to 'listen' and 'hear' the data through different media as appropriate. For example, John's[117] body language and speech frequently suggested that he wanted to be left alone and had no interest in sharing, participating, being consulted or even present in school or at interviews and also at some of the organised activities. However, when the time was right for him, he chose to communicate in writing and when he did, he expressed, indeed screamed his need to be cared for and looked after. As a research method, interpreting this is not as obvious as it sounds because just as you need to provide different methods of communication, it is also important to use different ways of reading and hearing the data that emerges. As John chose at his own pace to share through short conversations and over time, through submitted passages of writing, this was initially accepted from a researcher perspective with a sense of relief and almost superficial level of understanding within that relief of what he was sharing. However, a deeper realisation was only reached at the point of compiling ***all*** the data; triangulating evidence from observations recorded in the reflective diary, listening to recordings of conversations, however short, reading the passages he submitted and hearing comments about him from relevant adults in his life, all of which confirmed the anger, sadness and 'care' void that he was expressing.

One of the most significant aspects of this student voice approach relates to the temporal aspect of the process. Establishing comfortable and trusting relationships with the participants required regular and consistent contact and during the early stages of contact, many of the students at junior cycle level were reluctant to talk, although willing to leave class to meet me. From their contributions it was apparent that most of the participants were unused to being asked their opinions or 'given a voice' and it required time, consistency and patience to prove that I was genuinely interested in what they had to say. Especially in the earlier weeks of the process, with some students[118] there were occasions during meetings when we sat in silence or I played a CD or the student either scribbled on notepaper or sat kicking the table or chair.

[116] ***Jigsaw***
[117] ***Lonewolf***
[118] e.g. Lorraine, Kevin, John and Harry in particular

Lorraine[119] significantly proved the disparity between what a student may actually be thinking and 'what teachers and others think they think' as she was perceived in the classroom 'to be a pleasure to have in class as she was very well behaved and polite' (Ms. Green 12th May 2009. However, on the contrary, Lorraine shared her lack of confidence and extreme unhappiness frequently during interviews.

At our earlier meetings together, when Harry[120] spoke it was with a pronounced stammer and it was apparent that he was not comfortable. His level of interest in participating in the research increased considerably following an incident with a teacher as a result of which he was excluded from class and asked to stand outside the door. He was angry at the injustice of the incident, as his exclusion had arisen due to his refusal to read because of his stammer. Having the opportunity to share his frustration and calm down was a turning point in our relationship after which we met more frequently and he was happy to be consulted as part of the research process.

Summary

This section has presented an analysis and discussion of issues that were generated through consultation with the participants relevant to the theme of 'Voice' with respect to the 'the act of listening'; 'empowerment and change'; and 'voice; a research approach'.

It has been demonstrated that unless participants in student voice research encounter an authentic experience of being listened to, the experience is 'tokenistic' and redundant in the pursuit of active participation in bringing about change and positive transformation in their experience of school. The students who voiced their satisfaction through engagement with this process were those who, for the most part, actively participated in activities that were generated through the consultative nature of the process and were acknowledged for their contributions or benefited from the supportive or caring relations that developed through those contributions. Students who had reason to believe that their opinions and wishes were irrelevant and felt powerless as a result were less disposed to active or full participation in the process. Although their disappointment or sense of powerlessness was not directly related to the research process, it is significant that it was in relation to important circumstances that were current at the time of the research.

[119] ***Legends***
[120] ***Blood Brothers***

When give the opportunity to transform their experience of school, the majority of students in this study rose to this challenge by suggesting, designing and piloting strategies that improved relationships and deconstructed power relations from a position of power sharing to empowerment.

I have argued that the ethnographic nature of the methodological approach was significant to the experience of this research. A lot of the contributions from participants emerged as a result of familiarity over time and the fact that within my role as 'insider', I was witness to changes and power relations that were impacting on the participants as they were happening. However, my role as 'outsider' was essential to accessing different methods of reading and hearing the data as derived through triangulation and compilation of all the contributions and evidence.

PERSPECTIVES OF DIFFERENCE

The student participants identified 'feeling/being different' within their school environment as an important theme within this study with respect to the impact it had on their perception of themselves and how they were perceived by others.

Context

Minow (1990) challenges attitudes that stigmatise through what she describes as 'the dilemma of difference'. This dilemma is relevant within the evidence of this research as it reflects concerns she raises with regard to generating stigma, either by treating people differently such that it emphasises 'difference' or ignoring difference and potentially disadvantaging in the process. All of the twenty students who were consulted in this study, presented with varying levels of difficulty in school which were encompassed within the broad spectrum terminology of social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. These included difficulties acknowledged within the legal definition of Emotional/Severe Emotional Disturbance (Government of Ireland 2005, p.19) in addition to difficulties recognised through the 'non medical definition' that are communicated through internalizing and/or externalizing behaviours that 'act as a barrier to their personal, social, cognitive and emotional development' (NEPS 2010, p.4; SESS 2011, p.3). Treating young people with SEBD as though they do not have these difficulties is problematic and may perpetuate further behavioural difficulties that subsequently impact on learning. Similarly, the frustration which can arise for a student with learning needs if

these needs are not met, may, as a result, impact on behaviour (DCSF 2008; Garner 2009; Pirrie et al, 2009, SESS 2011). Meaney et al. (2005) caution the lack of direction in Irish legislation with regard to disciplinary and behavioural policy in schools relevant to students whose difficulties manifest in challenging behaviour as a consequence of special educational needs. However, the other side of the 'dilemma' is that young people with SEBD are the least popular amongst their teachers (Cooper and Jacobs 2011; Farrell 2000; Lindsay 2007; Scanlon 2007; Shevlin et al. 2012; Winter and O'Raw 2010), and for that reason are more likely to experience negative perspectives of their difficulties.

The rest of this section examines evidence from the research with regard to;

- teacher perspectives of the student participants especially as it relates to 'difficult difference
- perspectives of themselves that were shared by the students and how this impacted on their experience of school

Teacher Perspectives

The Special Education Support Service circulated a teaching resource to all schools in the Republic of Ireland entitled 'Signposts', which describes the most commonly occurring special educational needs in mainstream education. The rationale for this title is evident in the foreword which explains that rather than labels being used to stigmatise students they should be used as signposts to enable teachers meet the learning and teaching requirements of their students (SESS 2008, p.iii). Unfortunately, some labels and categorisations of students are associated with negative stereotypical imagery and behaviour which serve to highlight the student or category of students as different or 'other' in relation to the dominant group (Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Holt 2004; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Veck 2009).

In the pilot study and the main case study there is evidence that teachers had negative perspectives and attitudes towards some of the students with SEBD. This was voiced by the young participants but also corroborated by the teachers through their input and comments. In the pilot study, Ms. Caramel admitted her dread and suspicion of Alex once she realised he had ADHD. She also suspected that her negative feelings towards Alex may have contributed to his confrontational behaviour towards her. This suspicion was entirely justified as Alex had confided in me at our first meeting (21st October 2008)

that he thought she became agitated when he told her that he had ADHD. Ms. Caramel confirmed in her feedback at the end of that school year (25th June 2009) that her perception of ADHD had been based on what she had learned during her teacher training from which she had formed a negative impression and dread.

The main case study also provides evidence that the participants were correct in believing that some of their teachers had a negative impression of them. This is conveyed through the language used in contributions and comments from the teachers. For example: 'the likes of him'; 'scum'; 'waste of space'; 'I'm sick of the sight of him'; 'brats'; 'thugs'. Although teachers are generally well disposed to the inclusion of students with special educational needs in their classrooms, (Shevlin et al. 2012) attitudes may be different when they are confronted with 'difficult difference' (Rogers 2012; Tomlinson 1982; Young 1999). An example from the data which illuminates this is when Gary[121] shared the fact that he did not have to do any work in class because nobody asked him for evidence of homework or to contribute to class. This practice was confirmed by a few of his teachers, one of whom shared that Gary should: a) be the responsibility of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and b) 'shouldn't be in this school' (16th April 2010). His teachers' decisions to ignore Gary so that they might avoid confrontation with him meant that in the process he was not being taught in their classrooms.

The SENCO, Ms. Greene confirmed that many of the teachers in the school were of the opinion that if a student was in receipt of resource/learning support hours, they ought to be the responsibility of the SEN/learning support team rather than the mainstream teachers. She also pointed out that prior to the success of the student voice initiative in the school; students with SEN had never been accepted onto the optional Transition Year programme. Harry[122] was the first student to change this tradition by means of his acceptance. However, what is most significant is the fact that she made the point that not only was he a student with SEN, but it was all the more incredible that he should be allowed take this route because he had ADHD (Ms. Greene 21st September 2011). These pre existing assumptions and attitudes support Rogers' (2012) contention that exclusionary practice can be a response to dealing with difficult differences.

[121] ***Legends***
[122] ***Blood Brothers***

Perspectives of Self

Norwich (2007) acknowledges the historical association between attitudes towards difference and social hierarchies of superiority-inferiority. This sub section draws from the data to demonstrate that when young people with different abilities or emotional/behavioural difficulties are measured through lenses of 'normality', they can internalize negative attitudes of themselves, revealing their sense of inferiority relative to their peers and in their relationships with their teachers. The participants also convey considerable insight when they identify how these negative perceptions can influence their behaviour and self esteem.

Three of the students with ADHD, were very conscious of the negative perceptions of this condition and two of them blamed ADHD for characteristics in themselves that they did not like. One of these boys, however, came to transform his attitude when he experienced more positive relationships with his teachers and also because he became friendly with a boy who had dyslexia. He came to the conclusion that they were both just 'a bit different' and it really wasn't 'a big deal' (Alex, 10th May 2010). Peter[123] on the other hand, personified ADHD by describing it as a vile creature. Some of the other student participants described themselves in negative language; e.g. 'I'm stupid'; 'everyone here expects me to be shite'; 'I'm rubbish at school, I'm going to fail'; 'Maybe I am a very bad person underneath?' 'Could you imagine me as a good example...? It'll never happen'; 'I think a lot of teachers would prefer if I just left'.

Students were also keen to share their frustration about not having the opportunity to succeed in school and their needs being ignored. Disregarding a different way of learning or ability and not providing opportunities to empower a student by providing access to the curriculum that encourages their skills and abilities, further reinforces an experience of stigma, inequality and injustice (Lynch and Baker 2005, Minow 1990). Gary and Cassie[124] shared their frustration and distress because each had difficulties with literacy skills. They were conscious that these difficulties were especially disadvantageous since literacy skills are prioritised across the curricula at post primary level in Irish schools (Lynch and Baker 2005).

[123] ***Legends***
[124] ***Legends***

For students whose learning needs or behaviour present as different from the 'norm', this can impact on their experience of social acceptance (Garner 2009). When students encounter a sense of inferiority as a result of being categorised, defined and evaluated through 'lenses of normality', this may propagate a sense of inferiority and recurring frustration. Evidence in the data demonstrates that these feelings can manifest into disruptive and challenging behaviour because students are angry, upset or 'stressed' at feeling different and believing that everyone else in their class has greater ability than them. However, some of the participants also shared that they would rather get into trouble for 'bad' behaviour than feel undermined because of ability in front of their peers[125]. Not wanting to be embarrassed or undermined in front of friends and classmates is a recurring issue amongst the participants, with some students praising teachers who chose to discipline them quietly or away from their peers rather than confronting them publicly. Significantly, they were more inclined to make efforts to improve behaviour for teachers who showed them this courtesy. Harry[126] shared his vision for a better experience of school that he would like for his young nephew; 'I hope that if he gets into trouble that somebody will tell him to wise up and give him a break. Just cos he does something wrong, or even if he has a friend who's always getting into trouble doesn't mean that he's bad' (Harry, 15th April).

The impact of stigmatising labels, attitudes and perspectives can result in 'scarring within this silent misrecognition' and the potential to render students as 'invisible' or subject to 'implicit rejection' (Lynch and Baker 2005; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Minow 1990; Veck 2009). Contributions from the research participants support this position in the literature. When asked why they would like to be a part of this student voice initiative, students shared; 'I'm very unhappy...'; 'Teachers tell me I'm no good...'; 'I want somebody to listen to me and not just think I'm always wrong'; 'I'm invisible'[127]. Three of the female participants during interviews conveyed their sense of poor self image and esteem because they believed they were 'not noticed', or ignored. They pointed out that the boys got a lot more attention if they were badly behaved but their own struggles with confidence and ability were overlooked. Cassie[128] was instrumental in changing some attitudes, not just towards her but also towards ***My PAD*** as an intervention because she used it to focus her teachers' attention on her efforts to improve

[125] ***Legends*** focus group meeting 7th May 2010
[126] ***Blood Brothers***
[127] Appendix G
[128] ***Legends***

her levels of confidence and participation in the classroom. Eucharia[129], however, who was struggling and unhappy because she believed that the rest of her class group had stronger ability than her, complained; 'Some noisy people in my class, teachers don't see me' (Eucharia, 16th December 2009). Collins' (1996) concerns with regard to 'the quiet child' are realised in the palpable unhappiness conveyed by Lorraine[130], who despite her teachers' opinion of her as 'a pleasure to have in class' because she was polite and well behaved, shared her wish to 'get a really bad sickness' because 'I hate every minute...I'm not good at anything' (Lorraine, 4th February 2010).

The participants when consulted to do so shared a number of insights with regard to how they believed schools and teachers should support students who feel 'different'. The ***Legends*** group shared that 'being a little bit different doesn't have to be a bad thing' and all students should be treated as worthwhile and deserving of respect. Similarly, ***Blood Brothers*** pointed out that school can be a very lonely place when you feel you are different and 'it shouldn't matter if you are smart at a subject, everyone should be treated the same and get the same respect'. ***Jigsaw*** pointed out that obstacles to learning include; 'boredom', 'thinking you're stupid', 'the teacher telling you that you're useless'. They also made the point that 'some teachers can make everything interesting, some teachers make everything boring'.

Summary

This section began by presenting a context for a discussion on 'perspectives of difference' by presenting 'the dilemma of difference' as relevant to students who are identified with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The two way relationship between learning and behaviour introduced in the first sub-section prevails throughout the discussion. Links are drawn between feelings of frustration for students when they are not supported appropriately to access learning and the manifestation of externalising disruptive behaviours or internalising withdrawn behaviours which can render a sense of 'invisibility' for some.

Data from this study corroborates evidence in the literature that some teachers have negative perspectives of students with SEBD and in particular when they encounter 'difficult difference'. The student participants indicated their awareness of the negative

[129] ***Jigsaw***
[130] ***Legends***

attitudes towards them and many of the participants in this study demonstrated that they had internalised these negative perspectives. Their feelings of negativity and poor self esteem as a result of 'feeling different' are conveyed by means of behaviour and/or the language they use to describe themselves.

The section concludes with assertions on the part of the students with regard to treating all learners equally and with respect, as well as pointing out that being made to feel 'useless' or 'stupid' or 'bored' is a barrier to learning.

CARE

One of the most important themes to emerge from the data was that of 'care' and 'caring relations'. This became evident through the course of the data collection as the participants developed confidence in talking about supports and obstacles which they identified within their experience of school and as they shared their vision for the kind of educational environment that would positively transform their experience. The significance of 'caring relations' became apparent in their active participation in pursuit of that transformation.

This section examines the theme of 'care' with respect to 'teacher student interactions' and 'relational care'.

Teacher-Student Interactions

There is considerable agreement in the literature that the quality of relationships between students and teachers impacts on a variety of factors pertaining to the well-being and experience of students in schools (Birch and Ladd 1998; Klem and Connell 2004; O'Brien 2008). Birch and Ladd (1998) claim that students are more engaged in learning when they have positive relationships with teachers but also report that they are more inclined to enjoy school and experience less loneliness. Similarly, with respect to the experiences of young people with SEBD, research highlights the significance placed in their relationships with teachers and how these relations are factors in their engagement with school and the curriculum (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Garner 1993; Harris et al. 2006; Jahnukainen 2001; De Pear and Garner 1996; Sellman 2009).

Evidence from this data indicates that thirteen out of fifteen male student participants had difficult relationships with all or most of their teachers at the beginning of this study as

compared to two out of five female participants. 'Difficult' was defined across the students to include 'always picking on me'; 'hates me'; 'wrecks me head'; 'gets in me face'; 'shouts/yells/gives out a lot/all the time'; 'some teachers get a kick out of giving you a hard time'. Descriptions of interactions suggested a meeting of confrontational and sometimes petty or childish behaviour on the part of the students with aggressive or stressed/angry/defensive and/or sometimes offensive responses from their teachers. The five students whose relationships with teachers were not described as 'confrontational' or especially 'difficult' did not believe that they had 'happy' or 'positive' relationships with the adults either. Instead they spoke about 'being ignored'; 'they don't see me'; 'doesn't care about me'.

When asked what needed to change in order to improve student-teacher relationships, many of the younger participants[131] focussed on being acknowledged and praised for achievements, however small. One of the most frequent complaints amongst the participants was that they were only noticed if they did something 'wrong' or 'got into trouble'. The positive aims diary emerged from discussions around addressing this issue and was credited by the students in feedback as a factor in improving relationships with teachers. The main reason that the students gave for this was because they believed that their teachers noticed when they were trying to make an effort and consequently praised and encouraged them. However, in addition it would seem the use of this strategy facilitated more one to one communication between the participants and their teachers and in many cases these regular 'check-in' style conversations fostered improved understanding and more positive interactions. Some of the students volunteered that even having a better relationship with one or two teachers made a significant difference to their confidence and sense of comfort in school. The experience of acknowledgement through ***My PAD*** also impacted on satisfaction levels outside school as some of the students agreed that family members were delighted to see a record of positive comments[132], e.g. 'me ma was real proud' (Harry 28th September 2010).

An issue that was prioritised across the students at junior and senior cycle, however, related to teacher attitudes towards them especially when they were being disciplined. Students indicated that they accepted the need to be punished if they had done something to warrant it, but complained about the way teachers humiliated them, embarrassed them in front of their friends, or used insulting terms and language when they were

[131] Alex in the Pilot, 5/6 students in ***Legends***, Harry and Ian in ***Legends***
[132] Supported by feedback from the SENCO, Appendix O

reprimanding them. The general consensus amongst most of the students (***Legends, Blood Brothers, Jigsaw***) was that they wanted to be respected. This issue is supported in the literature which points out that young people with SEBD or students who are labelled "disruptive" consider fairness and respect from their teachers to be very important (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Cruddas 2007; Davies 2005; Garner 1993; Sellman 2009). Cefai and Cooper's (2010) claim that students are prepared to invest in relationships with teachers if they are treated with fairness, dignity and respect is also evident in this student voice research study. Being treated fairly for the participants included some of the following suggestions: 'wipe the slate clean'; 'give us more than one chance, even more than two' and Frank[133] expressed the wish that teachers wouldn't hold grudges.

However, they were also keen to acknowledge and praise teachers who they agreed were more respectful towards them. Where relationships with teachers improved as a result of some of the emergent interventions and activities, the students conceded this also and shared that their overall experience of school had improved as a result. Alex's story in the pilot case study is clearly an example of the difference that can be made in a student's life when relationships with teachers improve. Out of nineteen students who participated in the main case study, one was excluded and two students did not return to school after the summer in 2010. Of the remaining sixteen participants, positive relationships with teachers impacted on five out of six students in ***Legends***; John[134] acknowledged 'I still don't like a lot of my teachers because they don't care about us really but there's two that are ok now and that helps a lot'; Harry's[135] relationships significantly improved with his teachers as evident in his feedback and also in the references and support he received when he wanted to enrol in the Transition Year programme; and seven out of eight students in ***Legends*** were satisfied that their teacher-student relationships had improved which they credited mainly to their involvement in the mentoring programme.

In total, fourteen out of sixteen students realised some progress in the development of more positive relationships with two or more of their relationships with teachers, which they believed was due to engagement in activities that:

[133] ***Legends***
[134] ***Lonewolf***
[135] ***Blood Brothers***

- provided opportunities for more dialogue and communication
- promoted positive affirmation, acknowledgment and praise
- fostered a culture of caring relationships, e.g. the mentoring programme

Relational Care

The theme of care emerged as significant to the participants through their contributions in relation to their desire and need for 'care' and an experience of 'belonging' and attachment. When the students became actively engaged in transforming their experience of school, a system of relational care became an important element of that transformation.

Baker et al. (2004) assert that the 'educational system is an important site for promoting equality of love, care and solidarity' (2004, p.164) and suggest that failure of education to recognise the importance of the emotions in learning is 'a denial of the educational needs of both teachers and students as emotional beings (ibid.). However, the subject of 'caring' and the encouragement of 'emotional learning' is not prioritised in schools (Lynch and Baker 2005; Lynch et al. 2009 and 2012; Noddings 1992 and 2005). In her challenge of the narrow view of academic intellectual education, Noddings (1992) advocates the need to teach about relationships and the skills to lead a meaningful life, insisting that schools should be organised around themes of caring. 'There is nothing mushy about caring. It is the strong resilient backbone of human life' (1992, p.195). However, data from this research study strongly asserts through the eyes of the participants, their belief that they were not being cared for in school: 'nobody cares so why bother'; 'some of them (teachers) are afraid of me and the rest just don't care' 'How are I supposed to be ok in school when nobody there really knows me or cares'; 'You think they care...they don't'; 'Nobody cares'. After he had been bullied and before he had established positive relationships with his teachers in post primary school, Alex pointed out that he was sad and scared because 'no one seemed to care'.

O'Brien (2008) points out the need for emotional work to be carried out and received not just for the educational possibilities around caring within schools but also for well-being and development. Cooper (2008) and Kennedy (2008) contend that it is essential for students who have had negative life experiences or present with SEBD to encounter 'respectful' and 'caring' environments. Schools which cultivate these values are in a

better position to combat disaffection and exclusion (Cooper 2008). Evidence from this study supports this position in the literature because, as their relationships improved with teachers, the participants used language that equated this change with 'care': 'others genuinely care, that makes a difference'; 'there's two (teachers) that are ok now and that really helps' 'A few of them really care how I'm getting on and that's lovely; 'some more than others but even one or two is a hell of a lot better than all of them not getting ya'. The students who experienced the most positive changes in their experiences of school were also the students who correspondingly encountered a heightened sense of care in their relationships with at least one or more of their teachers.

Some of the participants shared stories about their lives outside school which indicated that they were dealing with difficult or distressing circumstances or responsibilities. In a few of these situations, students had emotional caring roles for parents or siblings as a result of violence or illness in their homes. All of the participants who shared these stories expressed the need or desire for 'care' in school. Ian's sense of rejection by a teacher culminated in challenging and disruptive behaviour which led to his expulsion. Harry frequently credited his SNA who used to 'mammy' him, 'I don't think I'd last a day without her' (6th November 2009) and in our final interview in 2012, he was still adamant that she had been one of his greatest supports throughout school. Les, Mark, Kevin and Quincy had all been told by teachers at some stage during their time in school that as students, they represented the 'worst they'd ever had' (Mark 9th October 2009). However, Les and Mark indicated their need to be cared for and supported on several occasions. Both of these boys believed that if they had had an older student to mentor them when they were in junior cycle it would have been helpful[136]. During a ***Jigsaw*** focus group meeting, six out of ten students in attendance indicated they believed nobody at home cared what they did at school.

John's grief at the loss of his mother prevails throughout his story during this research process. The apparent impact on his behaviour in school as a result presented as 'dark', 'volatile' and 'unpredictable' (Ms. Honey 27th November 2009) and consequently most of his teachers allowed him to keep his head 'down on the desk' rather than confront him. However, in the communications that he shared during this study, he pointed out that this stance which had brought about his 'invisibility' was 'boring and lonely' and complained that 'nobody cares'[137]. John credited two experiences that had a positive

[136] ***I'm Me***: Pupil Ownership
[137] ***Lonewolf*** Case Study

impact on his experience of school. The first was being involved in the mentoring programme and the second was the development of his friendship with Adam[138]. It is reasonable to draw from this that John needed relationships and care in his life and the decision to leave him alone rather than risk confrontation, however well-intentioned or fearful, was in fact perpetuating his isolation and negative sense of well-being. In his feedback, all of the themes that John identified as significant for him are associated with care and the development of caring relations: 'believing that somebody cares about me; having a friend; having at least one teacher who is kind to me or gets me; feeling that I belong even a bit in school' (6th May 2011).

John's desire for a sense of 'belonging' is expressed also by other participants in the study and supports evidence from research with female students identified with SEBD which indicated their desire 'to belong' and to have 'some sort of attachment with people and places' (Nind et al. 2012). Most of the students[139] shared their sense of attachment to the groups established within the research process via either the focus groups or the mentoring group. The fact that the process was given a name 'the ***I'm Me Programme***' was received enthusiastically by most of the participants and teachers commented that they seemed to think they were part of a 'cool' gang or club[140]. '...being part of this group '***I'm Me***' is a bit like being in a club, I've never been part of anything before' (Cassie, 15th September 2010). The adoption of 'names' for their groups at the end of the process was met with great camaraderie and affection amongst ***Legends***, ***Blood Brothers*** and ***Jigsaw***.

I agree with Smith's (2006) research conclusions that a young person's attachment to school is impacted upon by the quality of their relationships with teachers. His findings that other significant factors include the 'belief that school success will bring later rewards' and also 'the level of commitment to school and involvement in school activities on the part of the parents' (Smith 2006, p.18) did not emerge strongly within the context of this study. However, what seems at least equally important from the data with respect to a young person's sense of attachment and belonging in school is the development of 'care relations' with other students *as well as* with teachers.

[138] Evidence in the ***Lonewolf*** Case Study
[139] With the exception of Ian, Kalu, Quincy and Eucharia
[140] See Appendix O

The interventions and strategies which emerged through the student voice approach to encourage the students' ownership of change resulted in the participants creating and building opportunities for caring relations, most obviously through the mentoring programme. However, other strategies such as the ***Chill Out Card*** and ***My PAD*** provided occasions for improving or developing caring relations because both interventions presented channels for dialogue and communication with teachers, while the ***Chill Out Card*** also relied on a partnership with a mentor. The activities which were enjoyed as part of the mentoring programme had the most considerable impact on the development of caring and supportive relations between the students. It is interesting to note that some of the workshops involved creative and emotional learning, e.g. music, art, sculpture and conflict resolution through mime and drama. These activities strengthened mentoring partnerships and facilitated team building experiences. Evidence of the learning and impact of these experiences was in the fact that arising from dialogue at these meetings:

- Some of the students decided to take leadership roles in student led workshops for other class groups and their peers
- Five out of the eight younger students indicated that they would like to become mentors when they moved to the senior cycle
- Seven out of the eight mentors agreed that it had been the most positive experience they had had in school to date and they all agreed they would like to continue to be a part of positive change in their experience of school
- Suggestions of activities that the senior students wanted to organise or become involved with in the future were all with the purpose of developing further supportive or creative caring relations

All of the positive changes which were initiated by the participants had an impact on relational care, which was influential in changing attitudes of adults and teachers at the school both in relation to themselves as students and what they were capable of, as well as the benefits of engaging in 'student voice'[141]. The model of relational care which emerged through this research experience is one that is multi-directional with 'caring-about' and 'caring-for' experienced and received by students in relationships with each other (Noddings 2002) and informing a culture and ethos of caring in their school such

[141] See the ***Glass House*** and Appendices N and O

that it supported, rather than relied on 'top down' models of care, although these too were reinforced in the process[142].

The principal of the school in her feedback on this 'student voice' initiative claimed that what she had hoped would benefit 'some of our vulnerable and challenging students in the school in fact changed the ethos of the school to a stronger culture of caring and benefited our school community' (Ms. Gray, Appendix N). This evidence supports the position that emotions and emotional work are integral to education, student well-being and empowerment, based on a dialogue between students and teachers and between students themselves (Lynch and Baker 2005; Noddings 1992 and 2005; O'Brien 2008; Smyth et al. 2012).

Summary

'Care' emerged as one of the most important themes identified by the student participants across the data corpus. The significance of the theme was evident with respect to their relationships with teachers and the impact of those relations on their levels of confidence as well as their sense of comfort and well-being. Engagement in dialogue, in conjunction with experiencing praise, success and acknowledgement substantially improved relations between students and teachers.

Participants also emphasised whether they believed their teachers cared about them or not and there are multiple examples of this across the data sets. Students who are disaffected, unhappy or present with challenging behaviour, need to experience positive and caring relationships.

The importance of 'attachment' and the need to feel like they 'belong' in school and amongst their peers also emerged within the theme of 'care'. Most of the participants enjoyed being part of the research group and the sense of identity and shared experience which this generated.

The students were particularly influenced by the strategies and structures which emanated from their initiative and active agency in the pursuit of positive changes in their environment, most particularly in the development of 'caring relations. The relational care which transpired as a result of this engagement was multi-directional. The pre-

[142] Ms. Magnolia's feedback in the ***Glass House***

requisite necessary to develop a model such as this is an ethos and climate of care in school.

LEADERSHIP

The analysis and discussion of this final theme of 'leadership' is informed primarily from the position as researcher and incorporates perspectives ascertained as 'insider', 'outsider' and largely 'the space between'. However, the emergence of this topic through the data was inspired by contributions from and observations of the student participants and the context of the research environment. Seventeen students were initially consulted on the inclusion of this theme of which fifteen agreed with its significance and two said they didn't know. Eight students[143] also contributed suggestions and perspectives to support the subject matter. Four of the students volunteered to be consultants for the final analysis[144] and approved the summary of content and conclusions of the discussion.

The theme of leadership is illustrated here as it relates to 'a bottom up approach' and a 'top down response'. The pertinent issue shares common ground with and feeds into and from the other themes in this chapter. The school principal is responsible for fostering the learning needs of all students and as a result, this leader has the potential to impact on the experience of and attitudes to students who are rendered 'other' or 'different' with respect to their educational environment. Similar to the model of 'relational care', the position of this discussion presents a new paradigm around a 'multidirectional' leadership which is primarily care based and facilitates the development of opportunities for empowerment and positive relationships.

A Bottom Up Approach

Shor (1992) argues that when students encounter a 'top down' approach to the teaching and learning environment, it can engender an experience of boredom, frustration and disempowerment. Evidence from literature together with this study supports the association between these negative experiences with negative behaviour and attitudes (Cooper 1996, 1999; Davies 2005; Griffin and Shevlin 2011; Rose and Shevlin 2010; Shor 1992; Wearmouth 2004). The methods of obtaining and sharing knowledge within

[143] 2 from ***Legends***, 1 from ***Blood Brothers*** and 5 from ***Jigsaw***
[144] Meeting on 17th October 2012

this student voice initiative were accomplished by means of a 'bottom up' approach to engagement. Students chose at their own pace, whether or not to suggest, design and engage in behaviours and strategies to positively transform their experience of school, as a direct consequence of being heard on these issues and facilitated to make those changes. As a result, the participants were empowered to inform 'across and upwards' within their school community on their vision for the kind of environment that would support their engagement, behaviour and learning.

Consulting students on measures to enrich their experience of school as well as involving them in organisational and pedagogic decision making can improve their sense of agency and motivation as well as academic and communication skills (Fielding and Bragg 2003; Leitch and Mitchell 2007; Flutter and Rudduck 2004). Many of the students between the pilot and main case study showed considerable insight in identifying supports and obstacles to their engagement in school. Although a lot of the obstacles emanated from a sense of frustration due to what they perceived as negative attitudes towards them or challenges as a result of different styles of learning, feedback from students and participants indicates that the dialogic consultation and the experience of being heard improved confidence, attitude and engagement in school. The emergent interventions and strategies from that consultation, support Rudduck and McIntyre's (2007) assertion that when students' insights and opinions are taken seriously, they can experience a sense of 'ownership' in their experience of school.

In the example of '***My PAD***', the students who were involved in the conception and design firmly conveyed their ownership of the strategy by choosing the language in the diary which was written from the perspective of the young person ***to*** the teacher[145]. Their enthusiasm for this and other activities which they suggested or designed demonstrated not just their ownership but also the sense of responsibility which they assumed in the successful administration and organisation of their ideas and their investment in the outcomes. An example of this was in the very careful use of the ***Chill Out Card*** so that the students could not be accused of abusing the privilege and because they wanted to prove they could be trusted in the process[146]. Through this experience of 'ownership, responsibility and investment' the participants emerged as 'leaders'. An unambiguous manifestation of this leadership was demonstrated through

[145] See Appendix K
[146] In ***I'm Me***: pupil ownership

the mentoring programme when the group demonstrated their belief in themselves and each other to take on leadership roles as evident in the student led workshops. The principal expressed her approval of this in feedback 'For me the most impressive outcome of the programme was witnessing the leadership potential among students I had personally identified as exclusion risks'[147].

In a model similar to that which emerged through their cultivation of 'caring relations,' the students empowered and encouraged each other. When Mark insightfully suggested that I 'make him [his friend Peter] the leader' at a focus group meeting, the young man rose to the challenge and was impressive in the exercise. Harry was influential in convincing his friend to accept help for his drug addiction. He also demonstrated his sense of responsibility and caring skills when he expressed the wish that his nephew should have a better experience in school than Harry had had initially and indicated that he wanted to be a good 'role model' as his uncle.

The senior students illustrated the very real potential for an experience of 'voice and empowerment' to encourage a sense of ownership, responsibility and investment in a paradigm of 'caring' leadership. At the end of their first year of the mentoring experience the eight students involved were enthusiastic to maintain the programme and to actively facilitate other activities both inside and out of the school community to improve the experience of other young people. Peter indicated the impact of the experience:

> ...being a mentor was the biggest hugest change I could ever make in my life cos I never cared about anybody except myself but I couldn't believe that someone would trust me and I wanted to, you know, not let them down. It was great for me too (Peter, 7th May 2010).

Their empathy for other young people and desire to take leadership roles or facilitate opportunities for their own involvement in further development of 'caring relations' reinforces the positive impact of emotional work and the necessity for schools to value and provide exposure and chances for 'emotional learning' and 'emotional work' (Noddings 1992; Lynch 1999; Lynch and Baker 2005). In this way, education is fundamental to the cultivation of caring in society and the encouragement of leadership roles in that pursuit.

[147] Appendix N

A Top Down Response

It has been argued here and by many advocates of 'student voice research' that unless students encounter an 'authentic response' within the process, the experience of itself is neither empowering nor will it have the potential to promote a positive change in the circumstances of the participants (Cook-Sather 2006; Fielding and Rudduck 2002; Flynn et al. 2011; Lundy 2007; Robinson and Taylor 2007; Rudduck and Demetriou 2003). As an approach, it must generate a response to the insights of the young participants and impact on the power relationships between teachers and students so that engagement, behaviour and learning become a shared responsibility. Robinson and Taylor (2007) insist that student voice work should challenge the structures and process of power so as 'to embed equality of voice for all in the life of the school' (Robinson and Taylor 2007, p.12). Fielding (2004) argues that teachers, administrators and policymakers need to follow the lead of students and to have the courage to embrace 'the threat these actions carry' (Fielding 2004, p.381).

In both the pilot and the main case study in this research, there is evidence that for many of the students who experienced an authentic response when they chose to communicate through this process, they were empowered to pursue and actively produce change in their educational environment. However, this 'authentic response' was not simply the impact of being listened to with interest; it crucially required a 'top down' reply. As a researcher and participant in this study, the power was not within that role to authorise changes to procedures or structures. The introduction of new interventions and organisation of activities were approved fundamentally by the school principal in the case of the main study and the class teacher in the pilot. Co-operation amongst teaching personnel was essential in St. Bernadette's Post Primary School and was encouraged and facilitated by the principal and SENCO despite some resistance. Over time, more adults were motivated to become willingly and actively involved as their levels of interest and satisfaction heightened in response to the participants' initiatives. In essence, the ethos and culture of the school changed to focus on 'listening' and 'care', which was acknowledged by both the SENCO and the principal[148].

This model of leadership is both empowering and reflective of itself. As a consequence of school leaders 'leading to encourage empowerment', the students become

[148] ***Glass House*** and Appendix N

'empowered to lead' generating a multidirectional model of empowerment, caring and leadership as a response to 'listening'. When a model such as this, includes students with labels that render them 'different' or examples of 'difficult difference', surely this implies a methodology in the development of the inclusive school.

Summary

The theme of leadership is crucially linked to the other themes in this discussion and analysis. Taking the opportunity to promote a culture of 'listening' and 'caring' is not possible without the support and vision of the school leader and significant personnel. The school principal is also responsible for fostering and encouraging learning for all students, including students who present with different learning abilities and needs. This is essential to the encouragement of a positive response to 'difference' as well as recognising and encouraging all capabilities.

Within 'student voice work', it is important that students are not met with a 'tokenistic' response because an experience of 'authentic listening' has the potential to empower students to actively direct positive change in their school lives and to assume leadership roles in the process. However, a 'bottom up approach' such as this is redundant without an appropriate 'top down' response. This leadership relationship is multidirectional with the inherent possibility to promote relational care.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a discussion and analysis of four major themes, prioritising the perspectives of the student participants.

The discussion has demonstrated that a relational thread traverses through these themes. Engaging with the student perspectives through this 'student voice' methodological approach elucidated perceptions of 'difference' and how these perceptions impact on confidence, behaviour and relationships. The importance of having positive relationships with teachers and a belief that they cared about their students, prevailed through the data.

When participants experienced an authentic response to their communications and input, many of them were empowered to actively pursue change in their educational environment. These transformative processes primarily impacted on relationships and the development of 'relational care' and encouraged a leadership response amongst some of

the participants. Students who were actively involved in the design and implementation of emergent strategies demonstrated a sense of ownership, responsibility and investment in them as a result.

The most significant response to this research study was the development and encouragement of a model of multidirectional leadership and relational care. This would not have been possible without a committed ‘top down’ reply to the ‘bottom up’ approach. The acknowledgment amongst relevant personnel and the school principal that the ethos of the school had changed to ‘a culture of caring’ and ‘listening’ is a powerful affirmation of the potential within the engagement of student voice for students to become active agents in the pursuit of positive transformation in their educational environment.

CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consolidates the findings within the scope of the research enquiry and draws on that information to put forward implications and recommendations for educational policy and practice. The strengths and limitations of the research approach are outlined in addition to suggestions for further research.

THE ENQUIRY

The purpose of this study was to elicit the voices of a sample group of young people in mainstream education to learn from them about their experience of school. All twenty of the student participants had been identified as either at risk of educational exclusion, or presenting with internalising or externalising behaviours that are encompassed within the broad spectrum classification of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It was integral to this enquiry to determine if the experience of being 'listened to' for the student participants was one of empowerment, which positively impacted on or encouraged active agency in transforming their experience of school.

The reason for inviting this target sample of young people to participate in the study is because research demonstrates that young people with behavioural problems are often the least understood and liked group of students with additional needs amongst their peers and teachers (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Scottish Executive 2001). Studies have indicated that teachers in the Republic of Ireland are more positively disposed to the inclusion of students with other forms of special educational need in their classrooms than towards students with SEBD (Scanlon 2007; Shevlin et al. 2012). Recognising that young people are experts on their own experience of school (Cooper 1996; Gersch 2001; James et al. 1998; Leitch et al. 2005; Rose and Shevlin 2010) and that engagement with student voice has the potential to empower participants (Cook-Sather 2006; Fielding and Rudduck 2002; Robinson and Taylor 2007; Tangen 2009) underpins the rationale for this research approach with respect to the central enquiry.

My vision of 'inclusive education' is a system based on recognition and respect for difference which should challenge marginalisation and marginalising behaviours.

Students who are at risk of exclusion or present with SEBD represent an example of young people who are marginalised within schools, largely through the belief that they are difficult to work with. Acknowledging that a 'policy' of inclusion exists in accordance with the legislative framework is not sufficient unless the lived experience of education for 'all' students is inclusive in reality. Accordingly, the theoretical perspectives which influenced the design and approach to this study are a commitment to inclusion', 'voice' and 'empowerment'.

The following three questions represent the underlying enquiry of this research study:

1. What is the impact on the student participants when they engage in this student voice research process?
2. What is the impact on the wider school community?
3. What are the implications from this research for creating a more inclusive learning environment in schools?

The first two questions are addressed in the following section on 'Findings' and the final question is the focus of the discussion in the section, 'Implications and Recommendations for Creating a More Inclusive Learning Environment in Schools'.

FINDINGS

Data from this study was collected in collaboration with the research participants, primarily by means of one to one interviews and focus groups involving the students. Regular entries in a reflective journal and conversations with school personnel in both the pilot and main case study provided additional insights that contributed to the data corpus and supported evidence ascertained through individual and group communications with the students. However, the perspectives of the young people were prioritised throughout the thematic analysis.

The issues of importance to the participants emerged through the data collection and were interrogated in the discussion and analysis chapter under the headings; Voice, Perspectives of Difference, Relational Care and Leadership.

In the main case study, creative workshops and activities were identified as significant for the students who were involved in the mentoring programme during the process and were highlighted by those participants as an important element of the data collection.

Engagement in the workshops contributed evidence of caring relations and qualities of leadership which corroborated data that emerged across the research collection. In particular, the activities provided opportunities for those involved, to foster supportive and caring networks with their peers and also encouraged them to use and develop creative and emotional skills and learning. The fact that these activities were identified as 'fun' by so many of the participants cannot be underestimated in its significance, as for most of the same group, their experience of school was seldom enjoyable. This may have contributed to the improved sense of well-being and confidence expressed by the majority of those involved towards the end of that process (O'Brien 2008).

What is the impact on the student participants when they engage in this student voice research process?

The engagement with this student voice initiative in the main case study was unique to each individual involved, as evident from the different pace at which students contributed and the levels of involvement and participation chosen by them. Having the opportunity to be heard was significant to all of the participants. However, for some of the young people who were 'silenced' on important issues in other parts of their lives, the experience of this 'voice' process had less impact. It proved difficult to convince a young person that their opinions matter and that their voice can make an important contribution to a study like this if there are contradictions in what is happening around them.

For many of the participants, the opportunity to talk and encountering an 'authentic response' influenced their levels of enthusiasm for and participation in the research process. As students realised that their contributions were met with genuine interest, correspondingly, there was a measured increase in levels of communication and participation. My reflections indicate that I was tested on my sincerity and commitment to this endeavour by participants over the first few weeks and months but patience and consistency encouraged the necessary trust on the part of students who contributed the most. 'Authentic responses' to what students spoke about took many forms but very often it was simply remembering to follow up with questions or expressions of interest in whatever they had chosen to discuss in previous conversations, which was highlighted by some students as important to them. Other responses required being more proactive at times, for example ascertaining information for them from relevant personnel when they did not have the confidence to make those approaches themselves.

Some of the most significant 'authentic responses' as relevant to this study were generated from asking the students to identify supports and obstacles to their enjoyment of and engagement in school. As a result of identifying important issues such as the quality of their relationships with teachers and their desire for respect, acknowledgment and to 'be cared for and about'; the focus of the research process was to encourage them to become 'active agents' in orchestrating changes to bring about an improvement in their experience of school. In some cases that active agency emanated in the students designing strategies such as ***My PAD*** and the ***Chill Out Card***. These strategies are not intended as recommendations for behavioural support or to generate a specific intervention or support programme but instead they represent initiatives which can emerge from an engagement with student voice. However, their important contribution to this research is in the evidence they provide which confirms that students are experts in their own experience and are often best placed to indicate what would support or obstruct their engagement, behaviour and learning.

However, the confirmation of the potential relationship between 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'transformation' was realised in the fact that most of the participants actively contributed to improving relationships with their teachers and peers, while promoting and participating in strategies and activities that impacted positively on their experience of school. Knowing that they were heard for some students was very powerful, as they had indicated at the beginning of the study that their opinions didn't matter or that nobody ever listened to them. It is significant that as they met a response which assured them that their opinions ***did*** in fact matter, most of the students were empowered to actively engage in, suggest or design interventions that contributed to transforming 'the culture' of their school.

What is the impact on the wider school community?

One of the most significant themes to emerge from the data was the importance of 'care' to the participants. The language of caring prevails through the transcripts as students either accuse their teachers or the school of not caring about them, while praising and indicating appreciation for those people in their lives who *do* care about them.

The impact of the students' active agency when they rose to the challenge of precipitating positive transformation to their school environment was realised throughout the school community. Evidence of this is embodied in the teachers whose attitudes towards the students significantly became more positive and the acknowledgement by key personnel of the participants' impact on teachers and the school. The principal, the special educational needs co-ordinator and one of the year heads agreed that the students were indeed best placed to identify how the adults could support them. They also confirmed that the ethos and culture of the school had been changed to one that prioritised 'care' and 'listening'.

The school guidance counsellor reinforced the evidence that the student voice experience had impacted positively on teacher attitudes towards the students. He pointed out that engagement in emergent initiatives had impacted on 'power relations' in classrooms, with teachers resistant at first to what they perceived as an erosion of power. However, he indicated that the adults in the school had learned from the students that the transformational enterprises which were instigated by the participants were targeting more than just behaviour, and the realisation that the students needed more encouragement and communication with their teachers was integral to positive changes in the relationships.

Some of the school personnel were suspicious that positive changes and attitudes emergent from this process were reliant on the duration of the research study. However, the most significant verification of the impact the student participants accomplished in transforming their school community has been in the combined efforts between staff and students to sustain important aspects of the student voice initiative and strategies which emerged, in order to maintain and encourage positive and caring relations. This manifestation of 'multidirectional leadership' has been essential to the preservation of 'listening' to students at the school. Follow up visits confirmed the sustainability of the changed 'ethos of the school to a stronger culture of caring'[149]and the expansion of interventions to involve more of the school community, including parents.

[149] Appendix N

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS

Introduction

This research has provided evidence of the potential within student voice work to encourage empowerment and active agency in promoting positive transformation in the school environment. The participants demonstrated that having positive relationships with their teachers increased their confidence, well-being and enjoyment of school. However, it was integral to those relationships that they experienced success, acknowledgement, praise and encouragement. Many of the participants indicated that frustration, either because of negative attitudes towards them or difficulties accessing the curriculum, precipitated episodes of challenging behaviour. What also emerged from the data was that it was important for the students to know that they were 'cared about and for' and that they had opportunities to engage in activities that valued creative and emotional intelligences and facilitated the development of 'caring relations'. The sustainability of this approach and the positive impact on teacher attitudes and student well-being in the main case study brought about a change in the culture and ethos of the school such that it impacted on the school community. An engagement with 'community, relationality, care and ethics' Rogers (2012) argues is a basis for inclusive education (2012, p.2).

Legislation

The legislative framework relevant to the policy of inclusion has been criticised in this thesis because of the inconsistency in terms of tangible support and opportunities for consultation and involvement on the part of the students since the deferral of some aspects of the EPSEN Act 2004. This study has demonstrated that it is imperative for students to have opportunities to represent and contribute to discussions relevant to their needs. Apart from the benefits of involvement in individual educational plans, students have the potential to suggest transformations that may have broader implications and benefits for their school environment.

Similarly, the disadvantage for students with special educational needs as a consequence of the deferral, specifically in relation to statutory assessment have also been highlighted

and the point has been made that this represents an inexcusable example of inequitable access to resources despite the objectives within education, health and equality legislation. This study also supports the contention that students who present with emotional or behavioural difficulties should be facilitated access to supports even if they are not being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist (Cooper and Jacobs 2011). If this situation is not addressed it will continue to further perpetuate what may already be difficult circumstances in school for some students and continue to impede fair and equal access by students to their educational entitlements.

Behaviour and Learning

It has already been argued in the literature review that 'labelling' is an act of power (Holt, 2004; Minow, 1990; Swain et al., 2003) and has the potential to reinforce negative stereotypical imagery of individuals and groups of people (Griffin and Shevlin 2011) . This power has been demonstrated in the accounts of participants within this study who experienced the impact of negative perspectives of their behaviour and difficulties. In the school environment, labels of Emotional Disturbance (ED) and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) are problematic because the terminology encompasses a broad range of behaviours and difficulties that are very different from one end of the spectrum to the other. As conveyed from the experiences of the participants and contributions from teachers in this study, perspectives of these behaviours have the power to render stigmatising concepts of 'difficult difference' or in the case of the 'quiet child' to render 'invisibility' (Collins, 1996).

It is essential that educators and school personnel are aware of a number of factors in relation to young people who present with disaffection and/or difficulties associated with SEBD in pursuit of fair and equitable opportunities for students in the development of inclusive practice. Some of the following suggestions that are supported from this study may be of benefit in teacher education programmes.

1. Students with SEBD are not a homogenous group and therefore it does not make sense to offer generic guidelines on how to work with or teach students with ED/SEBD. Supporting teachers and SNAs to enable all children with additional needs should start with advising them to become acquainted with the individual child, in preference to consulting a label. Categorisations of SEN provide 'signposts' only but they should not substitute respect for the unique set of

capabilities and talents possessed by the individual student (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993).

2. It is essential to recognise the 'two way relationship' between behaviour and learning (Garner, 2009; Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). As supported by this research, if a student has difficulties accessing the curriculum this may impact on their behaviour just as behavioural difficulties can also impinge on learning.
3. Initial teacher education and continuing professional development need to address the significance of the 'two way relationship' between learning and behaviour and promote methodologies to support positive behaviour through 'respectful, pupil-focused approaches' (Garner, 2012, p. 334) as evident in this study.
4. A student who presents with internalising behaviours; for example, if they are shy, reticent, withdrawn, nervous, or anxious, is at risk of being ignored or rendered 'invisible'. The 'quiet child' is easily overlooked and vulnerable to internalising very low levels of self esteem which can be exacerbated if their needs are ignored (Collins, 1996).
5. Students who are labelled with SEBD or ED are sometimes 'blamed' for difficulties they are experiencing in their educational environment (Clough et al. 2005; Cooper, 2008) despite the fact that some behaviours are inherent to a specific condition, for example, 'hyperactivity' and ADHD.
6. Many of the difficulties associated with SEBD are exacerbated by an educational environment that labels rather than assists them. Focussing on these behaviours within a perspective which is facilitated by naming this difference as 'challenging' or 'difficult' diverts attention from ways in which schools can support students (Thomas, 2005).

Difference

Perspectives of difference as presented in the analysis of this data submit evidence of links between attitudes of teachers and internalised perceptions of self on the part of the students. Marginalised groups expose the lenses of normality through which they are unconsciously subscribed as different, and reveal what is implicit to the hidden curriculum of the school. Although teachers and students may not intentionally reinforce negative perceptions of difference or reproduce notions of ability and disability, these are

often unintended consequences of everyday practices associated with fulfilling the purposes of schools (Holt, 2004).

In pursuit of an equitable and supportive environment of inclusive education, it is recommended that schools identify implicit and explicit practice by examining the markers of inclusion and exclusion. This needs to be a 'whole school' exercise between teaching personnel and students to share understandings of language and behaviours that indicate normative judgements and perceptions, thus expose marginalising attitudes. Unless opportunities are taken to encourage contributions from students who have internalised beliefs that they 'don't belong'; 'are not worthy/normal/liked'; 'are invisible', the gulf between the legislative policy of inclusive education and the 'lived' experience in practice will not be bridged.

'Care' and the Intrinsic Benefits of Education

The contention within the literature of the necessity for students to have the opportunities in school to develop the capacity to care as well as access 'emotional learning' (Lynch and Baker, 2005; Lynch et al., 2012; Noddings,1992; O'Brien 2008) is supported with evidence from this study. Students in this study prioritised 'care' and 'being cared for' as significant to the quality of their experience of school and their vision for an improved educational environment. Opportunities to engage in activities, like the mentoring programme, which promoted creative and personal intelligences were credited as having the most positive impact on their confidence and well being through the research process. However, 'personal intelligences involved in emotional work' (Lynch and Baker, 2005, p. 152) are not emphasised in schools. Instead there is an emphasis on academic intelligences which further disadvantages and marginalises students whose skills are not represented.

As educators we need to revisit the question; 'What's the good of education?' as posed by Joseph Dunne (1995) and challenge the focus on academic outcomes and league tables in favour of emotional support, engagement and the intrinsic values of education. If education in school is presented with more emphasis on grades, examinations and qualifications and with less regard for emotional intelligence, caring, or respect for ability and difference, is it really a preparation for life (Dunne 1995) or indeed does this experience of education represent education as 'life itself' (Dewey 1900)?

A Paradigm of Leadership

This study has presented a paradigm of 'multidirectional' leadership which is primarily care based and facilitates the development of opportunities for empowerment and positive relationships. As a consequence of school leaders 'leading to encourage empowerment', the students became 'empowered to lead', generating a multidirectional model of empowerment, caring and leadership as a response to 'listening'. Accordingly, this leadership is both empowering and reflective of itself. The paradigm is premised on encouraging students through an engagement with 'voice' to demonstrate their strengths and abilities and valuing them in the process. Respecting and acknowledging that students may know better 'how to help us help them', can promote a sense of 'ownership, responsibility and investment' in positive behaviour and learning.

Significantly, the students who participated in this study were identified as presenting with internalising and externalising behaviours that were impinging on their social and/or educational development. Some of the students had been identified as 'exclusion risks' by the school principal. Yet in this school, students with labels that exemplify 'difficult difference' were responsible for positively affecting changes in attitudes towards them and presenting a model for the development of relationality in care and leadership. This evidence suggests that a 'student voice' approach to supporting young people is fundamental to the development of an inclusive learning environment for the benefit of *all* students. An education system which promotes inclusive principles should encourage a 'culture of listening'. Schools need to hear, not just the 'articulate' voice (Bourdieu et al., 1977; Robinson and Taylor 2007), or simply the voices of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, but the expert voice of every student in their own school in the pursuit of inclusive education.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH APPROACH

One of the strengths of the approach taken to this research was in the ethnographic stance taken to the study which meant that my regular presence allowed me access to students and staff at times of their choosing. Frequently, conversations were spontaneous and unscheduled but being present on a regular basis meant that I was in a position to respond to situations as they unfolded. This 'insider' position facilitated opportunities for

the participants to decide the frequency and level of their communication and contact with me. It also afforded time within our relationships, for students to decide if they trusted me and how much they wished to contribute to the process. A close examination of the data reveals that participants engaged with this 'voice' process, contributed at their own pace which suggests that student voice work requires 'time', consistency and frequent consultation in order to develop relationships of communication and 'authentic listening'. It also suggests that less frequent visits and meetings with the students would not have facilitated contributions from many of the participants.

The outsider perspective which was also integral to this ethnographic approach was essential to the analysis of the data because my reflective diary reveals bias that indicated at times I was very involved in the study and it was necessary to withdraw emotionally and attempt to interrogate the evidence from a broader perspective. Being an 'outsider' to the process, however, meant that although I became a familiar presence in the main case study school, I was conspicuously 'other' to both the 'community' of staff and 'community' of students. Initially, this meant that I was regarded with suspicion most evidently by some members of staff. The position of 'other' in my relationships with students meant that I could only access their perspectives through my 'adult' eyes and biases and needed to constantly check my interpretation of their insights and contributions. However, their perception of me as 'other' in relation to the adults in the school was frequently cited as the reason for agreeing to talk to me, which is a view that is supported by key personnel in the school also. Being cognisant of the power relations within the school and in my relationships with the participants was fundamental to the theoretical underpinnings and commitment to this approach as a critical ethnographer. For this reason, I took every opportunity to reinforce the 'power-sharing' dimension of the research structure and remind the participants that they had the 'power' to determine their level of engagement and to suggest, pilot and design interventions or withdraw from/reduce participation if they wished.

The 'outsider' stance was also necessary in the compilation of the data for analysis because this study revealed that being too close to events that are unfolding can also mean that it is possible to overlook issues of importance for the students that are emerging unless they are stressing their emphasis. Having the opportunity to triangulate evidence between transcripts, notes, reflective diary and contributions from relevant adults provided a rich contextualised source of data.

The strengths of this research approach also reflect the inherent weaknesses. It is very time consuming and emotionally draining to sustain the level of engagement which was involved in this data collection. Having this much time to devote to the study was a privilege, however, it would not be sustainable for a researcher who had employment commitments.

There are ethical considerations, especially when working with vulnerable students. Taking every precaution to protect the students is paramount and was essential in the design and process of this study. However, this experience highlighted for me that ethical issues need to be understood in relation to the protection of the researcher also, as the intensive nature of the approach can engender a sense of emotional grieving at its termination and it can be difficult to withdraw from the process. There is a need for support structures for researchers when engaging in the kind of study that is focussing on participants' well-being in order to ensure that the researcher is taking care of him or herself.

Having a dual role as 'active participant' in the research while retaining the necessity to 'stand back' from the study adds a challenging aspect to the role which needs to be considered within ethical considerations for future research of this nature.

The evidence of this research is limited due to the small number of participants and the fact that the main case study was located in one school only. I was very fortunate that key personnel in the school were willing to respond generously to the research process and facilitate an authentic response to 'student voice' by allowing emergent strategies and interventions to be trialled in the school. If the response from the school had been different, I have no doubt that the experience of this study would have generated different results and therefore it is not possible to make generalised assumptions without acknowledging the variables.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH

A significant contribution to research from this study is the evidence that there are indeed *potential* links between an engagement with student voice and 'empowerment'. The qualification of 'potential' is necessary because this research does not prove that this engagement will be guaranteed success because of the different experiences that may influence and impinge on a young person's life from either within or outside school.

However, the impact on most of the participants in this study supports earlier research on the benefits of consultation and participation and the links between an experience of empowerment and 'active agency' towards positive change in their environment on the part of the students.

The findings and theoretical analysis from this study also support the literature on issues such as the value of positive relationships and an ethos of care, especially for young people who have had difficult experiences or present with internalising or externalising behaviours identified within the spectrum of SEBD.

This study contributes a new paradigm of leadership which is primarily 'care' based and encourages opportunities for 'student voice', empowerment and relational care. Essential to this model of leadership is an experience of democratization of education for all stakeholders, which must represent the students (Lynch and Baker, 2005). The paradigm which is demonstrated in this study is a 'top down response to a bottom up approach'.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The implications of this study in conjunction with the limitations that were identified, suggest that there is a necessity to engage young people in student voice research that would represent the diverse population, the broad spectrum of society and the variance in the educational landscape represented across schools. The benefits that were realised to the school in the major case study and the students across the case studies imply the potential that could be realised to influence policy and practice in meeting the needs of *all* students by learning from them 'what they really think' and what they would identify as supports and obstacles to their engagement and learning.

From the experience of this study, it is recommended that in a large scale study, a number of researchers would be needed to collect and analyse the data but it would be essential to include key personnel and students in the design and collaborative nature of the study within each school. Prioritising the participation of student and adult consultants in schools is essential to providing for the sustainability of any positive changes that emerge from the process.

CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has reaffirmed the context for this enquiry of engagement in student voice research with participants who had been identified with internalising or externalising behaviours within the broad spectrum classification of SEBD.

All of the students who were invited to participate in this research process contributed to the research but for students whose circumstances meant that their voices were not heard on issues of importance to them outside this study, their levels of interest and participation were correspondingly impacted upon. Most of the students contributed to beneficial changes in their environment and responded positively to 'being listened to'. Evidence from the research indicated that the empowerment of this group of students, especially in their leadership response and development of relational care, impacted on the culture and ethos of their school.

Implications of this study for the development of a more inclusive learning environment in school include the need to address access to resources and supports for all students who present with any behaviours that suggest they need them, regardless of assessment or labels. It is essential that aspects of the legislation which have been deferred are enforced to support the practice of student consultation and assessment entitlements. The 'two way relationship' between behaviour and learning must be emphasised in teacher education as well as 'respectful student focused' approaches to encourage positive behaviour. Employing a 'capability' approach to support students requires the school to adapt to meeting the needs of students rather than the other way around.

The necessity to encourage a culture of 'listening' and 'caring' has been reinforced throughout the data and through the discussion and analysis. It is evident that there is a strong relationship between 'voice', 'empowerment', 'relational care' and 'leadership'. The requirement for what was identified by the principal in the main case study as 'complete buy in[150]' on the part of key personnel is a requisite for the realisation of the benefits of student voice work.

Further research of this kind with a broader representation of young people may have the potential to inform policy and practice on issues that are identified as significant to the needs of all students who represent the diversity and breadth of society in our schools.

[150] Appendix N

However, it will not precipitate an authentic or consultative process unless participants encounter ‘authentic listening’ and acknowledgement in order to generate positive change or transformative action where necessary. ‘Facilitating “a coherent institutional commitment” (Fielding and Rudduck 2002), necessitates an obligation to promote demonstrable and ultimately, “political” change’ (Flynn et al. 2012: 251).

Alternatively, if we neglect the opportunity to promote chances for success and to improve their experience of education for students who are struggling or unhappy at the expense of the ‘extrinsic’ values that warrant prioritising league tables, grades and qualifications, we may realise that ‘then education has in a sense gained the world, but in doing so, has lost its own soul (Dunne, 1995, p.68).

My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness (hooks, 2003 p.xiv).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – PSEUDONYMS OF PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOOL

Pseudonyms of Participants

Pseudonym	Status	School	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	Case Study
Alex	Student	Cliff NS	6th Class	1st Year		Pilot
Kenneth	Father					
Eileen	Mother					
Ms Amber	Principal	Cliff NS				
Ms Brown	Learning Support/Special Needs Coordinator	Cliff NS				
Ms. Caramel	5th/6th Class Teacher	Cliff NS				
Ms. Damson	3rd/4th Class Teacher	Cliff NS				
Ms. Emerald	Resource Teacher	Cliff NS				
Dr. Andrews	Child Psychiatrist					
Ms. Clarke	CAMHS Clinical Nurse					
Ms. Fern	School Guidance Counsellor	St Andrew's PPS				
Ms. Gray	Principal	St Bernadette's PPS				
Mr. Ash	School Guidance Counsellor	St Bernadette's PPS				
Ms. Magnolia	Year Head	St Bernadette's PPS				
Ms. Greene	SEN Co-Ordinator	St Bernadette's PPS				
Mr. Briar	LCA Co-Ordinator	St Bernadette's PPS				
Ms. Honey	2nd year Class Teacher and	St Bernadette's PPS				
Ms. (Clare) Indigo	SNA	St Bernadette's PPS				
Kevin	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Legends
Lorraine	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Legends
Eamon	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Legends
Frank	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Legends
Gary	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Legends
Cassie	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Legends
Harry	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Blood Brothers
Ian	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	Excluded	Blood Brothers
John	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	Lone Wolf
Les	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Emma	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Kalu	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Mark	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Owen	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Peter	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Roger	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Geraldine	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Quincy	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw
Eucharia	Student	St Bernadette's PPS	3rd Year	5th Year	6th Year	Jigsaw

APPENDIX B – INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PRINCIPALS AND BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT

Education Department
National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Co. Kildare
01 7086715
26th November 2008

The Principal and Board of Management
X Post Primary School

Dear Principal,
My name is Paula Flynn and I am writing to post-primary schools in order to find collaborative partners to facilitate my doctoral research study. This research will involve engagement in pupil voice with children in mainstream second level education who have been assessed as having (Social) Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.

I propose to invite students to participate in a process to determine if engagement in pupil voice impacts on their experience of school and to learn from them about their experience of obstacles and supports to learning and positive empowerment. With your permission and provided I have subsequent guardianship/parental permission, I would like to meet with students in your school who are ***interested*** in talking to me and taking part in this research study which will entail individual interviews and focus groups between September 2009 and May 2011. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet students who might be interested in participating in this study before the end of this school year so that I might explain the purpose of this research and answer any questions they might have in anticipation of their consent to participate.

During this project, my aim is to identify any difficulties that may be experienced by the participant students as perceived by them in mainstream education with a view towards determining from their input what is necessary to develop a support system which may improve their attendance, participation and learning in school. I will do this through a series of qualitative one to one and group interviews. On all occasions when I need to speak alone or interview any of the young people, I will organise a venue which ensures that we are constantly in the sight of at least one or more adults, preferably known to the teenager. I will also organise group sessions and workshops; initially designed to promote engagement at group level as well as active participation and

responsibility for the project on the part of the students involved. However, the content of these sessions will be influenced by the progress of the research and the design of sessions will be directed by the students themselves with input from strategies or suggestions arising from participation in pupil voice.

I envisage regular correspondence and communication with the students and would aim to visit the school on a regular basis; weekly, fortnightly or monthly as deemed appropriate by gatekeepers and participant students. I would be willing to work with the students involved in whatever time slots are agreed upon by everyone involved. The organisation of group sessions and workshops with students I appreciate may be a little more disruptive, however, if a suitable and appropriate time within the school timetable is not at my disposal, perhaps we could organise a meeting after the last class of the day on designated dates.

It is my intention that the participants in this research project should be involved in directing the focus of our research and in reading and writing its progress. However, participants will only be invited to read those parts of the research that are directly relevant to them. The names of the children, parents, guardians, teachers and schools will not be used and participants will not be identifiable by description or reference as a result of this project. All of the participants will be made fully aware of the reasons for this study and their input and contributions at every level will be greatly appreciated and valued. None of the material will be made public although it may be used in my final thesis, in which case it will be altered so as to protect the anonymity of the individual participants and the schools. The confidential nature of data collected or learned throughout this project will be protected and respected unconditionally. If any of the participants wish to withdraw from the project at any stage they may do so without explanation. It is important that the students are made fully aware of the nature of the study and implications of their involvement. I will be operating within the guidelines on ethics as laid down by the Education Department, NUI Maynooth and in accordance with the university Research Ethics Policy, which can be made available to you at your request.

APPENDIX B – INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PRINCIPALS AND BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT

From the outset, the welfare, support and well being of these children and teenagers will be a priority as it is not intended that they should be subjects of experimental research but rather that they should participate actively with the purpose of transforming their experience of school life. As I intend to prevent dependency issues as much as possible, I will encourage active support groups, comprised of the students themselves and any other staff members who are interested in being involved within the schools, and plan an effective exit strategy from the project so that feelings of rejection and abandonment can be minimised and if at all possible, avoided.

It is my fervent hope that participating in this project will be rewarding for everyone involved; students, teachers, parents/guardians and the entire school community. My objective is simple in purpose and if realised should contribute towards engagement and increased motivation for students who are very often disaffected and apathetic in mainstream education. In summary, I am hoping to determine the impact on pupils with (Social) Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties when their voices are listened to and they are encouraged to become 'active agents' in transforming their experience of school through their engagement with this pupil voice research project. The aim subsequently is to learn from the students themselves what may help them reach their potential socially and educationally within their schools through empowerment, voice and support systems and in so doing, encourage a more positive attitude towards and from them within their school community.

I hope that you are interested in my proposal but if you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me either by phone at 01 7086715 or by email at Paula.Flynn@nuim.ie. If you wish to clarify anything with my supervisor, Dr Anne Lodge, her contact details are: Anne.Lodge@nuim.ie, phone number 01 7083742.

Yours sincerely,

Paula Flynn	Dr Anne Lodge
John and Pat Hume Scholar	*Senior Lecturer Education Dept*

APPENDIX C – SCHOOL LETTER TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Reproduced faithfully from original but without the school letterhead in order to preserve anonymity.

14th January 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian

Paula Flynn has invited ***our school*** (italics changed to protect anonymity)to participate in a pupil voice research project for young people who are experiencing difficulties in school due to behavioural or emotional issues and who may have problems with concentration and engagement. She is conducting this research as part of her doctoral studies. Your son/daughter has been identified by the Learning Support Team as someone who might benefit from this study and she would like to meet him/her to discuss participation in this study and to explain what that participation will entail.

If you are agreeable for_____ to meet her for an introductory interview, please sign the permission slip below.

If you have any queries arising from this request, please do not hesitate to contact me on the number below. Future correspondence about this research will come directly from Paula if you are agreeable to your child's participation.
Yours sincerely

Ms _____

Resource and Special Education Needs Co-Ordinator

Phone Number:

Permission Slip

Name of Student:

I give permission for (name of student)_____ to participate in the pupil voice research project conducted by Paula Flynn from NUI Maynooth in _____ Secondary School

Parent/Guardian signature:_____ Date:_____

APPENDIX D – PILOT STUDENT CONSENT FORM

21st October 2008

Dear XXXXX,

You are invited to take part in a research project which will give you an opportunity to be heard about anything that is important to you within your experience of school. I would like to find out from you about what helps you to learn and get the most out of school as well as any obstacles to engagement that you have either experienced in the past and overcome, or still experience now.

If you have suggestions about what needs to change in your experience of school and how you might contribute to and benefit from that change, I would really like to hear about this too.

You are free to withdraw from this project at any time without explanation. You are also free to decide how much or how little involvement you would prefer to have. Everything you tell me will be treated with respect. I will write about the experience at the end my studies but I will not use your name or the name of the school in anything that I write. If you speak to me in confidence, I will not share this information unless I believe that you, or somebody you have spoken about is in danger.

Thank you for agreeing to this introductory interview today.

Sincerely,

_____

Paula Flynn

Student Consent

I understand that this project is about listening to young people in school.
I know that I can withdraw from this project whenever I want.
I know that my name will never be used in this project but what I say might be written about when it is finished.
I would like to be a part of this project.

Please print your name below

Please sign your name below

Date:

APPENDIX E – STUDENT CONSENT FORM

The I'm Me Project

Dear Student,

You are invited to take part in a research project which will involve regular one to one interviews as well as some group meetings with other students in your school at different intervals over the next two school years, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

The purpose of this project is to give you an opportunity to be heard about anything that is important to you within your experience of school. I would like to find out from you about what helps you to learn and get the most out of school as well as any obstacles to engagement that you have either experienced in the past and overcome, or still experience now.

Suggestions from you about what needs to change in your environment and how you might contribute to and benefit from that change will also be important to this study.

You are free to withdraw from this project at any time without explanation. You are also free to decide how much or how little involvement you would prefer to have. Everything you tell me will be treated with respect and although I will write about the experience at the end of our two years working together, I will not use your name or the name of the school in anything that I write. If you speak to me in confidence, I will not share this information unless I believe that you or somebody you have spoken about is in danger.

Thank you for agreeing to this introductory interview today.

Sincerely,

_____

Paula Flynn

Please tick one of the following boxes in response to each question:	YES	NO
I understand that this project is about listening to young people in school	☐	☐
I know that I can withdraw from this project whenever I want	☐	☐
I know that my name will never be used in this project but what I say might be written about when it is finished	☐	☐
I would like to be a part of this project	☐	☐

Please print your name below

_____

Please sign your name below

Date:

_____

APPENDIX F – ADULT CONSENT FORM

The 'I'm Me' Project

The purpose of this project is to give a sample group of participant students an opportunity to be heard about anything that is important to them within their experience of school. I would like to find out from them about what helps them to learn and get the most out of school as well as any obstacles to engagement that they have either experienced in the past and overcome, or still experience now.

Suggestions from them about what needs to change in their environment and how they might contribute to and benefit from that change will also be important to this study.

If you are willing to share your perspective, as a Principal/teacher/SNA in the school, on any aspect of the research process, your contribution will provide contextual insights for the analysis of this study.

You are free to withdraw consent to the inclusion of your contributions to this study at any time without explanation. Everything you tell me will be treated with respect and although I will write about this research process on completion, I will not use the names of students, school personnel or schools and all distinguishing features will be changed to protect the anonymity of all participants. When I have completed my doctoral studies, all materials and original data collected and compiled from this study will be destroyed.

Please indicate your role in the school above.

Please sign below if you consent to your contributions being included in the data collection.

Sincerely,

_____

Paula Flynn

Please print your name below

Please sign your name below

Date:

APPENDIX G –STUDENT CONSENT LETTERS THEY COMPOSED THEMSELVES – SAMPLE PHRASES

Consent Form

Thank you for meeting me today. If you would like to be part of the ***I'm Me Programme*** please tell me why and sign your name underneath. You are free to leave the programme whenever you want without giving notice or a reason.

Sample Student reasons for consent

- *I want to do I me cuz I want to talk about school and why I it makes me crazy*
- *I'm invisible*
- *People get in me face over stupid things like runners 'n stuff but they have no clue what's really important*
- *Teachers tell me I'm no good an I know that's true but maybe this I'm me thing will help somebody*
- *I want somebody to listen to me and not just think I'm always wrong*
- *I think if you listen to me and other kids here you'll learn what'll help other kids how to not feel like their rubbish*
- *I do it but I don't know why you want to talk to me, no1 ever asks me nothing*
- *Yeah if I can get out of some of me classes an you don't make me do homework.*
- *I know I can help other people like me if you give me a chance*
- *I'm very unhappy an I hate school every day*

APPENDIX H – LETTERS TO PARENTS

School of Education
Trinity College
University of Dublin
Dublin 2
26th August 2012

Dear (Name of Parent or Guardian),

Thank you for giving your consent to the school for _____ to participate in my student voice research project which is starting in *St. Bernadette's Post Primary School*[151] from September 2009. I would be grateful if you could also give your consent to me for my records and would like to take this opportunity to invite you to contact me directly if you would like more information about my studies. Since initial contact, I have been accepted to the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin as a doctoral student and will commence this research under the supervision of Dr. Michael Shevlin who is Head of School and senior lecturer in the School of Education, TCD and Dr. Anne Lodge who is Principal of the Church of Ireland College of Education.

I will meet all the students who have agreed to be part of this study at regular intervals for individual interviews and also within small groups where the students are happy to contribute in this model. Contact will occur most frequently during the school year 2009-10 with less frequent meetings in 2010-11. Where participants are agreeable, I will record conversations in order that I will have an accurate account of our meetings. Any school activities that are generated through this research will be optional and students are free to participate as much or as little as they would like. They are also free to withdraw contact and participation without notice or explanation at any stage during the research process.

Please feel free to contact me by mobile or email at any stage if you would like further information or if you have any questions. I will operate within the ethical guidelines of the School of Education in TCD a copy of which are available to you on request.

All information that is obtained during this study will be treated with respect and both written and recorded material will be destroyed when my thesis has been finally written. The students and the school will not be named in anything that I write about this study and every effort will be made to preserve anonymity at all times which means that identifying features will be changed for that purpose.

Please confirm or deny your consent on the enclosed permission slip and return to *Ms Greene*[152] before 4th September 2009.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Paula Flynn flynnpm@tcd.ie (0872573331)

[151] Name changed to protect anonymity of school
[152] Name changed to protect anonymity of SENCO

APPENDIX I – LETTERS TO STUDENTS

School of Education
Trinity College
University of Dublin
Dublin 2
1st September 2009

Dear _____

I hope you enjoyed your summer holidays since our last meeting. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of the ***I'm Me Programme*** and I look forward to meeting you again very soon.
The last time we spoke I explained that I was with the National University of Ireland in Maynooth but over the summer I moved to Trinity College, University of Dublin. The focus of my study is exactly the same as it was when we spoke together before, which means that I want to learn about your experience of school and what you consider to be supports and obstacles to learning and engagement. If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this research, please contact me through *Ms. Greene*[153] If you have changed your mind about your involvement in this study, you do not have to give an explanation.

I will contact you soon in school to arrange our first interview.
Best wishes,

_____
Paula Flynn

[153] Italics used to preserve anonymity

APPENDIX J – LYRICS TO 'JIGSAW'

These are specific lyrics from the song[154] chosen by the 'Jigsaw' case study group as meaningful to them – the interpretation of these lyrics as agreed upon by the students is that the words represent 'trusting yourself[155]', 'believing in yourself[156]', 'self-power[157]', 'taking responsibility for yourself and your own life[158]', 'doing the best you can doesn't mean that everything will be perfect but you know you're trying[159]' (Jigsaw group, 15th April 2011)

Jigsaw

Written and composed by Ryan Sheridan

Reproduced By Kind Permission of Ryan Sheridan

It's all to do with what you need,
And being what you want,
Leave it on your desk,
Don't leave it in your bag.
But I've got the view to get me home,
The means to get me there,
The fire in my soul,
and the lighter in my hand.
And I desecrate what I've been told,
To listen to myself,
I'm the one and only man who can make me who I am.
But you tossed a coin to pick my path,
To even out my odds
Two faced that leave me blind,
So you can't leave me in the cold.

Chorus:

I got lost to find my way,
Still I'm standing in the dark,
With one hand holding on to night
And one to day

[154] This is not the entire Song
[155] Owen
[156] Emma
[157] Niall
[158] Peter
[159] Niall

APPENDIX K – MY PAD

APPENDIX K – MY PAD

Guidance Notes for myPad

Positive
Aims
Diary

Inclusive
Methods in
Mainstream
Education

APPENDIX K – MY PAD

Important notes from student to teacher about miPad

- ☐ The reason I want to use this diary is to support me making positive changes in my behaviour and attitude in school.
- ☐ If I engage in these behaviours it will have a positive effect on your classroom
- ☐ This is not a report card for negative behaviour
- ☐ Your comments should relate to My Positive Aims only
- ☐ Please take this opportunity to notice me making a positive effort and acknowledge these positive changes.
- ☐ At the end of class if I have achieved my aims, please initial the appropriate boxes and feel free to add a positive comment

If I haven't achieved a specific aim, please leave the associated box empty

Page 1

APPENDIX K – MY PAD

My notes for My Positive Aims Diary

- ☐ I have chosen and agreed these 3 aims for this week with my coordinator
- ☐ I will try my best to meet my aims
- ☐ I will give My PAD to my teacher at the start of each class to complete before the end of the lesson
- ☐ I will review My PAD with my coordinator each week
- ☐ The purpose of My PAD is to support me in making positive changes so that I can:
  - ☐ achieve my goals
  - ☐ experience success
  - ☐ reach my potential in school

Page 2

APPENDIX K – MY PAD

My Aims This Week

A1.	
A2.	
A3.	

My Signature: _____

Date: _____

Coordinator _____

Year Head/Tutor _____

Page 3

APPENDIX K – MY PAD

Monday Date: / /20

Class	Teacher	Aim 1	Aim 2	Aim 3	Comment
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					

My Comments

Page 4

Weekly Review

My Comments

Coordinator's Comments

Page 9

APPENDIX L – MENTORING PROGRAMME GUIDELINES AND WORKSHEET

This programme will run from 29th January, every Friday afternoon from 3 pm. The programme will be reviewed every month to ensure that everyone involved is happy to continue and to provide an opportunity for suggestions around activities.

At any stage a mentor may withdraw from the programme if he/she wishes, or may be asked to withdraw if it is observed that they are not suitably committed or enthusiastic about their involvement or considerate of the partner they have been assigned to.

It is crucial that mentors are respectful of any confidences that are shared with them as part of the activities they engage in. Breaking confidence, making fun of and/or sharing information with other students that has been confided in them by their partners will be considered a serious breach of the programme and will result in that mentor being asked to leave the programme immediately.

However, if your partner discloses information to you that indicates he/she is in any danger or very troubled please advise them to speak either to the School Guidance Counsellor or me immediately and contact one of us to alert us to the situation.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck with your involvement in the

'I'm Me Mentoring Programme 2010'.

_____

Paula Flynn

Please sign below if you agree to the conditions of this programme:

_____

APPENDIX L – MENTORING PROGRAMME GUIDELINES AND WORKSHEET

5th YEAR LCA WORKSHEET 25th JANUARY 2010

NAME:_____

Responsibilities of mentoring programme:

1. Meet students on a weekly basis – 3 pm every Friday afternoon
2. Positive focus to conversations – concentrate on what is going well for them in school and outside
3. Build relationship of trust based on understanding and recognition of their experiences from experiences you had when you were in the Junior Cycle
4. Encourage them to participate in games and team work activities organized and suggested by the student group

Questions:

1. What in your opinion is your most important responsibility as a mentor in this programme?

2. If your younger partner discloses that they are very upset or troubled about anything, what will you do?

3. If your younger partner discloses that they or anybody else they know is in danger, what will you do?

4. Do you think it would have been helpful for you if you had had a mentor when you were in 1st 2nd or 3rd year?

5. If the answer to the question above is yes, how do you think it might have helped?

6. Do you believe that your own experience of junior cycle in school will help you to understand and help the student you have been assigned to? If yes, please elaborate.

APPENDIX M – MENTORING PARTNERSHIPS JAN – MAY 2010

5th year student	**2nd year student**
Les *	John
Emma	Cassie
Kalu	Lorriane
Mark	Gary
Owen	Frank
Peter	Harry
Roger	Kevin
Geraldine	Eamon

*Absent a lot in March and April – John attended some of the group exercises and discussions but paired with another student from 1st year last period on Friday afternoons

APPENDIX N – I'M ME - A PRINCIPAL'S PERSPECTIVE

It seems to me that the pupil – centred approach taken by Paula through her IMME programme requires complete buy in from the principal, deputy, year head, form teacher, resource/SEN teacher, and guidance counsellor. I think it works best when there is at least one skilful person facilitating the process. For us it was very helpful to have the expertise offered by Paula. Her input was crucial particularly at first but the success of the programme was in its sustainability when we identified a teacher to continue specific aspects of the approach and once the guidance counsellor and SEN coordinator were prepared to monitor and sustain the pupil voice approach. This facilitated at a system level a structure for referral and monitoring of pupils, we found we could get similar results in promoting pupil input, positive behaviour and opportunities to work on poor self esteem amongst vulnerable pupils ourselves. It was empowering and helpful that we understood from the outset that we were not expected to solve all the problems facing the pupils. We were dealing with what we could and sometimes other events took over. This support from Paula to staff was invaluable as I think at first some people were suspicious that she would be judgemental if we could not 'save' everyone, however, her level of understanding and care for everyone she had the opportunity to work with contributed to empowering not just the pupils but key members of the staff, including me.

As principal I felt it was important that the my pads were not over used or used haphazardly; structure was really key. Furthermore, others and I had to be able to withstand vocal teachers who had negative relationships with pupils, which they could not or would not let go. I think more input from Paula with these teachers could have further changed the culture of the school although I was astounded at the impact of the workshops she organised to support a tutor with a particularly unruly class. Not only did the atmosphere in the class become more positive but the tutor was visibly relieved and more confident as a result. For me the most impressive outcome of the programme was witnessing the leadership potential among pupils I had personally identified as exclusion risks. Some of these pupils took opportunities that none of us had foreseen and the most valuable example was when they put on similar workshops based on Paula's original model to improve morale and relationships amongst their own class groups, a move which impacted not just on their friends but also their teachers. I and others on staff found this extraordinary.

I think the approach taken for this research should in fact be made 'official' for clusters of schools so that they too could benefit from the change in culture and ethos as experienced in this school. For instance, I could see a 'Paula' operating with a number of schools where pupils have been identified with EBD or any mixture of behaviour that is challenging or where there is a breakdown in relationships between teachers and pupils. Or skilful teachers from a group of schools could mentor teachers in other schools. I feel that the fact that Paula was from outside relieved some of the pressures that keep pupils and teachers behaving in the same way; I think it

was a strength of the programme. I feel there is enormous potential and a real need to develop this aspect of the system for many other schools.

The my pads can become a ‘game changer’ for parents too. It gives them the chance to be proactive and responsive instead of reactive and negative about a lot of communications with school. It also puts it up to them to take part in something which so obviously improves relationships and builds on the benefits of praise and encouragement. It can become the foundation of a more collaborative approach to difficulties between school and home. This happened in most cases, though there were exceptions because of situations outside of the control of the school.

The IMME and my Pad system is school friendly and culture changing. It has proven potential to address EBD and other issues within school. It strikes me that it may need to become part of teacher training.

I originally agreed to this research in my school because I was anxious about the unacceptable level of challenging behaviour and the difficult relationships between staff with each other and staff with students. I was not convinced to begin with that the approach would be successful because of the over reliance on ‘pupil voice’ but when I met Paula I believed that she would find a way to work with some of our most difficult students. I am happy to admit that I was wrong and her ‘pupil voice’ approach was more successful than I expected and I am confident in my appraisal that what I had hoped would benefit some of our vulnerable and challenging students in the school in fact changed the ethos of the school to a stronger culture of caring and benefited our school community.

APPENDIX O – FEEDBACK FROM SENCO ON THE IMPACT OF THE RESEARCH

Inclusive Methods in Mainstream Education, The I'm me Programme.

Things have certainly improved since I started teaching in 1996. Instead of every effort to exclude the undesirable students, there is now every effort being made to include the "troubled students". Teachers, unbeknownst to themselves, even find that they have grown very fond of the student who was causing holy hell in the classroom.

This change in culture does not take away the fact that school is a very difficult place for my students with emotional difficulties. The SENO has very strict definitions and boxes that must be ticked before a student is regarded as having an EBD.

One of the differences the I'M ME project has is that Paula did not have as strict a definition of what an EBD was. She cared if the student was troubled. She listened to myself (resource), year heads, principal, class teacher etc to establish who would benefit from the pupil voice project. The students absolutely loved being part of the I'M ME gang and it had a certain street credibility none of us expected. Most of these kids are not 'joiners' and it really made a difference to them just being part of something. That in itself developed into a strong caring connection.

Main elements of the project

1. One to one time: A lot of time was spent by Paula getting to know each student in detail, gathering information from all the interested parties and more importantly chatting to the students themselves. She invested a great deal of energy in getting the students to trust her and without this element of the programme, I doubt it would have had the same impact or success.

2. Student diary: Some students were encouraged by Paula to keep a diary to record their feelings if they had difficulty talking to her. While some students did this initially, to my knowledge all of the students found it easy to talk to her within a short time.
3. Positive report card: An attractive report card where only good comments could be recorded. This had a major impact on the students ([redacted] and [redacted] in particular). It does a great deal for self esteem to have a complete booklet of positive comments.
4. Linking with teachers and parents: Paula spend time in the staff room chatting to teachers. I feel this was a medium whereby teachers could look for support from someone who didn't judge them if they were having a hard time. It was also a

method of getting a true picture of the classroom. Parents who began to realise that that their child was benefiting from being part of this programme also made appointments to talk to Paula so that they could understand 'why' it was working and get advice around improving relationships at home. All sides were heard.

5. Focus group discussions: Students discussed how they felt about school, and what the difficulties were. They also came up with great ideas between them on how to take control of some of their own difficulties and suggestions for how teachers could help (I was not at all these discussions but was allowed to attend two as an observer but only when the students agreed to it).
6. Student mentoring programme: 5th year LCA students acting as mentors for the 2nd year group – this was an unpopular initiative in the school at first but became hugely influential in the project and on the positive attitudes and relationships between the students involved. Some of the highlights from this according to my chats with the groups were: The 5th years couldn't believe that anyone would trust them this much but it made them want to be more responsible and to be good role models. One of two of the students admitted that in some tricky situations it made them choose better options because they didn't want to let down the younger students. The conversations in the room between the groups were inspiring, I was so proud of them. The sculpting workshops were a huge hit as were the conflict resolution sessions but in a different way. As a school, the workshops that the students themselves organised for their main class groups changed attitudes throughout the staffroom and people who had been very critical of Paula and the programme suddenly saw the whole approach in a new light. My Pad is something that the school will always use I believe from now on. We are very proud that the students were responsible for such a simple but effective idea and in particular that they got so much support from using it and incredibly that it became such a cool thing to be a part of – loads of students want to use it but it is only feasible that a maximum of three in any one class group at a time use it because otherwise it annoys the class teacher because it takes too much time completing it for every student.

My comments:

This programme has given me enormous support over the last 2 years. Quite often resource teachers can feel like they are battling alone. They are often an advocate for the

troubled student. This is fraught with problems in the staff room. Every class you have is full of students who are regularly acting out but obviously requiring even more intense displays of a teacher "giving a shit" about them. This can be exhausting! But enough of me whinging. This programme is supportive mainly because Paula was so supportive… I am aware that that is not the intention of the programme. The idea is that it will run long after Paula has gone. In that respect, it has many elements that will certainly be employed long after next year is over.

I learned the following:

1) An effective resource teacher can spend all her time working in small groups on the academic curriculum. Students will be aware that she cares by the dynamics of the class, and teachers and parents will be happy that learning support is taking place for the state examinations. However, what I learned from being involved in this programme is that it is not a "waste" to have one to one chat time with students, in fact it is essential to give the student TIME and to LISTEN effectively. Previously I worked under the illusion – why teach one when I can fit in 5/6. In light of budgets etc this is the reality, however I am now certain that even if it is short one on one non academic time – it is still very powerful in supporting the student. While I know my students very well and often discuss life's difficulties, I never really delved deep into this area as I would have felt that that was the job of a counsellor. However, I now realise that this one to one time is about letting students have a voice. I don't really have to solve anything and very often the students have ideas or solutions to difficulties they are experiencing as demonstrated from this research programme.
2) If this one to one time is to happen, the idea of having a diary where students can record key events or feelings is a good place to start the chat, and is beneficial if you are only seeing the students for maybe one period a week.
3) The I'm Me My Pad: the idea of having an attractive log that others might covet highlights that this pad is not a punishment and in fact, we were all shocked at how it became such a popular and sought after tool to promote praise from teachers and bring about effort, involvement and serious changes in attitude and confidence on the part of the students. Students that I never thought could possibly need this kind of help asked if they could use it too. Having a booklet of positive comments is extremely powerful for students who are used to carrying around the official school diary packed with "bad notes". It definitely healed some wounds for parents who are used to being disappointed by their child's behaviour. I have no doubt that this is a

key part to assisting students get through school a little easier and the best part about it is that it was invented by the students with Paula's encouragement and support. My experience tells me that parental involvement is a key predictor of how successful a student will be in school. I would hope that this pad will improve relations between student and parent and that the parent would be more inclined to contact the school and be more involved if they have seen some "positive stuff". Parents who have been faced with these packed "bad notes" diaries often go into hiding!

4) Spending time with teachers and parents. This element of the programme is not sustainable. As a resource teacher, it is my job to link with teachers and parents. This will not change. However the amount of time that Paula spent with key people is not possible within the restraints of the timetable, there is nobody on staff in school who could liaise with everyone in this way.

5) Focus group discussions: rather than the haphazard discussions that I frequently have with my students, I will definitely employ the focus group discussions, as I really felt a lot closer to the gang after they allowed me to attend one of two of their class chats with Paula. I was amazed by their insight and confidence talking in groups and especially knowing that the sessions were being recorded. Looking around the room at their enthusiastic faces I couldn't help wondering how they had transformed from a mixture of cheeky kids and painfully shy kids and also I know they felt very empowered by it, which again is essential to a student who's confidence is so frequently knocked. One ethical dilemma here is that I cannot allow students to slag off another teacher (even if they deserve to be slagged off). However, students then are not really being listened to if I insist on that.

6) Student mentoring: This is a really successful and popular element of the programme although it required a lot of effort and good will to keep it going and I'm not hundred per cent sure that it will be sustained once Paula has left the school although I know we will try. When it is going well it's brilliant but absenteeism can be a problem as it was with one student in particicular and it is disappointing for students in a group if their partner is not in. I was very impressed that the younger students in the partnerships are very interested in becoming mentors when they get past their junior cert exams. An incredible bond developed not just

between the mentors and the mentees but between the entire group. Again a lot of these kids are not used to being part of anything extra curricular and they loved being a part of this group and really supported and encouraged one another. I would be also interested in trying a variation on this element of the programme. I have been working closely with the parents of the present 1st year group (2nd year in Sept). I think it would be really interesting to do group mentoring sessions exactly as we did in the first year of the I'm Me programme but with the students and their parents. I'm sure it would improve relations between students and their parents and then lead to more effective paired studying by 3rd year.

7) The continuation of the sculpting and drama workshops for students involved in the programme. This was a really unexpected gem! It ticked all the boxes, improving self esteem, making school more fun, giving teachers an opportunity to praise etc.

As I mentioned previously, there is an element of this programme that will not be sustained or perpetuated, due mainly to Paula's caring personality and sheer persistence with the students and staff. She befriends all around her. There is not a lot of "time" in school life for squeezing anything more in. I have come to the conclusion however that rather than squeezing an "extra" thing in, that this programme is about trusting the students to know what will work for them, giving them a chance to make changes in their own lives, make time to listen to them and encouraging students to take some responsibility in their own lives and believe they can succeed. We will also make every effort to keep working with them on some of the tried and tested methods described above.

APPENDIX P – PHOTOGRAPH FROM SCULPTURE WORKSHOP

APPENDIX Q – CHILL-OUT CARD

Chill Out!

©Paula Flynn, I'M ME Program 2010
School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin 2
Email: flynnpm@tcd.ie

				60 min	
Date	Out	In	Taken	Remaining	Teacher

APPENDIX R – EXTRACTS

Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all (UNESCO 2005, p.13)

Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. … [As such,] it involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children'

Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs Post-Primary Guidelines (DES 2007, p.39)

The goal of inclusion is to create a framework within which differences between individuals are accommodated and celebrated. Inclusion in education relates not only to students with special educational needs, but also to a welcome for and acceptance within the school of all students who have learning differences - for example those who are members of the Traveller community, those living in areas of social or economic deprivation, and those from other cultures, whose first language may not be English or Irish. Inclusion does not seek to erase or ignore differences between individuals: in its essence, inclusion implies the right to appropriate education.

APPENDIX S – PILOT STUDY TIME LINE

Date	Eileen	Kenneth	Alex	Ms Amber	Ms Carmel	Ms Brown	Ms Damson	Ms Emerald	Dr Andrews	Ms Clarke
16/10/2008	Ph									
18/10/2008	Ph									
20/10/2008	Int	Int								
21/10/2008	Int	Int	Int							
21/10/2008			Int							
03/11/2008	Conf	Conf		Conf	Conf	Conf	Conf	Conf	Conf	Conf
05/11/2008			Int							
12/11/2008			Int							
19/11/2008			Int		Int					
26/11/2008			Int		Int			Int		
03/12/2008			Int							
10/12/2008			Int							
19/12/2008			Int							
14/01/2009			Int							
04/02/2009			Int							
25/02/2009			Int		Int					
04/03/2009			Int							
22/04/2009			Int							
13/05/2009			Int							
27/05/2009				Int		Int				
03/06/2009	Int	Int	Int		Int					
10/06/2009			Int							
25/06/2009					Email					
14/08/2009			Int							
12/05/2010			Int							

Totals	Eileen	Kenneth	Alex	Ms Amber	Ms Carmel	Ms Brown	Ms Damson	Ms Emerald	Dr Andrews	Ms Clarke
Phone	2									
Interviews	3	3	19	1	4	1		1		
Conference	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
E-mail					1					

APPENDIX T – BREAKDOWN OF MEETINGS IN ST BERNADETTE'S

	Code	Totals
Number of Days in 2008 Spent in St Bernadettes	Day	1
Number of Days in 2009 Spent in St Bernadettes	Day	48
Number of Days in 2010 Spent in St Bernadettes	Day	60
Number of Days in 2011 Spent in St Bernadettes	Day	8
Number of Days in 2012 Spent in St Bernadettes	Day	1
Total Number of Interviews	INT	218
Total Number of Conference Meetings	Conf	2
Number of Staff Meetings Attended	Staff	3
Number of Focus Group Meetings	FG	7
Number of Mentoring Meetings Facilitated	Ment	13
Number of Group Meetings	GM	1
Number of Sculpture Workshops	SW	2
Number of E-mail/Letter correspondence	EM/Letter	2

Dates of Attendance in St Bernadette's

DATES OF ATTENDANCE IN ST BERNADETTE'S							
2008	**2009**	**2009**	**2010**	**2010**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
	Term 3	**Term 1**	**Term 2**	**Term 3**	**Term 1**		
11-Dec-08	18-Mar-09	4-Sep-09	7-Jan-10	15-Apr-10	15-Sep-10	27-Jan-11	13-Jan-12
	19-Mar-09	11-Sep-09	8-Jan-10	16-Apr-10	16-Sep-10	13-Apr-11	
	20-Mar-09	16-Sep-09	13-Jan-10	21-Apr-10	28-Sep-10	14-Apr-11	
	26-Mar-09	17-Sep-09	14-Jan-10	22-Apr-10		15-Apr-11	
	28-Mar-09	18-Sep-09	15-Jan-10	23-Apr-10		4-May-11	
	30-Mar-09	24-Sep-09	18-Jan-10	29-Apr-10		6-May-11	
	31-Mar-09	25-Sep-09	21-Jan-10	30-Apr-10		7-May-11	
	2-Apr-09	30-Sep-09	22-Jan-10	4-May-10		2-Jun-11	
	7-May-09	1-Oct-09	25-Jan-10	5-May-10		8-Jun-11	
	12-May-09	2-Oct-09	27-Jan-10	6-May-10		18-Aug-11	
		7-Oct-09	28-Jan-10	7-May-10		21-Sep-11	
		8-Oct-09	29-Jan-10	12-May-10			
		9-Oct-09	1-Feb-10	13-May-10			
		14-Oct-09	3-Feb-10	14-May-10			
		15-Oct-09	4-Feb-10	19-May-10			
		16-Oct-09	5-Feb-10	20-May-10			
		22-Oct-09	10-Feb-10	21-May-10			
		23-Oct-09	11-Feb-10	27-May-10			
		2-Nov-09	12-Feb-10	28-May-10			
		5-Nov-09	22-Feb-10	2-Jun-10			
		6-Nov-09	24-Feb-10	3-Jun-10			
		11-Nov-09	24-Feb-10	4-Jun-10			
		12-Nov-09	25-Feb-10				
		13-Nov-09	26-Feb-10				
		19-Nov-09	3-Mar-10				
		20-Nov-09	4-Mar-10				
		25-Nov-09	5-Mar-10				
		26-Nov-09	10-Mar-10				
		27-Nov-09	11-Mar-10				
		2-Dec-09	12-Mar-10				
		3-Dec-09	18-Mar-10				
		4-Dec-09	19-Mar-10				
		7-Dec-09	24-Mar-10				
		9-Dec-09	25-Mar-10				
		10-Dec-09	26-Mar-10				
		11-Dec-09					
		16-Dec-09					
		17-Dec-09					
		18-Dec-09					

Staff Meetings

Date	Staff St Bernadettes	Ms Gray (Staff)	Ms Greene (Staff)	Mr Ash (Staff)	Claire Indigo (Staff)	Ms Honey (Staff)	English Teacher (Staff)	Mr Briar (Staff)	Maths Teacher (Staff)	Dep Principal (Staff)	Science Teacher (Staff)	Ms Magnolia (Staff)
11-Dec-08		INT	INT									
7-May-09				INT								
12-May-09			INT									
4-Sep-09	STAFF	INT/staff	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF
6-Nov-09					INT							
27-Nov-09				INT		INT						
2-Dec-09							INT					
7-Dec-09				INT								
13-Jan-10		Conf	Conf	Conf				Conf				
21-Jan-10		INT		INT					INT			
25-Jan-10		Conf		Conf						Conf		
27-Jan-10	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF
29-Jan-10			INT									
22-Feb-10	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF	STAFF
25-Feb-10						FG						
16-Apr-10											INT	
30-Apr-10												INT
15-Apr-11			INT									
7-May-11		INT										
2-Jun-11				INT								
8-Jun-11			Email									
18-Aug-11		LETTER										
21-Sep-11			INT									
13-Jan-12		INT	INT			INT						INT

Totals	Staff St Bernadettes	Ms Gray (Staff)	Ms Greene (Staff)	Mr Ash (Staff)	Claire Indigo (Staff)	Ms Honey (Staff)	English Teacher (Staff)	Mr Briar (Staff)	Maths Teacher (Staff)	Dep Principal (Staff)	Science Teacher (Staff)	Ms Magnolia (Staff)
Interviews		5	6	5	1	2	1		1	1	1	2
Conference		2	1	2				1				
E-mail/ Letter		1	1									
Staff Meet	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

Legends

Date	Cassie (Legends)	Lorraine (Legends)	Kevin (Legends)	Eamon (Legends)	Frank (Legends)	Gary (Legends)
18-Mar-09		INT				
20-Mar-09			INT	INT	INT	INT
31-Mar-09	INT					
16-Sep-09			INT			
17-Sep-09		INT				
24-Sep-09	INT			INT	INT	INT
30-Sep-09			INT			
1-Oct-09		INT				
8-Oct-09	INT			INT	INT	INT
14-Oct-09			INT			
15-Oct-09		INT				
22-Oct-09	INT			INT	INT	INT
5-Nov-09	INT			INT	INT	INT
11-Nov-09			INT			
12-Nov-09		INT				
19-Nov-09	INT			INT	INT	INT
25-Nov-09			INT			
26-Nov-09		INT				
3-Dec-09	INT			INT	INT	INT
9-Dec-09			INT			
10-Dec-09	FG	INT/FG	FG	FG	FG	FG
17-Dec-09	INT			INT	INT	INT
7-Jan-10		INT				
13-Jan-10			INT			
14-Jan-10	INT			INT	INT	INT
21-Jan-10		INT				
27-Jan-10			INT			
28-Jan-10	INT			INT	INT	INT
29-Jan-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
4-Feb-10		INT				
5-Feb-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
10-Feb-10			INT			
11-Feb-10	INT			INT	INT	INT
12-Feb-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
24-Feb-10	INT		INT	INT	INT	INT
26-Feb-10	SW			SW	SW	SW
4-Mar-10		INT				
5-Mar-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment

Legends -Continued

Date	Cassie (Legends)	Lorraine (Legends)	Kevin (Legends)	Eamon (Legends)	Frank (Legends)	Gary (Legends)
10-Mar-10			INT			
11-Mar-10	INT			INT	INT	INT
12-Mar-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
18-Mar-10		INT				
24-Mar-10			INT			
25-Mar-10	INT			INT		INT
26-Mar-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
15-Apr-10		INT			INT	
16-Apr-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
21-Apr-10			INT			
22-Apr-10	INT			INT	INT	INT
23-Apr-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
29-Apr-10		INT				
30-Apr-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment
5-May-10			INT			
6-May-10	INT			INT	INT	INT
7-May-10	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG
13-May-10		INT	INT			
14-May-10	INT/M	Ment	Ment	INT/M	INT/M	INT/M
15-Sep-10	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG
4-May-11	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG

Totals	Cassie (Legends)	Lorraine (Legends)	Kevin (Legends)	Eamon (Legends)	Frank (Legends)	Gary (Legends)
Interviews	17	15	16	18	17	17
Sculpture W/S	1			1	1	1
Focus Group	4	4	4	4	4	4
Mentoring	10	10	10	10	10	10

Jigsaw

Date	Les (Jigsaw)	Emma (Jigsaw)	Kalu (Jigsaw)	Mark (Jigsaw)	Owen (Jigsaw)	Peter (Jigsaw)	Roger (Jigsaw)	Geraldine (Jigsaw)	Quincy (Jigsaw)	Eucharia (Jigsaw)
19-Mar-09	INT	INT								
28-Mar-09										INT
30-Mar-09			INT	INT	INT	INT	INT			
2-Apr-09								INT	INT	INT
7-Oct-09	INT				INT					
9-Oct-09		INT		INT						
14-Oct-09			INT							
15-Oct-09									INT	INT
16-Oct-09						INT	INT	INT		
2-Nov-09	INT			INT	INT					
3-Dec-09						INT				
11-Dec-09					INT					
16-Dec-09	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG
13-Jan-10	GM	GM	GM	GM	GM	GM	GM	GM	GM	GM
15-Jan-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	INT/M	Ment	Ment		
18-Jan-10	Ment	INT/M	Ment	INT/M	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
28-Jan-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
29-Jan-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	INT/M	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
5-Feb-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
12-Feb-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
26-Feb-10		SW				SW	SW		SW	SW
5-Mar-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
12-Mar-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
19-Mar-10	SW		SW		SW			SW		
26-Mar-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
16-Apr-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
23-Apr-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
30-Apr-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
7-May-10	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG
14-May-10	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment	Ment		
13-Apr-11	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG
15-Apr-11	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG	FG

Jigsaw - Continued

Totals	Les (Jigsaw)	Emma (Jigsaw)	Kalu (Jigsaw)	Mark (Jigsaw)	Owen (Jigsaw)	Peter (Jigsaw)	Roger (Jigsaw)	Geraldine (Jigsaw)	Quincy (Jigsaw)	Eucharia (Jigsaw)
Interviews	3	3	2	2	4	4	2	2	2	3
Group Meet	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sculpture W/S	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1
Focus Group	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mentoring	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13		

Blood Brothers, Lone Wolf and Others Meetings

Date	Harry (Blood Brothers)	Ian (Blood Brothers)	Consented	John(Lone Wolf)	LCA	Johns Father	Sculpture Workshop	Adam	Bernie	Niall
18-Mar-09			INT							
20-Mar-09	INT	INT								
2-Apr-09				INT						
11-Sep-09	INT									
18-Sep-09		INT								
30-Sep-09				INT						
1-Oct-09		INT								
8-Oct-09		INT								
14-Oct-09				INT						
15-Oct-09		INT								
22-Oct-09		INT								
5-Nov-09		INT								
6-Nov-09	INT									
12-Nov-09		INT								
19-Nov-09		INT								
25-Nov-09				INT						
26-Nov-09		INT								
2-Dec-09	INT									
3-Dec-09		INT								
10-Dec-09	FG	FG								
16-Dec-09	INT		FG	INT						
17-Dec-09		INT								
18-Dec-09			INT							
7-Jan-10		INT								
8-Jan-10	INT									
13-Jan-10			GM	GM	GM					
14-Jan-10		INT								
21-Jan-10		INT								
22-Jan-10	INT			Ment						
25-Jan-10				Conf		Conf				
28-Jan-10		INT								
29-Jan-10				INT						
3-Feb-10				INT						
4-Feb-10	INT	INT								
11-Feb-10		INT								
24-Feb-10	INT									
24-Feb-10	INT			INT						
25-Feb-10	Ment	INT								
26-Feb-10	SW			INT/SW			SW			
3-Mar-10				INT						
4-Mar-10		INT								
11-Mar-10		INT								
18-Mar-10		INT								
19-Mar-10				SW			SW	SW	SW	SW
24-Mar-10				INT						
25-Mar-10		INT								
15-Apr-10	INT	INT								
22-Apr-10		INT								
29-Apr-10		INT								

Blood Brothers, Lone Wolf and Others Meetings – Continued

Date	Harry (Blood Brothers)	Ian (Blood Brothers)	Consented	John(Lone Wolf)	LCA	Johns Father	Sculpture Workshop	Adam	Bernie	Niall
5-May-10				INT						
6-May-10		INT								
7-May-10	FG									
13-May-10		INT								
20-May-10		INT								
27-May-10		INT								
3-Jun-10		INT								
15-Sep-10				INT						
16-Sep-10	INT	INT								
28-Sep-10	INT									
27-Jan-11				INT						
14-Apr-11	INT	INT								
6-May-11				INT						
13-Jan-12	INT	INT								

Totals	Harry (Blood Brothers)	Ian (Blood Brothers)	Consented	John(Lone Wolf)	LCA	Johns Father	Sculpture Workshop	Adam	Bernie	Niall
Interviews	15	34	2	15		1				
Conference	2			1						
Group Meet			1	1	1					
Sculpture W/S	1			2			2	1	1	1
Focus Group	2	1	1							
Mentoring				1						

APPENDIX U – ETHICAL QUESTIONS – SIKES (2004)

- **If you are intending to do covert research of some kind, can you justify this?**
  My response to this is that my intention is to be open and honest with all the participants as there is no hidden agenda. It is essential that the participants are invested in a process which they believe and understand is in their interests.
- **How do you regard the people you're going to be researching?**
  I respect every participant in this study and believe that they have an important contribution to make to this research. I believe that every child and young person has the right to express their views and those opportunities to facilitate a young person's potential to develop socially and educationally should be met.
- **Do you make the research process appear to be neat and unproblematic?**
  It is my intention to present this research with accuracy and transparency while protecting the anonymity of the participants. Human beings are 'messy' and therefore preferred outcomes and behaviours cannot be guaranteed. Being true to pupil voice research requires that I present the voice of the participants as accurately as possible without adulteration or ***over***-interpretation. I sincerely believe that unintended outcomes are as valid and interesting in research as intended outcomes.
- **Are informants sufficiently protected in written accounts?**
  I have created pseudonyms and changed distinguishing features of every participant, child, adult and school in this study. In conversations and interviews I have always explained that I will use the information I obtain but protect the identification of the source.

Paula Flynn

12th October 2009

APPENDIX V – LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED

The Leaving Certificate Applied Source: Second Level Support Service (http://lca.slss.ie/faq.html)

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained two-year programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. The programme puts an emphasis on forms of achievement and excellence, which the established Leaving Certificate has not recognised in the past.

The Leaving Certificate Applied was introduced to recognise the talents of all students and provide opportunities for development in terms of responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge. It is an innovative programme in the way students learn, in what they learn and in the way their achievements are assessed

The Leaving Certificate Applied is intended to meet the needs of those students who are not adequately catered for by other Leaving Certificate programmes or who choose not to opt for such programmes.