A 'DYSLEXIA – FRIENDLY' SCHOOL, BUT ONLY FOR THE 'RIGHT SORT' OF DYSLEXIC: RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN A PRIVATE SCHOOL CONTEXT.

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Abstract

This research set out to examine the barriers to a secondary private school in implementing dyslexia-friendly practice and responding to different needs, through an in-depth case study of a girls' school where this was an acknowledged aim. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews with staff, pupils and other key informants. Adolescent girls were chosen as the focus in relation to issues of self-esteem.

Before looking at potential barriers, perspectives of pupils in three different private schools for girls were examined in order to investigate how significant practices designated as dyslexia friendly were in the experience of adolescent girls. This suggested that there was no significant difference in the practices and teaching strategies found helpful by dyslexic or non-dyslexic pupils. What was significant was the strength of reaction to teaching strategies that were perceived as patronising or critical, despite often being intended as helpful.

Examinations of teachers' beliefs about the nature of difficulties showed that even where there appeared to be an interventionist perspective, this was diluted in the case of pupils who did not fit the profile of the 'right sort of dyslexic' who would reflect well on staff and school. Three significant barriers to the development of more inclusive practice were identified: the culture of autonomy in the classroom and suspicion of collaborative work; a high level of dependence on ability grouping; lack of consensus over the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO).

Significance of the findings in relation to the current dichotomy in the wider educational setting between league table pressures on one hand and inclusive ideology on the other is discussed and suggestions are made about areas for further investigation.

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Chapter 1   Introduction

Research Context

The subject of this research stemmed from an interest in how private schools were responding to recent changes in legislation, particularly the 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA), relating to the meeting of individual needs and ways of addressing difference. There is an obvious contradiction in discussing what is essentially inclusive practice within a setting that is anything but inclusive, by virtue of an admissions process that allows for exclusion of a large sector of the population, but within the limits of the range admitted, there will still be those whose learning needs are 'additional to' or 'otherwise different from' provision made for their peers. (DfES, 2001a, para 1:3) Since the redefining of dyslexia away from an attainment model it has become evident that there are pupils who are able to meet the entry requirements of private schools but are still disadvantaged by difficulties related to dyslexia. Dyslexia is therefore the most likely difference to be encountered in a private school setting.

Despite a vast body of research into the possible biological, cognitive and behavioural causes of dyslexia, along with the role played by the environment, (Frith, 1999; Snowling, 1998; Fawcett, 2002), there is still a lack of agreement over a clear definition of dyslexia, and whether it is a syndrome or a socially constructed phenomenon. (Stanovich,1994; Riddick, 2001; Herrington & Hunter-Carsch, 2001). These issues will be explored further in the literature review, but for the purposes of this research the position is that for the dyslexic individual and those connected with them the difficulties are very real and exacerbated by the demands and expectations of a literacy-based culture, where the response of significant others (Bandura, 1997) is crucially important in influencing outcomes.

There is a potential conflict between meeting the demands of the Special Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) which became law in 2001 and makes it unlawful to discriminate against learners with a disability, and efforts to reconcile these requirements with the need to retain standing in league tables in order to remain viable financially. This conflict is reflected in the increasingly competitive market for state schools. It could be argued that an examination of practice in private schools is irrelevant to the situation in the majority of schools that are state-funded, but the freedom from received ideology means that some issues are more overtly accessible. There is little empirical research in the public domain into practice within independent schools and how they are adapting to the new culture of greater inclusion.

Scene setting

Private schools have generally been slower than maintained schools to adopt inclusive practice and dyslexia provision has for many years been ad hoc and uncoordinated, particularly in academically selective schools. In a competitive, economically driven market, there is less opportunity for the sharing of information and mutual support than in the maintained sector and often any impetus for change has been dependent on the influences of individuals, rather than a ideological change in policy, or an enforced refocus through pressure from Government and LEA. However, in the past five years more of these schools have appointed Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and are actively promoting provision for dyslexic pupils.

Examination of in-service training provided by organisations such as the Independent Schools Information Service (ISCIS), the Headmasters' Conference (HMC) and the Girls' Schools Association (GSA) shows a current emphasis on courses with titles such as '*Achieving Potential: Making the most of individual differences.'* Independent training organisations such as 'Learning Works' are providing courses for the training of SENCOs in independent schools in

conjunction with the University of Worcester, while courses run by the Open University such as *'Difficulties in Literacy Development'* that carries the possibility of British Dyslexia Association (BDA) accreditation, attract a high proportion of teachers from private schools. In the case of independent boarding schools, especially those for girls, it could be argued that there is a vested interest in such provision as many parents are looking for those schools that will provide what they perceive to be a sympathetic education combined with the availability of specialist tuition. The requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) and the influence of recent litigation (*Phelps v London Borough of Hillingdon)* have also had a significant effect.

However, the culture of many of these schools is often not geared to differentiation, and the need to adapt teaching strategies can be seen as a culture shock for some teachers. At a time when generally numbers of applicants for boarding places are falling in all but the most academic of schools, this dyslexia market can cynically be seen as a potentially lucrative one. If the impetus for change is external, rather than internal, can it be successfully implemented to make a significant difference to the school's culture and the experience of individuals within the system?

Traditionally, provision in private schools has been based on a medical model of disability and remediation, to be administered by specialist teachers away from the classroom. However, some schools are beginning to move towards a more environmental model and embrace the concept of 'dyslexia friendly' schools, first propounded by Mackay (2001) at a British Dyslexia Association Governor Training Conference and subsequently endorsed by the DfES (British Dyslexia Association, 1999). Suggestions for good practices were broadly based on recommendations collated from a variety of sources, and were aimed at minimising failure. The claims made for the effectiveness of dyslexia friendly practices are extravagant:

Where schools have implemented the dyslexia friendly schools charter on a planned basis it has quickly become clear that there are wider benefits, including improvements in literacy across the curriculum, better teaching of literacy for all pupils, greater awareness of individual learning needs and the use of more varied teaching strategies.

(Warwick LEA, quoted in Resource Pack, BDA 2001)

This suggests that the practices are indicative of good teaching for all, but do not specifically address the question of the effect on the self-esteem of dyslexic pupils, although the criteria used for evaluating the effectiveness of the introduction of the programme across the Swansea LEA schools is that they now have 'few complaints and standards are rising'. (Peer, 2001). It is also apparent that there is a strong link between effective schools and the implementation of these practices, again suggesting that it could be the general ethos and atmosphere of the school that is the important factor.

As a Special Educational Needs Coordinator within a private school, responsible for promoting 'dyslexia friendly' practices within a whole school policy, this researcher was not convinced that the *provision* was sufficient to raise the self-esteem of those pupils who were hypersensitive, either as a result of earlier experiences – what Edwards (1994) refers to as 'scars of dyslexia' - or an innate sensitivity. Before beginning to look at the wider question of responses to difference, a pilot study was designed to investigate the initial question: "how significant are practices described as 'dyslexia friendly' in the experience of dyslexic students?

Key Research Questions

The main research area is:

How does a private school respond to issues of inclusion in the light of the requirements of SENDA? If the impetus for change is external rather than internal, can it be successfully implemented to make a significant difference to the experience of individuals within the system?

Within this overarching question, there are certain sub-questions:

- How receptive are private schools likely to be to adopting more inclusive policies and practice?
- What are the potential barriers to successful implementation of such practices?
- What are the perceptions of students about inclusive practice and how do these relate to the ideals expressed in claims of dyslexia friendly schools?

This last question is addressed separately within the Institution Focused Study (IFS) and subsequently informs the main case study. The main aim of the thesis, however, is to examine the phenomenon of selective private schools being required to demonstrate inclusive practice.

Map of thesis

In **Chapter 2** these questions will first be contextualised in relation to the literature on theories of inclusion, effective schools and private schooling, as well as the foundations for 'dyslexia friendly' practices, in order to identify potential gaps in existing research.

Chapter 3 leads on to discuss a comparison of piloted methods of data collection and their implications for the main investigation, both in methodology and content. This chapter fulfils the requirements of the Institution Focused Study (IFS).

This will be followed in **Chapter 4** by an examination of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for the chosen methodology. The process of data collection and analysis, including the 'natural history' of the case study, will be discussed.

In **Chapter 5,** findings are presented and illustrated by extracts from the data.

Chapter 6 reflects on the findings in relation to existing literature and discusses the conclusions to be drawn from the research, together with a reflection on the methods and acknowledgement of the limitations.

Chapter 7 concludes with an examination of the significance and implications of the findings and makes suggestions for further investigation.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review that follows seeks first to contextualise the research area within current policy and practice and then to identify and evaluate existing research into the areas of inclusion and dyslexia friendly practice, with particular reference to the private schooling of girls, together with theories of change in education.

Any discussion of responses to difference needs to be considered within the historical development of special needs provision in general and the shift to inclusion via the comprehensive ideal and integration in particular. Within this wider context, the position of private schools and their place within the current educational climate will be examined. As dyslexia is the special educational need most likely to be encountered in the private sector, and is specifically recognised as a disability under the Special Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001), which applies equally to private schools, the notion of dyslexia as a discrete category needs to be examined, together with the literature relating to social and emotional aspects and the emergence of the dyslexia-friendly schools initiatives. As the intention is to look at barriers to implementation, and as dyslexia friendly schools are proposed as more effective generally, concepts of school effectiveness and school improvement are significant, together with models for educational change.

Historical context

The history of dyslexia provision cannot be divorced from the context of special needs provision generally, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Dyson and Skidmore (1996) see the history of special needs provision not in terms of progress over time, but as a paradigm shift in the model and assumptions about learning. Gerber (2002) sees the history of special education as reflecting strategies devised by schools to cater for 'the immutable fact of

human differences in conflict with the ambition to build systems of universal mass education'. (p304)

Ireson & Hallam (2001) suggest that there has been a cyclical pattern from inclusion through segregation and back to inclusion. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was an assumption that all children were potentially educable, given appropriate teaching, although this has to be taken in the context of the exclusion of pupils with severe special educational needs, who had no entitlement to education until the 1970 Education Act. This assumption was challenged by the development of intelligence testing, with its suggestion that intelligence levels placed limits on the capacity to learn. Therefore the role of education was to enable individuals to realise their potential within these limits.

By the 1970s this paradigm was reflected in a 'remedial' model of special education, grounded in a psychological perspective where difficulties in learning were seen as within-child weaknesses in cognitive functioning. The emphasis was on diagnosis and remediation, especially of reading difficulties, with reading being seen as the key to the curriculum. This model continues to be prevalent in private schools, with entrance examinations frequently containing measures of 'intelligence' as well as attainment.

In the 1980s there was a shift from emphasis on the medical model of remediating individual difficulties to a whole school approach. Remedial teachers were re-designated curriculum support teachers and the emphasis was on access. An influential HMI report (SED, 1978) suggested that it was not sufficient to concentrate on reading difficulties as a separate entity, but instead there was the need to look at linguistic/conceptual difficulties with the curriculum content. As a result of this change of focus, the emphasis shifted to looking at ways of teaching that focused on 'appropriate' rather than remedial teaching, and this was seen as a responsibility of the whole school, whether remedial staff were employed or not. The role of special needs staff similarly shifted from remediation to support of

teachers in developing appropriate styles of teaching, although it is questionable how far this advice was accepted. The assumption was that children with literacy difficulties would have difficulties across the curriculum and that ways had to be found of allowing access to a broad based curriculum – the National Curriculum. At this point, there was the first suggestion that appropriate teaching for children with learning difficulties was a subset of 'good' teaching for all children.

This goes against the deterministic perspective on education that suggests that intelligence and home background largely determine the performance of pupils within the education system, as highlighted by Bourdieu & Passeron (1973), and is influenced by an interactionist perspective that suggests looking within the system for explanations of differentiated achievement. This has significant implications for schools and implies a paradigm shift from the traditional assumption that the role of schools is to provide learning opportunities which children may or may not take advantage of, to an obligation on schools to 'actively and constructively seek ways to instruct all students without exclusion' (Gerber 2002: 314).

Current situation

Alongside this rethinking on special educational needs and educability has been an emphasis on the rights of pupils to be educated with their peers. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) has been fundamental in changing attitudes and policies, reflected in the UK in a series of directives, such as the *Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs* (DfE, 1994), and the *National Curriculum Inclusion Statement* (DfE/QCA, 1999). Private schools were not bound by these documents, but Part 2 of the *Special Needs and Disability Act* (SENDA 2001), which came into force in September 2002, applies to all schools in the maintained and non-maintained sectors. The revised *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (DfES, 2001a) along with the statutory guidance in '*Inclusive Schooling*'

(DfES 2001b), and most recently *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004) give guidance on the application of SENDA.

Alongside this, though, the Education Reform Act (ERA, 1988) introduced national assessments at 7, 11 and 14 and also the principles of competition through parental choice and the publication of league tables; a rise in the number of exclusions from schools and a return to ability grouping are increasingly seen as a consequence of conflict between the philosophy of inclusion and the need to attract pupils who will contribute to the school's standing in the marketplace.

'Inclusion' is now accepted as a concept within the literature and as Thomas (2001) points out, is 'now *de rigeur* for mission statements, political speeches and policy documents of all kinds.' (Series editor's preface) As a concept, it is an extension of the comprehensive ideal and relates more to an equitable and tolerant system than to a procedural system such as 'integration' and 'desegregation'. As a consequence there is a tendency to make assumptions about unanimity of perspectives rather than on conflicting interpretations. Jones (2004) argues that issues relating to changing attitudes at the school level are neglected in the assumptions about acceptance of the principles. Often changes in legislation and ideology are not mirrored in the beliefs and practices of those involved at the microlevel. The next section looks at some studies that have attempted to uncover the complexities of the current situation.

Research into current situation

Despite the reservations of Jones (op cit) about lack of research into attitudinal aspects, there are several studies in the literature where the focus has been on teacher attitudes. Avramidis et al (2000), acknowledging that respondents could have multiple interpretations of concepts such as inclusion, used survey research with a variety of instruments including Likert and differential response scales as well as open ended questions, based on Knoster's (1991) framework of change in complex systems. Half the schools were involved because they were identified as

exemplars of good practice and the other randomly selected across the LEA . This was a large-scale study, albeit within only one LEA, that among other findings, suggested that experience of inclusion in practice and participation in further professional development contributed to more positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, it was apparent that many teachers were working with a model of integration requiring special provision and resources, rather than of inclusion. In a review of the literature, Avramidis et al find evidence for their hypothesis that prior experience of integration and/or inclusion is a significant factor in eliciting a more positive response to the provision. They suggest that:

> '*teachers' negative or neutral attitudes at the beginning of an innovation such as inclusive education may change over time as a function of experience and the expertise that develops through the process of implementation.* (Avramidis et al, 2000: 4 of 19)

and their own findings appear to strengthen this finding. This quantitative study is useful in generating a mass of information and avoids the parochial criticism of small scale studies, but it was also followed up with an in-depth case study (Avramidis et al, 2002) of one secondary school within the authority in order to examine critically an example of 'inclusive practice'. Using a series of interview sweeps with a variety of informant constituencies, they aimed for 'maximum variation' in order to generate rich multi-dimensional data. As in the previous study, they make a distinction between integration and inclusion and suggest that there is more support for integration than for fully inclusive practice. Although there was evidence of good practice, there was also a suggestion that many pupils with additional needs were socially isolated and suffered from low self-esteem. Insufficient differentiation was also a problem, as reported by LSAs working alongside students. One finding that is particularly significant in the context of the private sector was the perceived negative consequence of their success in catering for additional needs. The quote below from the deputy head could be attributed to any private school head or governing body arguing against developing Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision, and again illustrates the conflict between parental choice and market forces on one hand and social-ethical ideology on the other:

'….we have got the label that the school is good for SEN, and that is not the label we want because we are losing the brightest of the students locally…' (Avramidis et al, 2002: 157)

Even within this seemingly successful school, there was a greater focus on achievement than on the emotional development of the pupils. There was also a limit to the inclusion, with children *'who do not fit' (*Headteacher quoted in ibid, p159) being excluded.

Skidmore (1999) also chose an in-depth study of a secondary school that was in the process of implementing change in order to investigate the concept of consensus as a necessary condition for change. Skidmore challenges this belief and suggests that the existence of different discourses: '*pupil ability'* versus '*curriculum presentation',* roughly corresponding to the medical versus interventionist/environmental model discussed earlier, can co-exist within a working agreement. However, differences of interpretation of key concepts could prevent future development – for instance *'support'* can refer to support for the pupil in learning [pupil ability] or support for the teacher [curriculum presentation]. Skidmore concludes that the most important factor for change is dialogue and clarification of terminology, rather than consensus.

Skidmore used naturalistic inquiry methods, including semi-structured interviews, to generate data for discourse analysis. Jordan and Stanovich (2003) chose narrative interviews to investigate teachers' epistemological beliefs about the nature of disability. They collected data though an examination of accounts of experiences over the academic year with one or more pupils experiencing difficulties and used a '*pathognomic-interventionist'* scale to categorise responses. At the pathognomic end of the spectrum, teachers ascribed difficulties to the child, whereas at the interventionist end they took responsibility for changing their methods to accommodate or prevent difficulties. This is similar to Skidmore's '*pupil ability - curriculum presentation'* divide. Their intention was to investigate through classroom observations whether teacher beliefs influenced

practice and concluded that the teachers who were at the interventionist end of the scale appeared to have more effective teaching skills than those with pathognomic beliefs. This applied for all students, not just those with additional needs. Following a large scale self-report study, they conclude that teacher's beliefs about students with additional needs, together with their sense of self-efficacy as teachers (although this is more tenuous) and the prevailing culture of the school, are related to classroom practice. As with Avramidis et al (2000) who found that teachers' attitudes could change over time, they suggest that seeing successful outcomes through collaboration with colleagues can lead to a change in belief systems, as can a collective school ethos, where staff agree a definition of terminology – the aspect that Skidmore found could pose a barrier to change. Jordan and Stanovich conclude by suggesting that changes in beliefs as a result of successful experience of inclusion can lead to a benefit for all students.

Examinations of implementation of inclusive practice range from large-scale survey research to comparative case studies of individual teachers (e.g Freire & César, 2003) A common thread in all these studies is the importance of training and ongoing support. It is important to note that the movement towards inclusion is part of a wider international movement, exemplified in the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994). Clark et al (1999) looked at theories of educational change and micro-politics in examining four comprehensive schools in the process of implementing practice. In a survey of the literature, they refer to theories of school organisation practices that militate against change – quoting Skrtic (1995) and Ainscow (1997) in particular in discussing the effect of working in isolation as a barrier to developing more flexible problem-solving strategies for meeting diverse needs. This is likely to be particularly relevant to the private school sector, where there is relatively little cooperative teaching and performance evaluation is still viewed with suspicion.

Again, Clark et al (ibid) felt that to understand what was happening it was necessary to go beyond the stated policies and documentation and to look at

attitudes of teachers, through a bricolage approach of interviews, observation and documentary analysis, working over five terms and three school years. As with the other studies, there was evidence that inclusion was qualified – pupils with behavioural difficulties were likely to be excluded. They also noted 'the resilience of special education' in the use of ability grouping, effectively segregating students with additional needs, even in the most committed of schools. As Avramidis et al (2002) found in their study of an effective school, there was an acknowledgement that a schools' reputation for being '*good with students with special needs'* was seen as a '*double-edged sword,*' and at that time the successful school was thinking of ways to limit intake of such students. These findings were examined in relation to theories of change, organisational theories, conflict perspectives and a dilemmatic perspective. Although elements of all these appeared to apply, the one that Clark et al found most compelling was the dilemmatic perspective that sees education as characterised by a series of dilemmas over choices that are frequently mutually incompatible; the example they give is of *commonality* versus *difference (*1999:170). They argue that inclusion is one way of resolving the dilemma of providing a common education entitlement for learners who are different from each other. As schools seek to become more inclusive, they are still faced by the problem of dealing with differences and a demand for more differentiated provision. However, Clark et al also see the four possible theoretical explanations as complementary, providing multiple perspectives that help to explain the difference between principle and practice. They argue against a simplistic approach to evaluating inclusive practice and recommend going beyond the '*surface policy rhetoric'* to examine what is *actually going on in classrooms.* (1999:173). In their concluding comments they talk of the reduction of the debate to a spate of manuals about practice, divorced from any discussions of the problematisation of the issue.

The studies outlined so far have been broadly phenomenological, looking at institutions in relation to possible theories of change. Other studies have adopted a more critical approach, most notably Benjamin (2002) who conducted an insider

ethnographic study into practice in one secondary school through the perspectives of a group of less-able girls in a single-sex comprehensive school and is concerned with the positioning and marginalisation of less able students within a '*micropolitical and muliticultural context that positions them as intellectually subordinate'*. (2002: 135). She also recognises the dilemma of *'a prescriptive set of curricular demands on the one hand, and (its) commitment to equal opportunities on the other' (ibid: 139)* Benjamin argues for a feminist post-structural approach, because its emphasis on the complexities of the politics of difference enables the researcher to focus on 'layers of meaning' embedded in the social and political processes of intellectual subordination. As with the previous studies cited, she challenges the sometimes simplistic premises of the school improvement discourse and suggests a change to discussion of 'school effects', rather than 'school effectiveness'. She considers that the question that needs to be addressed in the inclusion debate is how schools produce insiders and outsiders.

Benjamin's work is particularly pertinent to the current study as she focuses on the experiences of girls – or 'young women' - in attempting to uncover what is 'going on' in a single establishment. Her chosen population were girls who might previously have been educated in a special school, and as such are possibly unlikely to be matched in private schools, but the questions raised are important in examining how comparatively less able students are positioned and gives emphasis to the pupils' voice.

The tendency to reification of 'school' as outlined by Clark et al (op cit) and by Stables (2003) was also emphasised in a comparative international study of inclusive education in practice, (Booth & Ainscow, 1998), starting from a similar dissatisfaction with over simplification of principles and practices and assumptions about *single national perspectives* (ibid: 1) that ignore conflicts and dilemmas. In talking of the heterogeneous population of private schools, there is potentially a similar tendency to over-generalise.

Having looked at the current position in relation to the wider national context, the next stage is to investigate the situation in relation to private schooling

Private education (girls)

There is a surprisingly small body of literature relating to the practices of independent schools; much of the literature that does exist is in the form of historical accounts of the development of individual establishments. This can partly be explained by the heterogeneous nature of such schools. Reynolds et al (1998), talking about international comparative studies of school effectiveness, suggest that:

> *'....understanding of the culture within which different systems are nested is essential if one is to understand issues of context specificity, of the cultural factors that potentiate schools, and of the interaction of children with their schools more generally'.*

Any discussion of independent schools tends to refer to the sector as an entity, disregarding the immense range represented within the sector. It is common to think in terms of the well-known major public schools within the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference groups, but these form a relatively small part of the sector. The majority of private schools, contrary to common perceptions, are day schools or those with a small proportion of boarders (Walford, 2003). There is a considerable difference between the entry policies, with some being highly selective academically and others needing to attract a wider intake in order to maintain viable numbers. It is schools in this latter category that have marketed themselves actively to overseas students. The range of abilities represented has often included those with special educational needs (albeit at the moderate end of the continuum) and some schools have recognised a need and actively marketed specialist provision.

The debate over the existence of private schools '*is often conducted more in terms of polemic than rational argument'* (Walford, 1993:1). Walford suggests that

this is because there is an assumption that private schooling is superior and the argument is over privilege, freedom of choice and access. Such assumptions are questionable, but the one feature that is less controversial is that the wishes of parents, as direct consumers, have considerable influence over decisions about curriculum and focus. In relation to the adoption of dyslexia friendly practices there is a conflict between the desirability of meeting the demands of parents of dyslexic pupils and avoiding being perceived as a specialist school that is no longer suitable for 'mainstream' pupils. To a certain extent, this problem has affected schools in the maintained sector with the conflicting demands of league tables and the General Statement on Inclusion (GSI), but the pressures are subtly different.

Whitty (2004) in a tribute to Caroline Benn, reproduces evidence that shows how small the difference in A-level results is between state and privately educated pupils. In a climate where the charitable status of private schools is being challenged, this puts further pressure on them to demonstrate how '*inclusive and innovative they are, how open their access is*' (Millar, 2004).

Despite this, selection, or more often pre-selection, is heavily dependent on performance at interview. Steven Schwarz, in a discussion with Woodward (2004) about university selection, challenges reliance on interview as being unreliable as a predictor of future performance. However, it is a means of excluding pupils that are seen as not fitting the school's profile, before any assessment has been made of academic potential.

A recent study (Dooley and Fuller, 2003) investigated a similarly market led development – the inclusion of girls in former all boys' schools - through an examination of the schools' prospectuses in 1997 and 2001. They found a greater use of inclusive language in the more recent versions, but otherwise concluded that claims to be inclusive in terms of gender were much exaggerated and

suggest that there has not been such a significant change in culture as would be suggested by marketing material aimed at filling vacant places.

Other studies have looked at parental choice of private education (West & Noden, 2003; Foskett & Helmsley-Brown, 2003) but special needs (including dyslexia) are not mentioned as a significant factor. However, in 1999, the British Dyslexia Association recorded that over one third of calls on their helpline came from parents complaining that state schools were not responding to needs of dyslexic pupils. In a Dyslexia Institute survey, 56% of parents surveyed (although the number questioned is not specified) considered that their children did not receive 'adequate support' at state schools, compared to only 28% dissatisfaction among private school parents. Parents with dyslexic pupils in private schools were also said to be more confident that their children's needs were understood by staff than those with children at state schools. (Dyslexia Institute, 1999). In view of the comparative reluctance of private schools to adopt the principles of the SEN Code of Practice and the ideology of inclusion, this seems surprising. However, a possible explanation can be found in Poole (2003) who, in proposing an ecological approach to dyslexia, recommends that this should include collecting '*all-inclusive information about aspects of a youngster's world*'. It is possible that the strong traditions of pastoral care in independent schools, together with closer contact with families, and raised expectations that the school will make a difference, contribute to the enhanced perception of pupils as individuals.

Dyslexia and Inclusion

As dyslexia (more properly 'specific developmental dyslexia') is the special educational need most likely to be encountered in private secondary schools, this will now be considered firstly in relation to current debates and research into the nature of dyslexia and potential barriers to learning and then in relation to different responses available and issues related to inclusion.

Historically research into dyslexia has focused on the search for the cause of unexpected and distressing difficulties with accessing the written word, affecting reading and especially spelling. Popularly the perception of dyslexia as a specific difficulty with literacy skills is still predominant, but there is a growing body of research into underlying difficulties with processing information that can prove as much a barrier to conventional learning as difficulties with print. Dyslexia has been described as a 'hidden disability'; the sympathetic recognition by some teachers of surface literacy difficulties can often be negated by lack of tolerance of the related processing difficulties. There remains still a division within research between those who are investigating the causes of reading problems, with dyslexia being seen as a reading disability, and those who are looking at dyslexia as a syndrome of difficulties. (Pumfrey, 2001). This is reflected in the number of different definitions of dyslexia that have been proposed over the years, some favouring a discrepancy definition that arbitrarily excludes certain individuals and others a definition that looks for positive indicators. The British Psychological Society Working Party (BPS, 1999) presented no fewer than ten theoretical accounts of dyslexia as alternative hypotheses to account for difficulties of a dyslexic nature. However, as Reason (2002) points out, *practitioners do not only look for single causative factors but also for multivariate explanations that take account of instructional, interpersonal and emotional factors in the individual case.'* (p193)

Some researchers focus on difficulties with phonological segmentation (Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Snowling, 1998; Stanovich, 1996; Tunmer and Chapman, 1996) but with differing emphasis on the discrepancy between performance and potential, as measured by conventional intelligence tests. Stanovich argues that intelligence is irrelevant if dyslexia is defined by poor word processing skills. Miles (1996) suggests that there is a pattern of comparative strengths and weaknesses in dyslexia and that global intelligence figures are anyway meaningless, whereas Nicholson (2001) considers a continued emphasis on IQ to be crucial in continuing research into causation until such time as early indicators can be

determined.

This confusion among professionals and other vested interest groups has hindered the acceptance of the existence of dyslexia, while definitions that use a distinction between intelligence and performance have led to accusations that it is a middle class construct. Nicholson (2001) as Chair of the 5th International British Association Conference called for more cooperation between researchers in the field, while the model developed by Frith (1999) begins to demonstrate how differing how areas of research at biological, cognitive and behavioural levels can be incorporated, along with environmental factors. At the biological level, research into deficits of the magnocellular pathway and the cerebellum begin to account for the differences at the cognitive level, including phonological processing and automatisation (Nicolson and Fawcett, 2000) as well as the 'double deficit' hypothesis of Wolf & Bowers (2000) that posits that dyslexic learners have both a processing speed and phonological processing deficit, resulting in a significantly longer time required to acquire a skill to mastery level. At the behavioural level are the observable differences in performance that allow for hypotheses to be made about the processes at the two deeper levels.

Reason (2002) suggests that the syndrome hypothesis, which sees dyslexia as a combination of difficulties affecting areas other than reading and spelling, and the phonological deficit/delay hypothesis, both of which concentrate on positive indicators rather than exclusion criteria, are more helpful inunderstanding the range of individual differences and demonstrating that problems of a dyslexic nature are unrelated to cognitive ability. It has to be noted, however, that education providers continue to favour definitions and assessments that rely on exclusionary criteria and can disadvantage pupils at both ends of the cognitive range, as well as pupils with English as a second or other language (Cline& Frederickson, 1999).

Another debate centres around the question of whether separate and discrete provision is needed for those identified as dyslexic. Until such time as positive indicators for pupils at risk can be deternmined, identification of dyslexia is frequently not made until the child has begun to fail. Traditionally, specific teaching programmes that feature small stepped multi-sensory learning, individually delivered, have been advocated. (Fawcett, 2002; Miles ,2004; Snowling,1998 inter alia). Dyson & Skidmore (2002) argue that much dyslexic provision goes against the inclusion paradigm because it is based on functional problems rather than conceptual, focusing on weaknesses in specific areas of functioning that threaten students' social and educational entitlements. In a comprehensive research review, Stanovich (1994) concluded that there was *'no support for the notion that a concept of dyslexia is needed which separates 'dyslexia' from more neutral terms such as 'poor reader'.* Young & Tyre (1983) equally challenged the need for separate labelling and provision, and this is echoed by Kerr (2001) who challenges the underlying concepts of much research into dyslexia, finding in adult education the application of a diagnosis of dyslexia could 'disempower' both student and teacher and result in a lowering of expectations.

There is a potential conflict between the environmental model inherent in the inclusion movement and recommendations for individual programmes for dyslexic pupils that cannot '*naturally and easily be accommodated within the school curriculum and the mainstream class*' (Reid, 1994, p91). Recently, Norwich (1996) has argued in favour of an ecological interpretation of dyslexia. This contrasts strongly with the nomothetic perspective that was held for some time by the organisations representing the interests of dyslexic learners, whose programmes were firmly based in the psychological model with specific cognitive functions

being seen as implicated in reading failure. Thomas (2001) challenges this position as association rather than causation; does the discovery of a lack of faculty for phonological awareness cause difficulty in reading or does difficulty in reading cause a lack of development in phonological awareness?

Current theories tend towards a balance theory of reading development, where there is considerable interaction between different faculties and individuals may differ in the route they take. There is:

> '*a shift of emphasis away from targeted intervention focusing only on the individual to approaches aimed at developing appropriate educational strategies for a wide range of learners with different aptitudes and achievements.*' (Reason, 2002, p194)

In addition, difficulties with learning to read may be affective rather than cognitive. As many authorities are now adopting a very wide definition of dyslexia: *'dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty' (BPS, 1999),* which encompasses a wide range or reading delay, there is a further blurring of the traditional thinking about separate provision

Dyson & Skidmore in a survey of studies investigating patterns of response to pupils with specific learning difficulties produced a model with three levels: '*conceptualisation* of specific learning difficulties which is somewhat different from that found in the literature' (this relates to findings about the importance of common terminology, referred to in the discussion on inclusion) 'This gives rise to a *rationale* for the school's response to specific learning difficulties, and it is around this that the detailed features of *provision* are organised'. (2002: 179). They suggest that although schools are continuing to base their provision on existing models of learning support, there are three areas that are distinctive in relation to SpLD: eclecticism, pragmatism and customisation. This survey was completed before the publication of the Dyslexia Friendly Schools advice, but suggests that the recommendations in the pack reflect current perceptions of good practice (the schools included in the survey were selected as exemplars)

rather than a change in ideology. Most significant is the issue of *pragmatism*, where learning support teachers select from an eclectic range of interventions to find the most useful for a particular pupil – this differs greatly from the very prescriptive programmes once advocated by dyslexia lobbies. Similarly, the conflict between withdrawal and inclusion was usually resolved by reference to the needs of an individual child, rather than any theoretical position. This is reflected in the third category of *customisation*, where a range of strategies 'tend much more to be assembled into customised packages for particular pupils' (ibid:183.) The wishes of the child are taken into account to a greater extent than previously. This is one legacy of the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) and the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and goes some way to addressing the affective consequences of dyslexia described by Edwards, (1994) and Riddick, (1996). However, there remains a conflict between the ideal of access to the curriculum and addressing the need for individualised teaching programmes. There is a dilemma in that the wishes of an individual pupil at a particular time may well be to have no provision which singles them out as different, but at a later stage they may feel that they were denied appropriate teaching – recent court cases testify to this, as well as illustrating the conflict between a focus on individually based provision versus whole class teaching. If it is suggested that intervention is only required where a pupil is not functioning effectively, who is responsible for this decision: the pupil, the parents or the school? In a situation where parents are direct purchasers of education, conflicts of interest are likely to occur.

Social and emotional factors

There has been anecdotal evidence of the affective consequences of dyslexia over a long period, and the initial impetus for the formation of organisations such as the Dyslexia Institute, British Dyslexia Association and Helen Arkell Centre, among others, was a concern of parents about a perceived lack of appreciation by the educational establishment of the frustration experienced by dyslexic pupils.

However, In 1991, Pumphrey & Reason commented that '*research into dyslexia is remarkably devoid of mention of social & emotional factors'* (p66) despite the fact that '*dyslexia can in some cases lead to significant emotional and behavioural difficulties and that those secondary symptoms can be more difficult to treat than the more obvious educational symptoms.*' (p72). Although these issues have been addressed more fully in the intervening years, (e.g. Edwards, 1994; Hughes & Dawson, 1995; McDougall, 2001; Riddick, 1996), research studies, along with popular anecdotal evidence, are more often based on evidence from 'casualties' rather than survivors. For instance, the focus of case study reports is predominantly on the negative experiences of school, without a direct comparison with the experiences of non-dyslexic students, who could have equally negative experiences. It could be argued that dyslexic pupils are a subset of students for whom schooling causes emotional distress, not a special case.

Edwards' intention was to study 'survivors', working with 16 -17 year old pupils in a special school for dyslexic pupils. Admittedly she was working with pupils who had presumably been placed in the special school after identification, rather than with those who might have developed coping strategies within the mainstream setting, but nevertheless her finding was that the scars of previous inappropriate responses were a significant feature in the profiles of all eight of her 'successful' subjects. She suggests that '*it could be strongly argued that it was the school system itself which was maladjusted to the urgent needs of the majority of its captive clientele*' (ibid: 122/3), basing this on the ability of her students to change under more favourable educational conditions, which she sees as evidence that '*failure and scarring is not an innate and integral feature of the dyslexic profile'*, but '*induced by adverse treatment conditions'*. It could be argued that this could be the same for some non-dyslexic pupils and her concept of a 'dyslexic personality' can be contested. She finds evidence of common personality traits among her eight subjects, but it is possible that this is a subset of personality variables that have led to them being in the situation, rather than being representative of the dyslexic population as a whole.

One of the traits Edwards identified was a '*strong tendency of vulnerability to criticism within the dyslexic personality*' (1994, p139) and she cites '*highly sensitive to criticism*' as a factor in the profiles of all eight of her subjects. Experience of working with adolescent girls has suggested that increased sensitivity to criticism, whether explicit or implied, can be a major barrier to progress in the classroom. Although the idea of a 'dyslexic personality' could be challenged, greater sensitivity does appear to be a significant factor in many cases. Riddick questions whether:

> '*at an objective level children with dyslexia do receive more criticism or whether they simply perceive themselves as receiving more criticism*.'
> (1998; p137)

and acknowledges that it is important not to assume that all children with dyslexia will automatically have social or emotional difficulties. Whatever the reasoning, these findings are fundamental to the development of dyslexia friendly practice, which aims to prevent situations of failure and criticism and promote understanding of the difficulties faced by dyslexic learners.

Edwards' work was exclusively with boys, while Riddick had only four girls in a sample of 22 students, reflecting the ratio attending Dyslexia Institute provision. Hales (1994) suggested that the dyslexia has different effects at different ages, especially in adolescence. He also suggests that the self-esteem of 'less intellectual' dyslexics may be more affected that those with more obvious strengths; this may be a significant factor in highly selective independent schools who may choose to admit only those dyslexic pupils perceived as having high academic potential – as measured on traditional measures of verbal/non-verbal reasoning, but in schools wishing to fill places with a niche market of catering for dyslexia, could be an argument *against* including those with dyslexia and low academic potential if there is not a substantial referent group.

Research into the biological basis of personality (Kagan,1999) suggests that a child who is introverted or hypersensitive is more likely to pick up on criticism and develop negative attitudes, which could possibly be further reinforced by the 'stigma' of extra help; there is also some concern that over-intervention can in itself reinforce 'learned helplessness' and external attribution. If so, the introduction of dyslexia-friendly classrooms rather than individual programmes would appear to address both problems. However, heightened sensitivity may lead to over-reaction to practices that are intended to be dyslexia-friendly but are not perceived as such by the pupil. If low self-esteem develops as a result of frustration in the literacy-based culture of the educational system, then nothing short of a change in culture may help.

A recent study by Humphrey and Mullins (2002) compared the self-concept of two groups of dyslexic children – one in mainstream schooling and one in a Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) unit – with a control group of non-dyslexic pupils. Their findings that the effects of dyslexia were more marked in participants attending mainstream schools reflect the findings of an earlier small-scale study by the researcher (Collins, 1993) into the effects of part–time attendance at a SpLD unit, which suggested that despite the move towards fuller integration, specialist provision was often perceived as a positive option by pupils. Humphrey & Mullins, along with Thomson (1990) and Crozier et al (1999) suggest that the differences between the groups can be explained because the environments found in SpLD units are more 'dyslexia-friendly'' and go on to recommend the incorporation of these features into mainstream schools. There is no evident causal link from the data, except perhaps for the need for increased understanding and liaison with specialist teachers, although the features listed are said to be associated with greater success in dyslexic pupils (Pollock & Waller, 1998). The suggestion is that dyslexia-friendly practices lead to greater academic success for dyslexic pupils and thence to raised self-esteem, but it could equally be argued that schools which actively adopt dyslexia friendly practices reflect the general ethos of the school, which may lead to more positive self-perceptions in

all pupils. One significant factor overlooked in this argument is the importance of the referent group within a specialist provision; this cannot be replicated within an integrated classroom, but could arguably exist within ability groupings of the type favoured by private schools.

Dyslexia friendly schools

The publication by the DfEE, in conjunction with the British Dyslexia Association, of the Dyslexia Friendly Schools Resource Pack ('*Achieving dyslexia friendly schools'*, DfEE 2001) was an attempt to address both affective aspects and to respond to the environmental model discussed earlier in this chapter. The phrase 'dyslexia friendly' was coined by Neil Mackay in a presentation to the British Dyslexia Association and his recommendations have been enthusiastically adopted by several LEAs – notably beginning in Wales with Swansea (1997), and followed by Durham and East Renfrew. (Crombie, 2002)

The concept of dyslexia-friendly schools suggests a holistic approach to differences in learning – Mackay (2004) suggests that 'specific learning difference' is a more helpful descriptor than 'specific learning difficulty' in that it allows for strengths as well as weaknesses. There are recommendations for good practice at LEA, school and class level, with an emphasis on the link between policy and practice – referred to by Mackay as 'walking the talk'. At classroom level there are a range of recommendations, ranging from;

- availability of pen portraits of all pupils with specific literacy difficulties being made available to all contact staff, including LSAs and supply teachers;
- regular review of targets and immediate action when targets are not made (cf Reason's 'noticing and adjusting' (2002);
- differentiated homework;
- work acceptable in a variety of forms including bullet points, mind maps flow charts etc

- currently weak basic skills not a barrier to ability-appropriate groups, sets and/or achievement
- 1:1/small group opportunities available out of classroonm as needs dictate.

In addition, there is emphasis on communication with parents and governor training. There is nothing within the guidelines that has not been proposed by advisers and practitioners over the last decade (Pollock & Waller, 1994; Thomson & Watkins, 1990; Reid, 1994, inter alia); what is different is the emphasis on a holistic approach.

It is interesting that just as the DARTS (Directed Activities Relating to Text) programme (Lunzer et al, 1984) was found to be beneficial to the development of good readers as well as those experiencing difficulties, the Dyslexia Friendly Pack markets itself as promoting practice which will be of benefit to all pupils: '*more children are successful when taught using dyslexia friendly teaching methods*' (Planning a dyslexia friendly school insert, p1), although no evidence for this assertion is produced. There is also a suggested equation between dyslexia friendly and effective schools.

The rationale appears to be that improving the environment for dyslexic pupils will focus attention on good classroom practice. The building of self-esteem and encouragement of learner autonomy is seen as fundamental, with the focus on appropriate delivery, developing coping strategies, circumventing potential problems and celebrating achievement. Skills development is integrated within the curriculum wherever possible. This is in sympathy with the ecological model of dyslexia where it is argued that the system, both within school and at national level, should be adapted to prevent failure wherever possible. As Peer & Reid assert: the '*dyslexic student is not responsible for the curriculum, nor the examination system which places him/her at a disadvantage*' (2002: 241) However, the dyslexia friendly model, despite some adoption at LEA level, is firmly based at school level, and until there is re-thinking of access to qualifications, there will continue to be a conflict between the ideology at school

and national assessment level.

Alternative perspectives

Burden (2002) looking at dyslexia from a cognitive perspective, considers that the experiences of the learner are less relevant than the sense s/he makes of them and the consequences in adjustments made to behaviour as a result of attributions made for success or failure, importance given to literacy by significant others and consequences of failure to make an effort. (p278) Whilst Edwards (1994) makes the assumption that that all aspects of a learner's self-esteem are affected by dyslexic difficulties, Burden suggests that this is too simplistic and that is important to distinguish between learning self-concept and global self-esteem.

The concept of self-esteem is complicated, not least by the terminology which has different connotations in common parlance from psychology and can be used very loosely to refer to self-concept, self-efficacy or self image. As has been seen in the preceding section, low self-esteem is frequently referred to in the dyslexia canon, with an assumption that low self-esteem is an inevitable consequence of dyslexia. The promotional materials for the Dyslexia Friendly Pack suggest that adoption of their practices could prevent the development of low self-esteem. In secondary schools, if we accept the conclusion of Hales (1994) that self-esteem issues are age or stage related, the situation is more complicated. In a major study of the self-image of adolescents, Rosenberg (1989) found that it was not performance per se that influenced self-image, but comparison with the peer group. His work with black pupils in segregated and integrated schools found that their self-image was higher in segregated schools; this is reflected in the work of Humphrey and Mullins with dyslexic pupils (2002). He also found that pupils in this age range were likely to develop ways of preserving self-esteem, by what he refers to as 'selectivity devices'. He cautions against assuming that the world as perceived by the observer is the same as that perceived by the 'involved actor' and considers that it is perceived and experienced reality that affects an individual's self-esteem. In order to understand people's reactions, we need to

understand the contexts in which they live. This has implications for the ideal of dyslexia friendly schools – however laudable the intentions, it is not easy to alter students' perceptions of comparative failure. Taken with the conclusions of Edwards (1994) and Riddick(1996) about the greater sensitivity of dyslexic pupils, it is difficult to see how the claims for dyslexia-friendly practice can be realised.

Despite the implication that there is a commonality of experience among dyslexic students, there are some who appear to have a greater resilience and it is important to consider other factors that could contribute to this, such as the role played by 'significant others' including family, peers and teachers. Bandura's self-efficacy theories suggest that a key factor in developing resilience is the presence of a 'caregiver' who can 'offer emotional support and guidance, promote meaningful values and standards, model constructive styles of coping and create numerous opportunities for mastery experiences'. (1977:172) It may be that the support of such a caregiver, or supportive peer group is more significant than any dyslexia friendly practices.

Becker (1966) suggested that teacher perceptions of students in terms of how they assess and evaluate them can have significant effects on interaction in the classroom and attainment levels in general. (see also Rosenthal & Jackson, 1964). Classifications of students' ability can be influenced by a range of non-academic factors, such as appearance, manner and demeanour, assessment of parents and reports on conduct and adjustment.

If a pupil's self-perceptions tend to be shaped by teachers' definitions, then pupil's attainment levels are to some degree a result of interaction between him/herself and the teacher. But this self-fulfilling prophecy is not inevitable. A study by Fuller (1982) of black girls showed how they resented the stereotyping of expectations and determined to prove them wrong. A recent television series – *Mind of a Millionaire* (BBC2, 2004) discovered that a high proportion of entrepreneurs had difficulties of a dyslexic nature and attributed their determination to succeed to a

desire to prove their school experiences wrong. In other words, labelling has an effect, but not necessarily negative or predictable. Riddick (2002) used evidence from interviews in her earlier study (1996) to suggest that the provision of a label of dyslexia could be of positive benefit to some pupils in countering suggestions that they were 'slow or 'stupid' and enable them to make re-attributions for earlier negative experiences. In contrast, Kerr (2001) concludes that the provision of a label can contribute to the development of learned helplessness, not only in the student but also, and perhaps more significantly, in the responses of teaching staff.

Peer & Reid (2002) see the adoption of dyslexia friendly practice as a responsibility of the whole school, rather than of individual specialist or subject teachers. However, if Edwards' (op cit) theory of the 'scars' is adopted, then it could only take one teacher who does not subscribe to the ideology of dyslexia friendly practice to cause damage to self-esteem. Jordan & Stanovich (2003) considered the key issues for success in responding to difference to be the teacher's beliefs about pathognomic versus interventionist attributions and the sense of their own efficacy as teachers, together with '*the prevailing beliefs about inclusion of the teaching community in which they work'* (p8).

Avramidis et al (2002) in their in-depth study of an effective inclusive secondary school found that there was a discrepancy between effectiveness in terms of academic achievement and inclusion and the social outcomes:

> '*Some parents perceived their children as socially isolated and some students reported they were experiencing, or had experienced, difficulties in establishing friendships in the school.' (p158)*

They suggest that one conclusion would be that the school '*adopted a discourse more focused on achievement and academic outcomes than one which was focused on social outcomes*'. With the greater emphasis on academic outcomes, the affective issues are deemed to be the responsibility of the pastoral system; historically an area well catered for by independent schools.

Wearmouth and Reid (2002) in a discussion of the impact of the learning environment on the dyslexic learner, look at different models for conceptualising the context for learning. In particular they cite the findings of Ysseldyke and Christenson (1987) who identified three aspects of the environment that could affect learning outcomes: school district conditions; within-school conditions; and general family characteristics. However, Wahlberg (1984) demonstrated that classroom environment was the single most significant factor in predicting outcomes.

Adoption of dyslexia friendly practice within a private school could be a feature at the microlevel of individual classrooms, or at the macrolevel of whole school policy. As has been shown, in the maintained sector it has frequently been adopted at LEA level. Any discussion of implementation at a whole school level and possible barriers needs to be considered in the context of the literature relating to the management of change in relation to inclusion referred to earlier in this chapter. Some of the suggested models will be covered in Chapter 4 in a discussion of the theoretical perspectives for the study.

In considering the relevance of school effectiveness in relation to the implementation of dyslexia friendly practice in independent schools, it is important to take into consideration the findings of research in the early 1990s which suggested that the factors involved in an effective school could be culture or geographical specific (Reynolds et al, 1998).

Implications

Although there is a substantial body of research into inclusive practice, there is a lack of evidence in how this is impacting on the private sector. The survey of the literature has identified a lack of published research into the way in which private schools address difference and has provided the context for the use of the

adoption of dyslexia friendly practice as a starting point in the proposed investigation.

Before considering ways of researching this wider area, however, questions relating to the views of pupils suggested a preliminary study comparing ways of accessing pupils' perspectives, which would also provide an opportunity to examine different epistemological assumptions underlying these approaches. This study was undertaken in fulfilment of the requirements of the Institution Focused Study.

Chapter 3   Institution Focused Study (IFS)

Examining pupils' perspectives

Introduction

Rationale

The unease expressed in Chapter 2 about the foundation and introduction of dyslexia friendly policy formed the basis for an investigation into different ways of accessing the dyslexic pupil's perspective on helpful and unhelpful practice. As has been noted, studies of self-esteem and dyslexia, (Edwards,1994; Riddick, 1996; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002) have mainly concentrated on interviews or questionnaires with pupils attending some form of specialist provision, talking about their past experiences. Although Riddick does address the question of greater sensitivity in dyslexic pupils, there is little evidence in the literature of any comparison of the experiences of dyslexic pupils with those of non-dyslexics, with the exception of a study by McDougall (2001) comparing the recollected experiences of dyslexic and non-dyslexic students in further education. As dyslexia is the special educational need most likely to be encountered in a private school, on the basis that other needs may have been filtered out at the admissions stage, the intention of this study was to compare the perceptions and reflections of a variety of informants, both dyslexic and non-dyslexic, in three contrasting private school settings, using a mix of participant observation, email journals, questionnaire and interviews, in order to evaluate the usefulness of this concept as a means of beginning to investigate whether private schools could cope with difference. In particular, there was an interest in exploring whether the accounts and concerns of dyslexic students differed in substance or degree from those of non-dyslexic pupils.

As the objective was to base the wider study on a case study, for reasons that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, the second purpose of this

comparative, reflexive study was a concern to grapple with the criticisms of the different epistemologies underlying the mixed methods or 'bricolage' approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) often advocated in case study research. Proponents of triangulation in case study research suggest that multiple data collection methods lead to 'stronger substantiation of constructs and hypotheses'. (Eisenhardt, 2002:14). Evaluation of the possibilities of different methods of accessing the experiences of the students would not only allow for critical examination of the rationale behind the new ideology of dyslexia friendliness, but also inform the choice of data collection methods to be used in the wider study. Robson (1993) suggests that in carrying out an exploratory study the nature of the data is dependent on the kind of study being undertaken, and can include a portfolio of methods including observation, interviews and use of documents and records. However, there are criticisms of the theoretical assumptions behind the use of an eclectic mix of methods. In particular, Silverman (2000) and Hammersley (2002) have challenged such approaches, on the grounds that there are conflicting epistemologies and assumptions underlying the different methods. Given that the original title for the research proposal had been *'Dyslexia-friendly private schools: myth or reality?'* it became evident that there was a need to examine whether the intention was to compare the student's perceptions with the 'reality' as perceived by the observer, to discover 'what's really going on here?' (Strauss & Corbin 1998:45) or to investigate the relative perspectives and constructions of different participants in the same setting.

The need for this reflection was further strengthened by a response from the University Ethics Committee to a proposal to use participant observation as a means of gaining an insight into the factors affecting the classroom experiences of a cohort of Y9 pupils as part of a research training exercise. This cohort included a high proportion of dyslexic pupils and the intention was to use unstructured observation to attempt to capture the meaning and interpretation of these experiences for the participants. The Committee questioned the need for participant observation and suggested that the information could be just as easily

acquired from interviews. This led to the decision to use the scope of the Institution Focused Study to examine the justification that there was a reason for comparing the perceptions and reactions of the pupils with observations of what appeared to be happening in classes. The aim was to consider how narratives about the content of lessons related to the perceptions of the observer, as well as piloting different modes of data collection in evaluating the experiences of pupils and comparing and contrasting both the methods and the data obtained, before deciding on methods to be used within the wider study.

Yin considers 'pilot tests' as a 'laboratory for the investigators, allowing them to observe different phenomena from many different angles or to try different approaches on a trial basis' (1989:74). Robson (1993) prefers to regard them as case studies in their own right with an essentially exploratory function, rather than a 'dress rehearsal'.

The intention was to attempt to look at the experiences of pupils in general, and then to compare them with the perceptions of dyslexic and non-dyslexic pupils and also to confirm or refute descriptions of the classroom experiences of dyslexic pupils described in earlier studies that have contributed to the current ideology of 'dyslexia-friendly' classrooms. The main purpose of this study therefore is to reflect on the processes rather than to report the data directly.

The study cases - overview

The schools selected for this comparative study - all names are pseudonyms - are all single sex (girls), selective and their Heads are members of the Girls Schools Association (GSA). Coincidentally, they are all former convent schools with a tradition of a Christian ethos of caring for individuals. However, there were significant differences in intake: School A (St Martha's), was predominantly boarding with a relatively broad range of ability; School B was day only and academically highly selective; School C (St Michael's) was also day only, and the intake was somewhere between the other two. In a recent league table of the top

performing 500 independent schools, (Financial Times, 4/9/2000), School A was ranked 218, School B 37 and School C 248. It is important to stress also that all schools were secondary – the situation in private preparatory schools in relation to SEN is markedly different from that in the secondary schools.

Within this category it was necessary to decide whether to choose a sample of pupils across the secondary age range or to limit the sample to a cross section of one year group. As Hales' (1994) findings suggest that the emotional effects of dyslexia vary according to age and sex and that girls are particularly prone to low self-esteem around puberty, it seemed more relevant to concentrate on a single year group. Although levels of maturity vary between individuals, Year 9 is typically seen by schools as a 'disaffected' year for girls in particular, combined with puberty, lack of focus and a desire to push boundaries. For pragmatic reasons it is also a good year to choose as students are still studying the full range of subjects, so it would be possible to investigate whether certain subjects cause more problems and also to monitor the group through the process of selecting GCSE options. This is an important stage in determining whether pupils will continue into non-compulsory education.

During the academic year 2002-3, participant observations were carried out in School A ('St Martha's'), the author's own establishment. Field notes were analysed for emerging themes, which were then presented to the participants, both as individuals and as groups, to see if they were considered a fair representation of the issues observed. Within the same period, an email journal was kept by an individual Y9 correspondent in School B for comparison. This phase was reported as part of a research training module comparing and contrasting different methods of data collection and analysis.

Participant observation within the author's own establishment posed some problems of access and insider/outsider perspective, so in the academic year 2003–4 a school with a comparative intake (School C – 'St Michael's') was

selected as a key case study for the wider investigation into independent schools' response to difference. Within that case study, participant observation was again utilised, also focusing on Year 9, followed by interviews with students.

During conversations with staff in this school, the name of one sixth former kept coming up as an example of a 'successful' dyslexic student and an interview was arranged to discuss the history of her experience in the school. She was asked by her tutor whether she would be prepared to take part in an interview and agreed readily. Once the purpose of the research had been explained, she was asked for the history of her experiences in the school, looking particularly what had been helpful or unhelpful, and how far she would describe the school as dyslexia friendly.

Throughout these studies a reflexive research journal was maintained, along with the field notes and transcripts of interviews and itself formed part of the data.

Within case study methodology, there is no one set of analysis methods prescribed, although both case study and ethnographical studies lend themselves to iterative or cyclical analysis, with informal analysis taking place within the study and more formal analysis at the conclusion. This allows for a process of interim analysis of emerging issues and explanation building, which can form the basis for further data collection and analysis. Yin (1994) suggests that this form of analysis is best suited to studies that are not initially related to a particular theory; this was the basis for deciding on this method.

As the intention in the following account and discussion of the 'natural history' of the research is to reflect on the process, it seems more appropriate to write in the first person for this section.

Participant observation (1) 2002-3 – St Martha's.

The first part of this preliminary study involved participant observation with year 9 girls in the school in which I had previously worked. As discussed earlier, the proposal had been cleared with the Ethics Committee and agreed with the school. The purpose of the research was presented to all staff concerned, as well as to the girls, as an interest in the experiences of Y9 generally. At this point I made no mention of a specific interest in dyslexic pupils. This raises an ethical issue about how honest I was being in my presentation of the study. Subsequently it became clear that there were misunderstandings about my role in the classroom that hampered the ability to collect data. There seemed to be a perception by some members of staff that it involved role-play, probably because I had stressed that I would not be functioning in a teaching role. Interestingly, the girls, with whom I had a longer session to explain my interest and ask their permission to observe them, seemed to have less difficulty in accepting what I was doing.

At an initial meeting with Y9, there was a generally positive response, including some constructive feedback about their main concerns as year group. The most common reaction, repeated often by individuals throughout the term, was surprise that anyone should find their views interesting. The other issue was that of anonymity, which prompted a great deal of discussion, especially on the choice of pseudonyms – some pupils were disappointed that they would not be identifiable. I made it clear that any notes I took in lessons would be available to them – this became an issue in one case, discussed later.

Following the discussion, I commenced observations in October 2002. Unfortunately, a problem arose when, because of the abrupt departure of a Maths teacher, I was asked to help by taking some of his lessons until a replacement could be found. As one of the year groups involved was Y9, I considered that there would be a conflict between roles so soon after having explained that I would *not* be working in a teaching role, so put the data collection on hold until the

Spring Term. The response from the maths set (a lower achieving set) was interesting:

'Now you know what we're like'
'Perhaps you'll change your mind about being with us now.'

It appeared that they thought I would have a different perception of them from the perspective of the teacher than from 'hanging out' (their terminology) with them. Although frustrating to have the data collection interrupted, it was illuminating to have the contrasting experience of working with this group from the delivery side as well as being on the receiving end.

Context of the observation

Access to classes was necessarily on an 'opportunity' basis because of the timetable, but I was also conscious that I tended to avoid certain subject areas where I was uncertain of the welcome I would receive from the subject teacher. This was a disadvantage of being an insider – in an unfamiliar school, I would not have been subject to these preconceptions. It is also possible that these members of staff were likely to be the least receptive to the concept of 'dyslexia friendly' practices, so I had to overcome my reluctance. A similar situation arose when I realised that I was avoiding taking up the opportunity of joining Y9 at lunch – making excuses to myself for not wanting to intrude on their space, but in fact being slightly intimidated by *'the difficulties of gaining some sort of purchase on the privatised, fairly excluding spheres inhabited by adolescent girls'* (Hey, 1997:46). Once I had made the initial move, it became easier subsequently and informal conversations over lunch revealed some interesting information. This does, though, raise questions about the subjective nature of selection of opportunities in this form of research.

Throughout the period of data collection I kept a research journal in which I recorded not only observations taken at the time, but also reflections on my

responses and those of others within the school. Within lessons, the amount of detail I was able to record differed according to the format of the lesson; wherever possible I tried to immerse myself in any task set rather than act as a dispassionate observer, although there were times when these roles overlapped. Inevitably, at times I was perceived by the students as a source of information or help – I tried only to act as a competent other rather than a teacher, but it would have been churlish not to respond to requests where appropriate. Epstein (1998) reports the editorial response of Geoffrey Walford to a similar dilemma in her work with primary schoolchildren, in which he commented:

> *'helping children when asked is what any adult would do and, more importantly, it is what friends would do. It seems to me that if you know that someone can help and refuse to do so, doesn't exactly help that relationship!' (p31)*

However, there were signs that I was accepted as a non-teacher: in a music lesson where we were sent off in groups to practise a composition, I was included in the ritual distribution of sweets and exchange of gossip.

Seating and positioning rapidly became an important part of the lesson. Wherever possible I took a place in the back row – these were small classes – to the right or left – so that I had as wide a view of what was happening as possible. In practical subjects such as music I needed to join a group; as with the lunch groups I was conscious of not wanting to intrude, but generally I was tolerated without obvious signs of resentment.

Nine lessons were observed at this pilot stage; two in Maths – middle and bottom sets, one in ICT, two each in Music and English, one in History and one in Chemistry. I was increasingly aware of ever changing dynamics, depending on such variables as the gatekeeper teacher, the presence of a welcoming student and the availability of a key informant to interpret situations. Arriving for one English lesson, I was greeted by *'Are you teaching us for this lesson?'* The response of the teacher: *'Mrs Collins is here to watch and take notes, and*

perhaps help you' was an example of the way my role was constructed by the teacher.

The issue of how to record observations was not easy to resolve. As mentioned, I tried to involve myself in any tasks but this made recording difficult and confined mainly to brief notes that could be expanded later. Generally I was able to write these notes relatively unobtrusively as I used the same book for carrying out any written tasks as for recording observations. What was interesting was to note those who were observing me writing. As mentioned in the account of the original presentation to the Y9 pupils, one agreement was that any notes taken could be reviewed by those present, and I would often pass across my book if anyone was showing an interest. In these notes I used either initials or abbreviated forms of names so that pupils could identify themselves. In one entry, I wrote *'Flick doing other work – check why'* to which the girl in question wrote *'Behind'*. On only one occasion was there a problem with this recording, but it was an unfortunate one, which merits discussion here.

During a group activity, ironically a 'Brain Gym' activity designed to promote dyslexia friendly thinking skills, I noted that two girls within the group I was working with had '*difficulty in cooperating'*. Both girls were ones I had taken an especial interest in, mainly because of the intensity of their reactions in certain circumstances. When one of them asked to see what I had been writing she was very concerned, firstly that I had identified her, and secondly because she did not agree with my interpretation of the incident – *'we were only joking'*. Despite reassurances that pseudonyms would be used in writing up, she responded *'but if you put 'Lucy and Sarah'* (her choice of names) *'I'll still know it's me.'* At this point she went into a decline and I was unable to discuss it further. I recorded in my notes that she was not to be identified in any further note-taking. I met her later that day in the corridor and apologised for causing distress and showed her my notes. She seemed reassured at this point, but the incident was doubly unfortunate as she was one of the pupils who was emerging as a possible

individual case study. However, she subsequently agreed to be interviewed individually.

This incident raised serious concerns about the ethical issues. In principle the access had been discussed and negotiated, with an agreement that anyone could opt out at any time, but in practice the implications had not fully been appreciated. Without the agreement of one pupil, how much could I record, and how ethical would it be to write up situations after the event? Issues of informed consent are not as straightforward as they might at first appear. In the event, I decided to suspend the observations at this point in order to evaluate their usefulness as a data collection tool and to consider additional or alternative methods to investigate the phenomenon. This was acceptable in a pilot study but would have posed problems in a full-scale research project where 'saturation' had not been reached.

Walford (1991) writing about issues of confidentiality in relation to work with children, makes the point that children '*have less reason than adults for believing that an interviewer is going to be honest with them, and they are often correct in being cautious about claims from adults about confidentiality* '(p97). In my original presentation I had made the obligatory proviso about not being able to guarantee confidentiality about information relating to situations where there was a risk to a student; in the event, no such an issue arose, but it would have presented a dilemma if it had.

As well as *how* to record, there are issues about *what* to record in participant observation. Despite careful consideration of placement it was obvious that I could not be aware of everything that was going on around me, especially as I was taking an active part in the lessons, so without using a structured observation inventory, the choice of what I recorded was subjective and to a certain extent dictated by what I was interested in – mostly reactions and incidents that were out of the ordinary. As I was attempting to discover what the key issues and concerns

were for this group, I felt that this was appropriate. Additionally, the accounts could be validated by presenting them to the participants. However, an alternative approach would have been to use either a timed observation schedule to record teacher input and pupil response or a check list such as that proposed for the BDA dyslexia-friendly kitemark (Mackay 2004) Within the wider study there could be scope for both approaches, but they fulfil very different purposes.

Data was collected from participant observation in nine lessons, ranging in length from 35 minutes to 75 minutes, in the form of field-notes. Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest three stages in analysis: data reduction; data display; conclusion drawing. However, Wellington suggests that this over-simplifies the 'messiness' of real research and suggests an extension of the process to include: immersion; reflecting; taking apart/analysing; synthesising/recombining. (2000: 134-37) Immersion involves 'listening' to the data, while reflecting requires standing back from data, particularly important in the case of participant observation where the researcher is involved in the events being recorded. In this case, immersion took the form of re-reading all the field notes, which included commentaries on the lessons observed as well as incidents which took place outside the classroom: at meals or in the staff room, for instance. Reading the narrative again gave an overview, which had become lost in the detail of individual accounts, and also revealed a refinement in the focus of recording, which had not been entirely conscious, but a product of the ongoing process of interaction with the data. A second read through was accompanied by the writing of memos on the blank facing pages of the journal – these memos were sometimes key words or phrases and occasionally fuller commentaries. This led to a reflection on the general usefulness and direction of the data collected in the light of the overall research question and a feel for emerging concepts.

The next stage was to begin the analysis proper. Using the process of memoing and coding described by Glaser & Strauss (1967), the memos written at the data immersion stage as well as those included earlier were collected and typed up for

sorting and categorising. Categories that recurred were grouped together but this still yielded over 50 separate categories. However, the process of collating these memos was in itself a stage in the analysis as it encouraged further reflection at a level removed from the data itself. This process of categorisation inevitably depends on the researcher's judgement, which is itself open to interpretation, and requires reflection and revisiting after an interval to see if alternative categories would be more appropriate.

If the initial process of categorisation is subjective, then the next stage is even more so. The units of meaning or categories collected need to be further categorised into concepts. There are various methods of doing this, but the use of concept mapping seemed a useful tool in this case, in line with Miles & Huberman's (1994) 'data display' stage, where they recommend that data be displayed in pictorial, diagrammatic or visual form to allow the researcher to conceptualise the information. There are a number of instruments available for this stage, but for a small-scale project such as this with a relatively small data set, the programme 'MindGenius' (Gael Ltd, 200-2003) was adequate. This allows for a brainstorming exercise, where all the codes are entered and sorted into sets and subsets. A preliminary sorting is achieved through the use of labelled 'branches' or concepts, to which subsequent categories are attached. Although apparently arbitrary, the choice of labels and categories is likely to be influenced by prior reading and grounding in the literature.

This first sorting produced 5 main headings:

- General explicit concerns of the year group;
- Logistics/practical issues;
- Teaching Strategies;
- Pupil reactions;
- Perceptions about the year group.

Space does not allow for the full map to be shown here, so the subcategories are subsumed into the higher level, but a full version is shown at Appendix A.
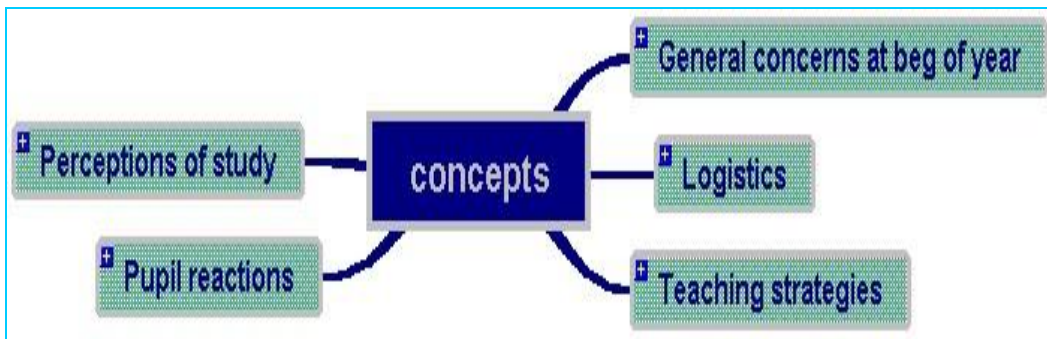
Fig 1

Not surprisingly in view of the research interest, 'Pupil reactions' covered the greatest area, with 14 separate sub-categories. The next stage was to examine these for further categorisation; this reduced the categories to four:

- Group dynamics
- Strategies
- Presentation of self
- Sensitivity

On further reflection, these were reduced two overarching categories:

- Reactions common across the group
- Reactions specific to individuals

This redefining of categories has been referred to as 'continuous refinement'. (Wellington, 2000:136) and forms part of the 'constant comparative method' proposed by Glaser & Strauss (1967).

Having divorced the data from its context and manipulated it, it is then necessary to relocate it.

> '*Coding is much more than simply giving categories to data; it is also about conceptualising the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data and discovering the data*'. (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 30)

One of the disadvantages of coding schemes is that the sets of categories produce 'a powerful conceptual grid' from which it is difficult to escape (Silverman, 2000) They can also deflect attention away from uncategorized activities. One suggestion for checking on reliability is to look for inter-coder agreement, where others independently code the data and the resulting codes are compared – not generally an option in a small-scale project. Another is to give access to original data to allow for cross checking of coding and to give evidence from the data for choice of codes. In order to avoid the temptation to simply list categories, it is important to delineate how particular descriptions inform the categories. This has the disadvantage of producing lengthier reports, which can become unwieldy, although in the case of a small-scale study it may be feasible.

A common concern in participant observation is how to resolve differences between the *inside* perspectives of group and the *outside* perspectives of researchers, who belong to other communities and bring multiple identities to the research context. Perhaps the most useful check is to return to the participants and compare the findings with their interpretation. The first occasion when this was tried was almost accidental – while demonstrating the Mind Genius programme (Gael, 2001) to a Y9 pupil as a revision aid I suggested we use my draft research model as an example of possibilities. This generated some very useful comments about the findings, which suggested that my interpretation was acceptable to the participant. It also proved very useful in forcing me to justify why I had grouped certain things under certain headings.

The next stage was to present the interim findings to the wider group. As there were forty girls involved, this was divided into two sessions. At the first I presented my findings in the MindGenius format and noted reactions and additions. The response of the girls was salutary. Whereas my observations had focused mainly on practical, instrumental barriers to learning and on 'teacherly' perceptions of good practice in differentiation and awareness of learning styles, the reaction to these in the presentation was little more than a polite agreement. However, there was a marked reaction to mention of interpersonal concepts, particularly in relation to teachers who responded to requests for help by suggesting that pupils had not been listening properly and to help that was perceived as patronising. This latter point was particularly raised by pupils who were currently receiving learning support, or had done so in the past. This then led to a change in the way the second presentation was organised, with a quick overview of the main categories and an emphasis on the group findings. The Mind Genius concept maps were translated into overhead slides using Microsoft PowerPoint. A simple questionnaire was produced using the categories and asking for an agree/disagree' response. The full questionnaire can be seen at Appendix B.

The session was tape-recorded, with the permission of all present, to allow for further analysis. As a result, certain of the concepts were discarded as being of little significance, whereas others elicited a much stronger response than I had anticipated. This also provided an opportunity to see whether there was any difference in response between the dyslexic and non-dyslexic pupils. In the event the only factor that distinguished the dyslexic and non-dyslexic group related to perception of help as patronising and raised important issues about sensitivity.

Although it would have been useful to have another follow-up session to discuss the new issues that arose, there was no further time available. However, there should be opportunities to investigate these further within the larger study.

School B - Computer mediated communication (CMC).

Participant observation served a useful purpose in providing an alternative interpretation of interactions within lessons, but of necessity opportunities for access to lessons were limited by divisions into sets, by timetabling constraints and by other commitments. One method of cross-checking of information that had been considered was the use of diaries or journals to record the pupils' own perceptions of their classroom experiences. This was rejected at the time as the very pupils whose views I was interested in were those least likely to respond because of their difficulties with written language as a medium. However, another possibility became apparent as I observed their use of internet communications such as MSN messenger. The school has a wireless intranet and all pupils are encouraged to have their own laptop computers, which are widely used in lessons and prep sessions. Email communication and mobile phones have replaced letter writing as the main means of communication with family and friends. Normal conventions of spelling and punctuation, which cause problems for pupils with dyslexic profiles, are seen as less important in this medium and this in turn removes some of the inhibitions. Additionally, email connections within schools are free of charge – or at least of any extra cost – so this would not be an issue. Discussion with some of the Y9 cohort indicated that they might be prepared to communicate with me in this way.

Before embarking on this course, I needed to set up a pilot study to see if it would be likely to yield useful data, and also to check for any potential problems, both methodological and pragmatic. I was fortunate in having access to a Y9 pupil, also with a dyslexic pattern of difficulties, who attended another school but was the daughter of a member of staff in the department and spent some time with us - usually working on the computer - after school. At some previous time it had been suggested that I might be interested in interviewing her because of former unfortunate experiences. When approached, 'KT' appeared happy to become involved. We negotiated a time-limited period of two weeks, during which she

would email me each school evening with an account of her experiences. I told her that I was especially interested in anything that went well or badly, but otherwise kept the guidance to a minimum, wishing to see what would emerge. Riessman (2002) recommends open-ended questions as more likely to encourage the production of narrative. We also agreed that communications would be private between us and that I would discuss my findings with her for confirmation once the analysis was carried out.

KT was assiduous in keeping her side of the bargain. She emailed regularly at least once a day, and responded to any queries I posed. The first entries were rather prosaic – 'we had maths, then...' I began to think that very little of interest was likely to emerge, but was reluctant to direct the communication. Mann & Stewart (2000) suggest that the temptation to reply – even if only to acknowledge receipt – distorts the diary methodology. However, I felt that the emails should be acknowledged and gradually as certain themes began to emerge, I asked for a little more detail or clarification. At this point there was beginning to be an overlap between diary/journal methods and an asynchronous unstructured interview. On reflection, I would argue that the medium demands a response and that the methodology is a hybrid, involving a greater degree of co-constructionism during rather than after the diary keeping. Nevertheless, it was important to reflect on the effect of the responses.

At the end of the two week period, this communication was beginning to develop, and we agreed to continue for a further week, bringing us to the end of the Spring Term, and that we would then have a gap while I reviewed the data and prepared further questions, for either an email or face to face interview. We also agreed to keep the lines of communication open, so that KT could email if there was anything she felt worth mentioning, or if I had any further questions. In this respect, she became a 'key informant'.

Narrative analysis

The original intention to include journals in the research proposal was to use them as an alternative means of examining the responses of the respondents to an external reality – the situation in classrooms – to compare their constructions of events to those of the researcher. However, an alternative approach was to treat the journal entries as narratives. In contrast to the more realist epistemology of the grounded theory approach, narrative analysis is concerned with an interpretivist approach to discovering how events have been constructed by active subjects:

> *"Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask,' Why was the story told that way?' "*(Riessman, 2002:218)

Narratives are themselves interpretive and, in turn, require further interpretation. Narrative analysis aims to make visible or explicit the meanings of an event for particular individuals and then across individuals, and then examine these meanings for what they say of experience in general or some particular aspect of experience.

> *'When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was" aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences…..neither open to proof nor self-evident.'* (Personal Narratives Group 1989:261) cited in Riessman (ibid).

Cortazzi (2001) emphasises the need to reflect on the function of the story before coming to narrative conclusions:

> *'A narrative told in a research interview may not be the same at all as a narrative told by the same person, and reporting roughly the same events, told in a conversation among peers.' (p388)*

This point was exemplified in an ambiguous relationship – pupil, almost teacher, friend, and researcher, in the context of the emails as shown in the question of modes of address. Although happy for the informant (the daughter of a colleague)

to use my Christian name, as in my email address, this was rejected: '*my mum says it's disrespectful*', yet 'Mrs Collins' seemed too formal. In the event the problem never arose – she never addressed me directly, whilst I used her email label 'KT' if sending a reply and signed off with my initials, while she chose to sign off as 'Pilot', which we had originally chosen as the subject line. It is possible that her story would have been more formally presented had she not been aware of me in a context other than teaching, but would have again been different if I did not have some connotations as 'teacher'.

Within narrative analysis, methods vary from the very structured sociolinguistic and conversational analysis models (Labov, 1972) to the examination of the role of power relationships in the production of personal narratives in the work of the Personal Narratives Group (1989). There is also a fundamental difference between those who believe that narratives represent reality and those, including phenomenologists, who consider that the narrative is the reality.

Riessman (2002) suggests that the stages of narrative analysis include:

- 'taking for granted – not analysing'
- 'attending'
- 'telling'
- 'talking &listening' – produce a narrative together. Story constructed in certain way according to audience. +creating a self-narrative as self-representation.
- analysing experience
- reading experience (possibly through presenting it to original informants)

Fig 2   (adapted from p221)

As with the grounded theory analysis, the initial stage of narrative analysis involves immersion; in this case a rereading of all the diary entries as a whole, rather than as separate entries.

> '*Traditional approaches to qualitative analysis often fracture these texts in the service of interpretation and generalization by taking bits and pieces, snippets of response edited out of context.*' (Riessman, 2002:219)

Despite an awareness of this tendency, it was difficult not to revert to thinking in terms of themes and concepts. In order to avoid this, it was necessary to consider analysis on the basis of content and context, using categories such as:

- Experiences
- Narrative
- Teller
- Audience
- Relationships

Two possible pitfalls suggested are reading narrative simply for content and reading it as evidence for a prior theory. One way of avoiding this is by starting with the structure of the narrative – how is it organised? Why does KT develop her story 'in *this* way with *me?*' (Riessman, 2002:254).

One suggestion is to create a synopsis - itself a narrative, either short or longer, depending on audience – to be used for clarifying the interpretation with the informant. At one level this can be used to confirm the 'what' of the story, but also to discuss the 'why'. To a certain extent this process had begun in the clarification questions asked during the data collection stage. One example of a possible misconstruction was when I noted that there were a high number of references to teacher absences and queried this, only to be told that there was a 'flu bug affecting staff and that at the same time several were out of school with a field trip. My interpretation that this was a commentary/complaint about a regular situation would therefore have been a misconstruction.

The process of producing a synopsis in itself demands selection and construction on the part of the researcher. Rereading the journals had given an overall impression, but the next stage was to take each entry and interrogate it to answer the question 'what is KT telling me here?' For each entry I wrote out a number of statements, such as '*I prefer subjects with a practical element*'. Once all the entries were annotated in this way, the statements were written out and numbered

and cross-referenced to the entries; in this way it was clear to see which statements were appearing most frequently. The first sort was by frequency, but then it became apparent that there were four main themes that were emerging:

- Subject related
- Personal preferences & learning style
- Role of teachers
- Peers

At no time had these headings been suggested to KT, but it appeared that these were either mental headings that she had compiled for her own use or genuinely reflected her main concerns. In order to examine this further, the list of statements under those headings was presented to KT for her observations as an email attachment, accompanied by the message:

> *'This is what I think is the story you have been telling me in your diaries. Have a read and see if you agree. We can discuss it when we meet tomorrow, or you might prefer to reply in an email.'*

When the statements were typed out, they resembled the 'like me, not like me' or 'true/false' statements in personality measures and one possibility was to present them in that format, but I decided instead to see in what way KT would respond – or again what story she would choose to tell me.

I am aware of the false dichotomy between collection and analysis – as with grounded theory, there was a continuous overlap between the two, and the final session with KT in which we discussed the findings from my first analysis I consider equally to be part of data collection. Having carried out the narrative analysis, I e-mailed her my summary for consideration and then arranged a face-to-face interview to discuss the findings. In the interim, she responded by e-mail, simply by highlighting the two statements she wished to qualify. In terms of validation, this could have been considered adequate, and it would also have been possible to respond with further questions, thus extending the computer mediated communication, but the face-to-face interview, which we recorded, allowed for a more immediate clarification and extension of issues. The

opportunity to use both methods seemed to combine the advantages of instant feedback offered by face to face interviewing versus the more considered responses of the computer mediated communication.

Some valuable insights emerged into helpful and unhelpful teaching practices, which could be compared with the recommendations for 'dyslexia friendly' practice. An example was the complaint about teachers who were not prepared to go over work again if it had not been understood the first time:

> *'refusing to explain things if they've "gone over it a hundred times before" or saying "you should have listened the first time"; people don't know why things immediately – things do need to be worked into the brain.'*

Significantly, this was also the issue that had concerned the year 9 group; this opportunity to crosscheck information between the two sets of data exemplified the principles of the constant comparative method.

Following the discussion on the findings from KT's own journal, I was then able to share with her the presentation I had used with the Y9 group in the pilot school. This was revealing in forming the basis for discussion about whether certain issues were common to both settings or could be specific to the boarding environment. As with the group feedback, it was apparent that while some issues had a certain resonance, others were not perceived as significant concern.

KT's initial reaction when I interviewed her was *'there's only two things I don't agree with – it's scary really, how well you know me'*. I then showed her by referring back to the emails, that she had given me this information cumulatively over the two weeks and it had not come from some sixth sense. We discussed the headings and she expanded on some issues that had emerged. One point that I had noted was that there was little reference to her peer group; she explained this by remarking *'I didn't think you wanted to hear about them – I thought you were interested in teachers and lessons'*. This reinforces the point that she was structuring her narrative for my benefit and that all narratives are

likely to be influenced by the questions posed; a different question might lead to a quite different narrative. It also shows the danger of interpreting without cross-referencing – I had tentatively considered that she might have had difficulties with her peer group, as the only comments were negative. This perception was not entirely dispelled by the conversation that followed, but it was modified.

An interesting aside came in a conversation with KT's mother when I was arranging the follow-up meeting. It was evident that she was expecting that KT would have been telling me about 'difficult' experiences at school and lack of support, whereas the message emerging from data was very different. This could be a result of KT's expectations of what I wanted to hear, although she was aware of my interest in the experiences of dyslexic pupils. This was an issue to be pursued in the follow-up

Following the discussion on the findings from KT's own journal, I was then able to share with her the presentation I had used with the Y9 group in the pilot school. This was revealing in forming the basis for discussion about whether certain issues were common to both settings or could be specific to the boarding environment.

Comments

As with the concerns over the subjective nature of the information gathering in participation observation, there are questions to be asked about the implications of the use of e-mail communications for authenticity and authority. Hine asks *'how are identities performed and experienced, and how is authenticity judged?'* (2000, p118). However, the same could also be asked of manuscript journals – the information presented is that the subject chooses to select and present. The significant factor with online communication is that '*the anonymity and dynamic, playful quality of the medium have a powerful disinhibiting effect'*. (Danet, 1998: 131, cited in Hine). The anonymity issue is only relevant to communications

where the contributor is free to invent a new identity – this was not the case with KT as she was already known to me and I was able to cross-check with her.

Mann & Stewart (2000) reported that e-mail entries were likely to be longer, because the '*rapid note-taking style of much e-mail correspondence might diminish the feeling of being burdened by the task of writing journal entries regularly.*' This seemed to be the case with KT, where she was clearly not as inhibited about written communication as she would have been if producing a script, but it has to be noted that one of the findings to emerge was that her preferred leisure activity was use of the Internet, so she might be an atypical case in this regard.

The experience of the pilot has persuaded me that this form of data gathering is one worth pursuing, not only with pupils but also with teachers and providers, mainly because of the opportunities for greater interaction than is possible in written communication. Although less feedback is available from oral or body language cues than in a face to face interview, asynchronous interviewing or conferencing allows for a more '*personal and thoughtful form of computer mediated conferencing.*' (Mann & Stewart, 2000:128)

The previous two sections looked at the experience of investigating the pupils' perspectives in two different settings, using two different methods. Both were seen to have advantages, and in the final section, the two methods of participant observation and interview are combined within one setting.

Participant Observation (2) 2003-4. St Michael's

The setting for this stage was School C (St Michael's), which was to form the case study for the wider investigation.

Introduction to Y9

The experience of having worked with the Y9 group in the School A was helpful in planning the introduction to Y9. The intention was that I would have approximately ten minutes with each of the three tutor groups, but in the event two of the groups had been combined to cover a staff absence, so it was possible to have a longer twenty-minute session, which allowed for a short presentation, followed by time for questions. A handout of the presentation was left with each of the tutor groups. A list of key prompts can be seen in Fig 3. The questions asked were varied and pertinent: several related to the outcome of the study and others were concerned about whether they would have to modify their language/behaviour in my presence.

Who am I?
  What to call me?
What am I doing here?
  research
Why here?
  Know AJ – convenient – right category
Why Y9?
  Profile – full choice of subjects
Why column 3?
  Initial contact with BM – suggested range of learning styles
What will I be doing?
  Participant observation – not role play
When will I be doing it?
  Last two weeks of Easter term and first two of Summer for in-class.
  Individual group consultations following analysis
How will I record?
  Anonymity – 'St Michael's' + pseudonyms
  Avoid anything that would identify individuals
What's in it for you?
  Feedback to staff
  More tangible rewards for key informants!

Fig 3

The session with the third group was shorter, but it was evident that there was going to be some discussion between the groups. In fact, when I moved to the next lesson with my group, I overheard one girl saying to another '*She's stalking*

us, that lady...' She was somewhat disconcerted to find me behind her and subsequently recounted the incident to friends in the lesson.

One area that had concerned me, and was also raised by the Ethics Committee, was how I represented my interest and also justified shadowing the bottom set. Before beginning the observations, I had been supplied with a list of girls identified as having special educational needs. It was apparent that the school management thought that I would choose to shadow specific individuals, but I felt that this would be too obvious and that it was preferable to shadow the group as a whole. In the end, I decided to focus on my interest in the different perceptions of the teaching and learning experiences, looking at '*what was helpful and unhelpful.'* and used my initial contact with the Y9 coordinator and English teacher as my rationale for following Set 3.

Significantly, in a lesson later that day I was asked whom I would be interviewing and I tried to play down my interest in Set 3 – the response was *'I expect you'll be interviewing X then – she's very clever.'* As with the girls in the pilot study, there was genuine surprise that anyone would be interested in their views. However, this turned out to be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, because when it came to the interviews, these girls were less ready to volunteer.

Lesson observations

As discussed previously, the initial observations took place over the final two weeks of the Spring term and the first full week of the summer term. During that time a full timetable was covered with Set 3, including Assembly, tutor time and PSE, although initially I did not spend break and lunch times with the girls as I did not want to intrude on their free time. Generally the girls accepted my presence and understood my role more easily than the staff, who tended to want reassurance that the lesson had been satisfactory, or wanted to explain their aims to me. At one point a teacher said something about behaviour in front of a visitor and was corrected by a girl who said '*she's not a visitor, you have to treat her like*

one of us'. As far as possible, I joined in activities, although with SATs on the horizon, there was a certain amount of activity relating to mock tests, particularly in Science, that made this difficult. I was conscious, too, that some of the lessons were enjoyable for me in that they filled in gaps in my knowledge with the benefit of subsequent experience, whereas the girls were meeting the topics for the first time.

There were two main reactions from staff – one accused the girls of being '*very lively today'*, with the implication that they were playing to the gallery, whilst others felt they behaved better than usual because of my presence. The girls themselves, when asked, were not aware that they were behaving differently.

Adverse comments on staff from pupils mainly related to being 'boring' – the greatest sin in their eyes, but also difficult to unpack, or to lack of awareness of individuals: *'she still doesn't know who we are'*. Being seen as an individual was very important, and this was interesting in view of the dominant discourse for staff about the bottom set, where they were frequently referred to collectively – '*they're very weak'* rather than individually.

Most of the lessons observed were taught according to sets, with the exception of Art, Music and Design Technology, where the year was divided according to some alphabetic principle. Although the girls were divided into form groups for the purposes of registration and tutor responsibility, they only ever worked together in these group for two periods of PSHE a week; this emerged as a significant issue for friendship groups during the interview discussions.

As with the previous school, field notes were analysed for emerging themes that could act as prompts for the interviews as required, although the intention was to encourage the girls to produce their own accounts with minimum intervention from me.

Pupil interviews

Before beginning the interviews, a letter was sent out to parents of all the Y9 girls, giving a brief explanation of the research and emphasising that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, and that the girls were under no pressure to take part. (Appendix C) In order to explain the nature of the study, I mentioned that I was interested in the experiences of Y9 in general and dyslexic pupils in particular. Following my concerns about the lack of honesty with the girls in St Martha's, as discussed previously, I felt that I had to include the focus on dyslexic pupils, but in retrospect I feel this may have been responsible for certain key pupils deciding not to take part. Certainly, when I re-entered the field I sensed a certain reticence – this may simply have been because I had lost the sense of belonging built up when I was attending lessons with them, but could also have been attributable to their possibly feeling I had not been completely honest with them at the outset.

The logistics of organising interviews promised to be quite complicated. Although the senior management were supportive, it was obvious that they would not have the time to set these up, and available times during the day were very limited. While I was considering the best way of approaching this, I joined a group of the girls over lunch and discussed the problems. The three girls present offered to take on the task for me; in the event, it was left to one of then to see it through, and I am conscious of the very significant part this girl played in enabling me to gain access to system. I was able to e-mail sheets for each of the form groups within Y9, inviting participation in interviews, either individually or in groups and suggesting possible times. I then arranged to meet the gatekeepers to collate the lists and sort out a timetable. They came up with the possibility that we could fit two sessions into a lunchtime break if those coming to the first session obtained sandwiches, and also negotiated use of a Science lab as an interview room – a possibility that the staff had not considered when I had asked for suggestions. The interview period lasted for ten days, and apart from one session where a girl

was not in school on the day booked, all arrived as planned. In my diary entry for Thursday 20 May, I noted:

> 1.05 *Nobody here – realise I am powerless in this situation – don't know girls, so entirely reliant on them turning up – can't leave to look for them, as no idea where to start.*

A few minutes later, the group I was expecting arrived, along with another checking on her time for the second session!

All interviews were taped, with the recorded permission of the girls. They appeared not be unduly influenced by the presence of the recorder, although inevitably their responses would have been influenced by the situation and the presence of the researcher. The girls were initially asked to talk about their experiences of teaching and learning over the past year, and if possible to identify helpful and unhelpful practices. The first session was partially transcribed to check for emerging issues, which then were used as prompts in subsequent sessions, in an iterative process.

Serendipity played a part, too, in the content of the interviews. Following the completion of SATs in Science, the whole year took part in a Water Project for the rest of the term, working in groups across sets and disciplines. This topic formed a useful lead in to discussion about the use of sets generally.

All but one of the eight interview sessions was with groups of two or more girls. This meant that group dynamics played a part and that on occasion one girl might not contribute as fully as others, but it also allowed for exchange of ideas and the emergence of alternative perspectives: 'the divergent views that can all too easily be missed or ignored'. (Seale, 1999). There were no discernible differences in the issues considered significant by dyslexic and non-dyslexic pupils, although with the proviso, as noted earlier, that it is possible that I did not access the views of two of the most severely dyslexic pupils, who might have had a different perspective.

The final interview in the series was the only individual session and it was useful to compare the experience of working with an individual as opposed to the groups. The interviewee was the self-appointed gatekeeper and her contribution was particularly valuable as she had transferred to the school in the middle of the previous year after an uncomfortable experience at her previous (state comprehensive) school, and her account was coloured by the comparison of the two schools. In this respect, her perspective was different from those who had a greater sense of belonging and possibly therefore a greater freedom to be critical.

Following the completion of the pupil intervention period, a preliminary coding of emerging themes produced first level codes (see Fig 4 below) which formed the basis for prompts in subsequent discussions with staff and also with an Y12 informant who was able to give a different perspective on some of the issues with the benefit of hindsight.
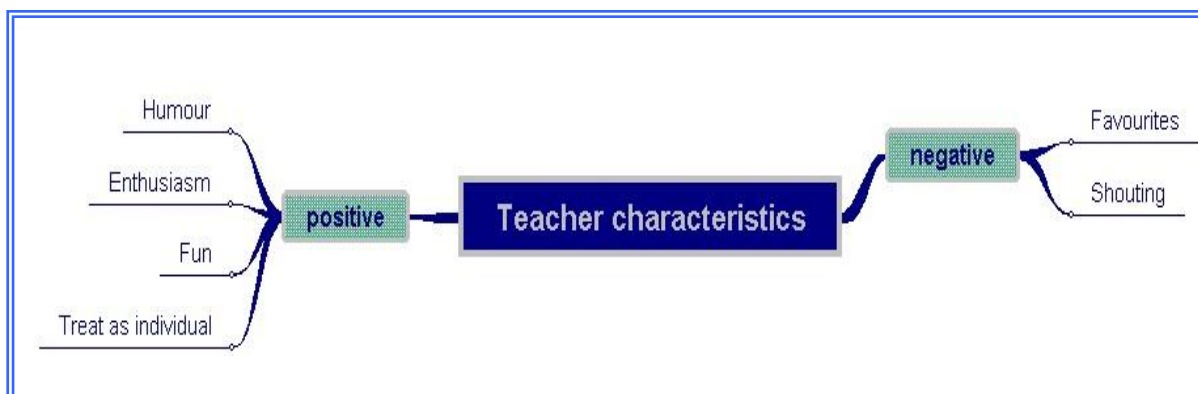
Fig 4

Negative

Apart from the failure to consider pupils as individuals, covered in the previous section, shouting and favouritism were the main negative comments on teaching styles.

> *'I can tell you what's been bad...teachers just like to yell at us all the time[…]most of the time shouting, not really teaching us.'*

(1) G2.1

'If teachers raise their voice, I personally don't tend to respond...I'll just sit there and ignore it. We don't shout at the teachers. If they talk to us, and are patient with us, we can relate more.'
(1) G2.2

'I have one teacher who really doesn't like me and it means that in her lessons I really feel put down – no matter what I say – and so they'll always yell at me[…] I just don't say anything any more, because like she'll yell at me no matter what I say, whether it's a valid point or not..'
(2) G7.46
'…some teachers tend to shout, say I wasn't listening.'
(1) G2.1

Favouritism was a big issue. It should be remembered that the majority of interviewees were Y9 girls, of an age when issues of fairness were given high importance, and who tended to be sensitive to perceived injustice. However, it was a frequently mentioned category:

'…in reading out stuff in PSE, she always picks the Set 1 people[...] and it was really stupid, it wasn't like anything intelligent you had to do..'
(1) G3.11

'… would be nice if teachers shouldn't be so judgemental, as well, because if someone takes a disliking to you, they take a disliking permanently.'
(2) G7.46

There was a general feeling that with some teachers it was difficult to 'wipe the slate clean':

'…this teacher[...] I got most of it right and it took me like a year to make sure she liked me, so it's difficult to change things.'
(3) G7.50

As one girl put it in her recommendations, what they were looking for was:

'…if someone does something wrong, yell at them, tell them off, give them a detention, whatever, but then wipe the slate clean because you shouldn't keep your opinion of someone.'
(4) G7.47

Positive

'Active learning', 'involvement' and 'boring' started as first level codes, but it became apparent that they were variations on a similar theme and were combined. However,' involvement' tended to be the preferred term of pupils, whereas teachers tended to use the term 'active learning', although there was some overlap. Unsurprisingly, the references to 'boring' came exclusively from pupils.

> '…more <u>active</u> work – interesting – not boring..'
>
> *(1) G1.2*

> '…but I like it when you are more involved with the lessons...it's better if the whole class is involved in reading rather than then reading it to you, 'cos it makes people pay attention...'
> (2) G6.6

> 'History, it's good, because Mrs X, who teaches us, involves you, in what you're doing and...I don't know, always makes you pay attention to it...it's not something you can drift off in.'
> (2) G6.8

'Chalk and talk' or its modern equivalent came in for a high level of criticism:

> 'I hate it when they just dictate to us.'
>
> *(1) G3.8*

> 'Some people just want us to listen and that's ok if you're interested, but if you're not – and that's me, normally, then you don't need to listen.'
> (1) G3.41

Lessons with a high degree of teacher exposition or copying from board or textbooks merited the most damning criticism in adolescent language: 'boring':

> '…to begin with it was boring 'cos we just did all those sheets…'
> (1) G2.4

> '…sometimes in lessons, a lesson can go really slowly and when you come out you feel like you haven't really **done** anything…I just wonder what the whole point is…'
> *(2) G6.10*

'...we have to write something out, it gets corrected and we have to write it out again after its been corrected, so we spend the entire lesson writing out one paragraph..'

(2) G7.1

There was a high degree of correlation between the lessons deemed to be boring and the opinion of the teacher.

Teachers and lessons were appreciated if they encouraged active involvement or provided variety:

'...can give you different ways of learning it...and she can give you many examples...'

(3) G7.48

Several pupils commented on how much easier they found it to learn if they were actively involved:

'In RS, we spend a lot of time discussing – about half the lesson talking – and though you don't actually write anything down, you learn a lot more that way.'   *(1) G3.15*

'...to begin with it was boring because we just did all those sheets, but then now it's more visual, so I learn more , because I enjoy...'

(1) G1.5

'...it's good in languages when you get to do role play and things, because then you remember – it's easier than writing it down....'

(2) G5.11

'Activities are the most thing that stay in my memory longest, and sometimes we have cover lessons, we just have to do, like, a phrase, paragraph thing and we have to copy it out and fit in the missing words...and for a test next week, I wouldn't know it, I couldn't memorise it,[...] whereas, say if we did a practical, I'd be able to relate to it more..'

(3) G8.6

There was no discernible difference between sets in their approach to this aspect, although there was one dissenting voice from a girl in Set 1, who commented:

'...when you do something actively, sometimes it doesn't get you that involved....discussions do, because if we're doing like a presentation or something, and it's something you can all get involved in, sometimes it

takes ages for them to explain like what we're going to do and we end up not really doing it for a very long time and not learning anything…'
(3) G7.5

This reflects the sentiment of KT in the email communication, who had a strong preference for active learning, but equally resented activities that seemed to have no specific purpose.

Appropriate use of humour and fun were frequently referred to in the context of good teaching.

'…makes it fun, doesn't boss us around, let's us get on with it...'
(1) G1.3

'…makes you laugh – cheers you up as a person. I hate it when you have to sit there in total silence.'
(1) G2.8

'…look like they know not only what they're doing but that they're enjoying it, rather than standing there looking really miserable the whole time..
(1) G3.6

'He's so much fun – and he still manages to keep everyone under control..'
(1) G3.8

However, this was disputed by another contributor to the same group, who said of the same teacher:

'He is funny, but he's so joky that people sometimes take that for granted...they don't concentrate in class and it's a bit annoying – you can have a joke with a teacher, but then you want to get on, to get down to work…' *(1) G3.11*

What was appreciated was a light approach, coupled with the ability to maintain order and also to be seen as competent in their subject:

'…someone fun, but also knows what he's doing…'

(2) G4.13

Y12 interview

Although the email journal kept by the student in School B had elements of narrative, the interview with the Y12 informant was nearer to the conventional idea of a narrative interview (Riessman, 2002). I initially asked her to tell me about her experiences as a dyslexic student in St Michael's, but in the event she started even earlier, from the time the dyslexic difficulties had been recognised at the age of seven. At the end of the session, which lasted for nearly an hour, she said that it was the first time she had ever told the story in its entirety. Permission was sought to record the interview; at first she was unsure whether she would feel comfortable and we agreed that it would be turned off if that were the case. As the recorder was quite sensitive, it was placed out of direct view, but towards the end of the interview, after I had turned it off, she would think of something to add and request that it be turned on again.

The end result was a rich narrative account, interspersed with an increasing degree of reflection on the issue of whether the school could be considered dyslexia-friendly. The data from this interview was crucial in helping to crystallise emerging themes, as well as indicating new issues for investigation in the wider study. For the purposes of this comparison, however, what was particularly relevant was a comparison between the data obtained using a cross-section of the community and their perspectives at their stage in the education system and those of a student reflecting retrospectively over a period of ten years (she had been in the junior school before entering the main school). For instance, in response to my asking her about help being perceived as patronising, she acknowledged that she had experienced this around Y9:

> *'I thought it was patronising and I started to get – uppity about it - and I thought I could do it now and I don't know, I think I became a bit too confident for myself and thought I didn't need the help any more, that I could do it fine....'(RN.26)*

But later she appreciated the help again.

One of the most striking aspects of this narrative was the history of her move from being a passive recipient of help/decisions:

'I was dropped back a year' (RN.2);' it was chosen for me' (ibid);' I had to go off into a room, an office' (RN.3)' I can't remember much about it, but I know she did something to help me'.(RN 23)

To a more active role:

'I've learned …just finding out who I am, what I'm capable of…'(RN.18)

'I felt like I could take control…' (RN.26)

'I had to push my way through that…'(RN.37)

Normally, I would have offered a transcript or synopsis of the interview for verification, but in view of the student's literacy difficulties, it seemed more appropriate to make a copy of the tape for her as a basis for any further discussion.

Discussion and Conclusions

Dyslexia-friendly?

One of the reasons for undertaking this study was to examine the foundations for the advice given in the Dyslexia Friendly Schools pack. As was noted in the report of the feedback session in School A (St Martha's), there appeared to be little significant difference between the strategies found helpful and unhelpful by dyslexic or non-dyslexic students. This was also the case in School C (St Michael's), except for a greater emphasis on the value placed on small group size by the dyslexic pupils. The main differences were between the emphasis that I as observer put on instrumental strategies as opposed to environmental issues, although this was less marked than in School A; I had modified my observations in light of the experience there. What was emerging was that the term 'pupil-friendly' was more important than 'dyslexia-friendly'.

Coinciding with the completion of this study, Mike Johnson reported at British Dyslexia Association conference in March 2004 the findings of a study, jointly conducted by the BDA and Manchester Metropolitan University and funded by the DfES, in which questionnaires had been sent to dyslexic pupils via a BDA Internet forum. (Johnson, 2004). The high level of response recorded could reflect the level of involvement of concerned parents, but it also avoids the ethical considerations that constrained the identification of dyslexic pupils in this study. One question, where they were asked to make recommendations for teachers to make life easier for dyslexic pupils was similar to that asked at the end of the pupil interviews at St Michael's. Responses were remarkably similar, and prompted me to compile a table (see Appendix D) using data from the different sources within my own study and Johnson's findings in comparison with the recommendations in the Dyslexia Friendly Pack.

The top positive factors emerged as:
- Being treated as individual
- Active involvement in lessons
- Enthusiasm of teacher for subject
- Getting help when needed – not having to wait

The negatives were almost the obverse:
- Teachers who said ' Why weren't you listening?' when asked for help or repetition
- Lessons that were 'boring' (not always clearly defined, but often referred to too much talk /reading from the text book)Additional help perceived as patronising
- Help that was over-intrusive, so pupils felt the work wasn't their own.

The issue of patronising help was perhaps one where my perceptions differed most markedly from the pupils. (It was also not a feature in Johnson's findings; it is possible that this is related to adolescent girls in particular, but as Johnson

does not give a gender breakdown, this is only conjecture, based on the usually higher referrals of boys for BDA support). On the other hand, in relation to enthusiasm of teachers and supportive (or not) classroom environments, there was a high level of agreement.

Comparison of methods.

The second reason for undertaking this comparative study was to address issues of methodology. As a researcher, the main conclusion that has emerged from this process is that the bricolage approach propounded by Denzin & Lincoln (1994) does allow the possibility of examining multiple perspectives. Within the first school, the thematic analysis of field notes and reflective journal appeared to yield very clear issues, but when these were presented to the pupils, they dismissed some as irrelevant, while others touched a nerve and provoked a strong response. Similarly, using informants from the same year group within three schools with different contexts showed that some issues were context specific – the first school was boarding, the CMC school was highly academically selective, while the case study school had a similar intake to the first school, but only took day girls. Comparing themes across the sample indicated those themes that were common and those that could be related to context.

The importance of keeping a check on the interpretation being put on the data was brought home forcibly in the reaction of the participants, particularly in the case of School A and B. Without this cross-checking, the interpretation could have been seen as purely ad hoc. It was salutary that when I inserted a theme relating to use of sarcasm that had emerged from the literature rather than from observations but which I felt might not have been observed because of my presence in the lessons, it was rejected by the girls as being inapplicable. This gave me a degree of confidence in the observation.

In School C, the use of narrative interview with the Y12 student highlighted limitations in focusing on one year group; looking back on Y9 she identified with

some of their concerns but reckoned that they were specific to that period. This does, however, also strengthen the justification for the use of this year group, in relation to the wider study, in that if there are issues relating to self-esteem in the way difference is addressed, they are likely to emerge at this time.

The importance of seeking out deviant cases was illustrated by the individual interview with the gatekeeper in Y9 in School C, whose perceptions were very much influenced by comparison with experience in a previous school.

However, this process could be unending and although as many perspectives as possible were incorporated, in theory there could be as many perspectives as participants, and this is still only a sample. Interviews were on a voluntary basis, and although there was a degree of enthusiasm for volunteering, there were those who I would have considered likely to hold deviant views who did not volunteer and therefore the final analysis could not be said to incorporate the full range of experiences. Again, if I had not been in lessons and 'hanging out' with the girls before beginning the interview process, I would not have been aware of those who opted out of the process, yet might have provided the most important information.

Participant observation – was it useful?

Finally, as one of the reasons for undertaking the pilot was to examine whether participant observation was justified, I needed to reflect on this aspect specifically.

The first conclusion was perhaps stating the obvious, but concerned the difference in the experience of undertaking participant observation as an insider versus outsider, In School A, I had been instrumental in setting up policies and procedures for supporting dyslexic pupils, I knew the majority of the staff and there was an ambivalence about my role. Despite attempts to bracket previous experience, it was difficult not to be influenced by prior knowledge and be selective in lessons observed as a participant. In School B, in contrast, I had no

history and knew no one apart from the Head, so went in with few preconceptions about what I would find, although inevitably previous experiences could not be entirely bracketed. Although this meant having to build relationships and learn the system, it still seemed to be a more valid method of enquiry.

Observation was useful in comparing my perceptions with those of the pupils. However, attempting *participant* observation was perhaps of doubtful value over a relatively short period. Although generally accepted by the girls, I question whether they really perceived me as a true participant, and using multiple methods could have contributed to a confusion of identity; although I tried to keep the data collection periods separate in School C, I still used the staff room as my base and retired there for coffee. Surprisingly, this role distinction seemed to work better in School A, perhaps because my previous position within the school meant that everyone had to make an effort to rethink my role. In retrospect, I think that non-participant observation would have enabled me take more detailed notes and observe more generally, although it might have lessened my perceptions of the atmosphere of the classroom and also been more uncomfortable for staff and pupils. This would suggest too, that I was seeking for a 'reality' of experience, rather than the relativism implied by the co-construction of meaning that emerged from the multiple methods. It is perhaps salutary that the kite mark to be implemented by the BDA in late 2004 will be judged against these realist criteria. However, certain data is less open to interpretation and can be collected in this way: strategies used; length of time involved, although without using an observation schedule, this also is open to interpretation and relativism.

On the other hand, participant observation enabled me to get a feel for the atmosphere of the classroom, and also to experience to a certain extent some of the frustrations and pressures experienced by the pupils in a way that might not have been so obvious to a detached observer. Certainly, my impressions correlated with those reported by the girls in interviews. Participant observation also allowed for the interpretation of individual differences in response to

situations; this would have been difficult to confirm through interviews or group discussions. If decisions about dyslexia friendly practice are to be based on pupils' perspectives, then it seems to be sensible to look at what appears to be happening in the classrooms and use this as a basis for discussion, rather than starting from abstractions

Implications for the wider study

The completion of this Institution Focused Study has been valuable in demonstrating the difficulties of accessing pupil experience but has also provided insights into the issues that are perceived as significant. These will in turn inform the data collection in the context of the wider case study, to be discussed in the next chapter. In particular, it has given me greater confidence in using aspects of dyslexia-friendly practice in assessing a private school's response to difference, in that the .....

Because of time constraints, there was some overlap between the pilot studies included within this chapter and the wider case study, but the experience led to a greater awareness of the strengths and limitations of the methods used, and a reconsideration of the theoretical assumptions underpinning them. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4　Methodology

This chapter outlines the rationale for the choice of case study, using methods derived from grounded theory methodology, to examine the issue of how private schools cater for pupils' individual needs and differences in relation to the current climate of inclusion and the legal requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA). The underlying assumptions about epistemology are further discussed in relation to this choice.

Case Study

The linear structure imposed by the format required in the writing of a thesis would suggest that the findings of the previous chapter neatly informed decisions on the chosen methodology for the main study. In reality, pragmatic considerations of access meant that the decision to proceed with a case study overlapped with the final data collection phase of the IFS.

Several possibilities were examined before deciding on a single in-depth case study, including survey research, comparative case study and focus group. The reasons for rejecting these will be discussed first.

Survey research has the advantage of population size and potential generalisability but has the disadvantage of lack of involvement by respondents and potentially low response rate. Moreover, the lack of homogeneity in the sample population of private schools makes it difficult to select appropriate schools and obtain rich data. However, a modified form of survey research was considered as a means of testing and discussing emerging hypotheses with practitioners in a range of similar schools in order to examine whether some issues that seemed significant were context sensitive. In order to facilitate this, a data base of contacts was built up over the course of the research period, mainly on an opportunity basis through contacts made at conferences, students taking

Open University courses and those following a 'Learning Works' course for SENCOs in private schools. It could be argued that this represented a biased sample in that it covered schools which were already making some moves to change practice, but in many cases, particularly with Open University students, the schools were not sponsoring the students and in some cases students were undertaking the courses for their own personal development needs specifically because of concern about lack of support within their establishments.

A **comparative case study** would have had the advantage of dealing with context specific issues and allowing for an examination of similarities and differences. Two possibilities were considered: selecting schools with a similar context, (girls + middle ranking private) or making comparisons (state/independent: girls/mixed). As the purpose is to examine the response to difference and the adoption of dyslexia friendly practice in the context of private schools, it seemed advisable to restrict the sample to schools within the former category. However, within the limits of an Education Doctorate, there would only be opportunities for a comparison of one or two additional cases, and as Silverman (2000) points out '*the coordination of several ethnographic studies requires substantial resources of time and personnel'.* It would also dilute the possibility of in-depth study. It could also be argued that two cases are no more representative of the whole body of even the schools within the sample population than one. Gaining access to institutions on a comparative basis could also have caused problems, in light of the competitive nature of private schools and a certain reluctance to expose themselves to public scrutiny. (Walford, 2003) The author's previous school could have been used, but this would have introduced issues of differences of insider/outsider perspectives, as outlined in the previous chapter.

In choosing a **single case study,** careful consideration has to be given to the choice of case and the likelihood that it will fulfil the criterion of applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 2002).

Case study literature suggests that case selection in a comparative design is dependent on the theoretical framework that specifies the conditions under which the phenomenon of interest – in this case, the response of a private school to the the inclusion of pupils with dyslexia – is likely to be found:

> *'Seek out groups, settings and individuals where….the processes being studied are most likely to occur.'* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 202)

Yin (2003) gives a technical definition of a case study as:

'an empirical inquiry that
- *investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when*
- *the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.'*

(2003:13)

Private schools cannot be considered as a homogeneous group – but there are certain groupings that lead to similarities. For the purposes of this study, the target group was that of middle–ranking schools whose heads were members of the Girls' School Association (GSA). The reason for this choice was that these schools aspired to a high academic standard, but were not in such a strong position financially that they could select exclusively by academic potential; there was a need to maintain numbers to remain solvent and so the possibility of admitting pupils with special educational needs was higher.

Case selection

The decision to proceed with a single case study was therefore partly determined by the rejection of alternative methods, but also by the pragmatic opportunity of geographically convenient access to a school fulfilling the sample requirement. St Michael's is a private girls' day school in the south of the Central England region with 285 girls in the senior school. It also has an attached junior school, with a separate staffing structure, that does not feature in this research. The Head has been in post for just over two years and during that time has been responsible for a programme of improvement of the premises, but is now turning attention to the development of teaching and learning policies and has spoken of a desire to

make the school more dyslexia-friendly. The possibility of providing feedback to inform future development in the area of special needs provision was a key factor in negotiating access.

> *'Very often a case will be chosen simply because it allows access.'*
> (Silverman, 2000:102)

Skidmore (1999) considered it appropriate to use a case study to examine a situation where a '*process of planned organisational development was under way.*' (2 of 12).

Having selected the school, it was necessary to decide whether to choose a sample of pupils across the secondary age range or to limit the sample to a cross section of one year group. The rationale for the choice of a single year cohort of Y9 in relation to issues of sensitivity and self-esteem has already been explained in the previous chapter.

Case study was chosen therefore because it allows for the phenomenon of dyslexia-friendly practice to be examined within its social context (Yin, 1984). By starting with a study of the Y9 group, it was hoped that the inductive and interpretative forms of data analysis would allow for emerging insights into how effectively inclusive practices could be adopted in the context of a private school.

Case study can be seen as either a discrete methodology or a set of methods that can be utilised within different methodologies (Scott & Usher, 1999). Hammersley (1992, cited in ibid, p87) argues for the latter position, with ethnography, grounded theory, survey and experimental research all involving case studies. Yin refers to case study both as a 'strategy' (2003:1), and as a 'research method' (ibid: 15). In either case, it is important to consider the theoretical position underlying the study.

Philosophical considerations

Case study can be used within a range of epistemological frameworks, including naturalistic enquiry, ethnomethodology and postmodernism. The aims of the present investigation suggest that there is a 'reality' about practices with an educational system to be discovered, although with a concept such as 'school' representing '*a complex system existing in discursive rather that physical geographical space'* (Stables, 2003), it could be argued that research evidence can be no more than '*phenomenographic fragments'* (ibid). However, judgements can be and indeed are made about the social world, the '*local character of what we observe'* (Byrne, 2002). Reed and Harvey (1992) propose a 'complex reality' that combines complexity theory with critical realism in an ontological view of the social world, where systems are temporal and dynamic and change through time. This approach sees the case as more important than the variables, where the case is more than a mere '*aggregation of individuals'* (Byrne, 2003.) However, this is not to be seen as a definitive description of reality but as a working model that is liable to modification in the light of further investigations. Hammersley prefers the term 'subtle realism' and considers that it is possible to '*maintain belief in the existence of phenomena independent of our claims about them, and in their knowability, without assuming that we can have unmediated contact with them'*. (2002: 72). Stables (2003) questions whether the social context of a school can ever be adequately accounted for at any given moment and suggests that data collected by researchers, for instance in the field of school effectiveness, relate to perceptions rather than facts and figures. This perspective needs to be considered in relation to the epistemological stance of social constructionism.

Social constructionism

Taken at its most basic, this is an epistemological stance that the social world is created or constructed by human actions and continues to evolve. Even generally accepted concepts such as dyslexia can be seen as a phenomenon constructed through exchanges between those who have difficulties and those who teach, test and research them (derived from Burr, 2003) This does not, however, deny the

reality of the social world that has been created. In looking at a school as an institution made up of interrelated individuals, the school undoubtedly exists in a sense beyond the physical environment, but its existence is socially constructed. If it is argued that all beliefs are 'constructions' it is therefore virtually impossible to get behind these constructions, so definitive neutral or factual accounts cannot be given of the social world (Byrne, 2002), but Crotty claims that '*social constructionism is both realist and relativist*' (1998:63); in other words, just because meanings are socially constructed and negotiated, this does not make them any the less real. Descriptions and narratives obtained in interviews are not in themselves representations of reality as they are relative to the narrator's situations and beliefs. In order to access these representations, the researcher needs to attempt to establish the standpoints of those involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The focus on seeing a situation from the point of view of actors underpins ethnography, but is also fundamental to a variety of methodologies, including negotiated-order theory, which considers that societal arrangements and procedures are constantly reworked by those involved through the medium of language. (Crotty, 1998:77) This stems from the theoretical position of symbolic interactionism, (Mead, 1934) which sees institutions as a product of interaction between the people who are involved, whether at micro or macro level. Human agents are constantly impacting on the social world by their actions and in doing so have the capacity to change it. Reflexive monitoring of these actions allows for the possibility of change. If objectives are not achieved, actors may start to behave in new ways. Social relationships and practices change continually over time as patterns of interaction change – institutions, such as schools, may display some continuity over time, but can also change; hence the focus for this enquiry.

In viewing a school as a complex system, Byrne (op cit) proposes using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data relating to performance and social context, with a focus on change over time, to allow for emergence of key

characteristics. Within such a perspective there is a preference for inductive analysis that allows for the emergence of theories grounded in the data. Two approaches considered were Naturalistic Inquiry and Grounded Theory.

Naturalistic Enquiry

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate the use of 'naturalistic enquiry' as an approach to case study that is carried out by human researchers examining human social contexts. The use of predominantly, although not exclusively, qualitative methods is recommended because of their 'flexibility and adaptability' (p39). Inductive data analysis is preferred as it allows for a description of the setting and the interactions between the researcher and the study population. This is supported by a preference for the theory to be grounded in the data and for an emergent design that develops from interaction with the data collected. Instead of starting from a fixed hypothesis the researcher develops theories through intensive analysis and coding of data and further theoretical sampling. The intention is to provide a 'trustworthy account' that allows the reader to make informed judgements about the 'fit' between the situation described and the one to which conclusions might be applied. (Schofield, 2000). In contrast, grounded theorists see the end product of the research to be an overarching theory that can be tested in a variety of unrelated contexts.

Grounded theory as methodology

While Lincoln and Guba utilize the grounding of theory as one method within Naturalistic Inquiry, Glaser and Strauss (1967) consider it as a methodology in its own right. The process of analysis requires constant reference to the data in order to yield a 'core variable', which Glaser (2003) describes as having three essential characteristics: recurring frequently in the data; linking the data together; and explaining much of the variation in the data.

> 'The researcher will not get what is actually going on usually, but will get the properline data on how to see it, how to interpret it and how to blur it with vagaries. For the GT researcher this is what is going on to maintain current social organisation. From this data he/she generates an abstract

theory to explain action in the substantive area, because this kind of data is system maintenance data'. (Glaser, 2003: 12 of 17)

Through case-based constant comparison, hypotheses are continually reformulated to develop an adequate overall account of the social processes being considered.

It should be noted that there has been a significant split between Glaser and Strauss: Glaser continues to emphasise that the researcher should make no a priori presuppositions about the research, with all the emphasis placed on emerging data. Strauss, together with Corbin (1990) now acknowledges that familiarity with prior research is probably inevitable.

Criticisms of grounded theory

Silverman considers that grounded theory can deteriorate into a series of merely anecdotal insights (2000: 292) and that there is danger of not going beyond the first stage of descriptive categories and making transition to analytical codes. One of the disadvantages of coding schemes is that the sets of categories can produce 'a powerful conceptual grid' from which it is difficult to escape (Silverman, ibid) They can also deflect attention away from uncategorized activities. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) also consider that the reliance on the very prescriptive mechanisms of coding and analysis, particularly when computer software is involved, produces a 'single, exclusive interpretation of the data' (Seale, 1999: 103) The assumption that there is a stable reality or context to which people respond has been equated with a naïve realism, but Glaser counters this by suggesting:

> '*Categories are reifications with good fit, but still can be changed to rename the same latent pattern. Modification not accuracy is the issue'* (2003:14 of 17).

This thinking is more akin to a complex or subtle realist epistemology and is compatible with social constructionism. There is also criticism of the personal

nature of the narrative that is constructed in the creation of the theory - this criticism could equally be applied to naturalistic inquiry. Glaser's position is that:

> '*GT discovers and conceptualises the latent patterns of what is going on*' …. '*If a GT is accused as being interpretive, which is probably meaningless, it is a very relevant interpretation.*' (2003:65)

Grounded theory or naturalistic inquiry?

Glaser (2003) argues forcibly that the process of analytic induction should be adhered to and not diluted, accusing researchers such as Lincoln & Guba (1985) of hijacking grounded theory by incorporating it into Naturalistic Inquiry.

One of the strengths of both Grounded Theory and Naturalistic Inquiry is that they can offer a new perspective on a subject that can in turn be tested by other, possibly quantitative, research methods. Strauss and Corbin (1990) would argue that the data should always be available for reinterpretation.

Whether the grounding of data is considered as a method subsumed within the case study or as a methodology within its own right, the crucial requirement is to provide sufficient 'rich description' to allow the reader to make decisions about the applicability of the conclusions drawn. Seale argues that the methods of grounded theory are a useful discipline and that the use of theoretical sampling and constant comparison is useful in generating 'thick descriptions of considerable scope' (1999: 105) as well as providing clear links between emerging concepts and evidence, while Miles and Huberman (1984) advocate the use of the comparative method within a less restrictive framework; this is the position adopted for the design of this study.

Having outlined the epistemological framework for the research, the choice of methods for obtaining and analysing the data will be outlined and justified.

Data collection

> '*Most qualitative researchers use such data as interviews, focus groups and diaries. Thus they attempt 'to get inside the "black box" of social institutions to gain access to their interior processes and practices.*'(Drew & Heritage, 1192:5, quoted in Silverman 2002:292)

Within the framework outlined above, a variety of methods were adopted, including computer mediated communication, interviews, documentary analysis of sources such as school prospectus, mission statement and inclusion policies, alongside participation in classes and reflexive commentary on the process in order to examine the complexity of the situation in private schools. This seemingly eclectic selection of methods is in line with Denzin & Lincoln's (1994) 'bricolage' approach as used by Avramidis et al (2002), where the aim is to '*assemble different facets of a problem from a variety of sources to build up a more detailed picture.'* The objections to the use of this approach have been discussed in relation to the IFS and the justification made.

Time scale

The main data collection took place during the second half of the Spring term and the first half of the Summer term 2004, following an initial presentation to staff before the Spring half-term.

The provisional timetable was:
- Preliminary discussions with key informants - January 2004
- Introduction and outline to staff before Spring half-term 2004
- Teacher email questionnaires/semi structured interviews, observations in Y9, attendance at meetings etc, Spring Term second half (February – March)
- Presentation of interim findings for clarification, September 2004

The observations of Y9 were designed to cover a complete week's timetable, but distributed over the second half of the Spring term. Where appropriate, attendance at relevant key events, such as whole staff, pastoral and executive meetings, would be negotiated. The precise timing was dependent on the school's calendar of events and needed to be flexible. It was anticipated that all work in school would be completed by Summer half-term, thus avoiding data collection during the period when examinations disrupt the normal programme, although also allowing time for returning to the participants for feedback or verification/clarification of findings. As it turned out, the interviewing continued until the last week of the Summer term, as for some staff the period after public examinations provided more available time.

This enabled initial data analysis to take place over the Summer holiday period. The intention was to return to school in the first half of the Autumn term 2004 to present preliminary findings, providing an opportunity for any further clarification and data collection required for theoretical sampling.

Key informants

From initial discussions, it became apparent that there were a number of key informants who would need to be approached, either because they were decision makers or had an active interest in individual needs. These were :

*Headteacher
*Head of Senior School
*Bursar
Coordinator for Y9-11
Individual Needs Coordinator
 Director of Studies
Admissions Secretary

*members of executive

It also became evident that the three Y9 tutors would be important gatekeepers.

These individuals became the focus for initial exploratory information gathering. Following the initial presentation of the research overview to the whole staff a number of individuals made contact either to offer access to classrooms or to discuss individual students. It quickly became apparent that there was a desire for advice and/or confirmation of practice from some members of staff. On the other hand, some staff were anxious to know who I was to be shadowing, presumably so they could be prepared.

Ethical considerations

As discussed, a variety of methods of data collection are possible within a case study. Although the methods need to be in line with the theoretical framework, the choice is inevitably also governed by what is possible within a given setting. If the research is democratic and not imposed, it needs to utilise methods that do not alienate the participants or make undue demands on their time and goodwill. Participant observation, as discussed in Chapter 3, in a school where staff are currently unused to being observed except in the context of inspections, needs careful introduction and negotiation; the misunderstandings arising in the pilot study in 'St Martha's' provided useful pointers here.

Demands on participants' time needed to be kept to a minimum. Wherever possible e-mail communication was used for the purposes of arranging appointments, exchanging information and clarifying misunderstandings. This gave the respondents some control over their level of response, without being over intrusive or creating too many demands on their time.

Access and confidentiality

Access and permission had previously been negotiated with the school used in the pilot study and cleared with the University Ethics committee. In the case of the

main case study school, the Head initially agreed access and the informed consent of the consultative group was sought at the time of initial contact. An assurance was given that all data would be treated in a way that protects the confidentiality and anonymity of the schools, teachers, parents and children involved in the study. Participants would be free to withdraw at any stage.

The aims and practical implications of the research were introduced to the staff at a Staff briefing session and a copy of the presentation (see Appendix E) was displayed in the staffroom for the benefit of anyone who had not been present at the briefing. In the case of access to lessons, staff were asked to opt out in advance, if desired, via the head of Senior School, to avoid any awkwardness in being turned away from lessons while accompanying Y9 students. In contrast, agreement to take part in either face-to-face interviews or email correspondence would require active opting in.

The Y9 group were informed about the researcher's role in lessons and any individual girls identified were asked whether they were prepared to be included and consulted on how they wished to be represented. The right of any participant to withdraw at any point without any adverse effect was emphasised. Copies of letters to parents and invitations to interview can be seen in Appendices A and B.

There were several important issues to be taken into consideration:

How was the research to be presented? If it were evident that the purpose was to monitor progress towards a 'dyslexia friendly' environment, it was likely that responses would be influenced by a wish to be seen as conforming to that aim. On the other hand, if it were presented as a study of the process of implementing change, but the analysis was seen as evaluating participants' attitudes, it could be seen as covert. This is a difficulty with an emerging study, where the focus could shift as categories emerge.

In discussion with the Y9 group, the intention was to explain the presence of an observer in lessons as a study into the typical experiences of the year group with no specific mention of an interest in dyslexia. If key informants were identified in the process, they would be approached separately and asked whether they would be prepared to contribute. There is a potential ethical issue in identifying dyslexic pupils as a discrete group; although this was not such a problem in the pilot school, where the high proportion of girls with dyslexia meant that they had a large referent group, in a different setting with fewer dyslexic pupils it was felt there could be an ethical issue about selecting informants on the basis of being identified as dyslexic. After further reflection on potential sensitivity, especially with girls in this age group, it was decided not to target individual girls specifically but to offer the opportunity for all to take part in the interview stage. Although this resolved some ethical issues, it also changed the direction of the research, in that two key pupils decided not to become involved.

The choice of participants from within the staff population had to be carefully managed so as not to be seen as judgemental. In reporting findings, it was important to give equal regard to the views of all participants. In a single setting study, although the anonymity of the school can be maintained, staff may be able to identify themselves and feel that they have been misrepresented. It was therefore considered important to refer accounts back to the participants before publication.

Any study should have some potential benefit to the participants. In the case of the school, it is hoped that insights received into the current position and the gaps between ideology and practice will be useful in planning future developments. A separate report is being produced for the school to help inform their Development Planning. The advice and exchange of ideas via the focus group should be useful to the school's SENCO and the Hawthorne effect of having a spotlight on practice could be at least of short-term benefit to pupils involved. Staff have expressed an appreciation of the opportunity of having a non-judgemental observer/participant

to discuss their practice – although it has to be acknowledged that this was probably confined to those who were comfortable with the situation.

Participant observation

The Institution-focused study had concentrated on Year 9 and this was continued through into the Case Study. As was described in Chapter 3, this was further targeted on Set 3, and this proved useful in selecting staff for interview – all who were involved with these pupils, either through subject teaching or pastoral commitments, were invited to take part in interviews.

The plan for working with Y9 had to be delayed because the whole year were away on a geography field during the first week. This left only two weeks before the end of the Spring Term. The project was introduced to the whole year as part of a PSE session, and then arrangements were made to cover a whole week's timetable, although not on consecutive days. Initially this was organised by starting off in a bottom set and then asking for volunteers to act as guides. The explanation given for focusing on Set 3 was that the first point of contact had been the Head of KS3 and as she taught this particular set, it seemed a good starting point. As there were three sets, this was only a start, but it was hoped that conversations with the girls would lead to more purposive sampling of future lessons. Out of the seven girls identified by the Individual Needs Department, five were working in Set 3 for all subjects.

As discussed in the previous section, information about these girls identified as having special educational needs had been provided, but the decision was made not to shadow them specifically. However, in the course of the observations, two pupils presented as cases worth considering in more detail. One of these was a pupil who had her arm in a sling because of a serious shoulder problem, which during the period of the observations prevented her from writing in lessons. This provided an opportunity to volunteer to scribe for her, and even to complete art work under her direction, which provided a definite role in lessons as well as an

opportunity to observe what provisions were made for her. It transpired that she had considerable difficulties with spatial awareness and visualisation of a dyspraxic nature that were often misunderstood by staff – she did not fit the mould of the 'good' dyslexic student.

The other case, in contrast, was a more typical dyslexic student who was extremely conscientious and seen by staff as coping well with her difficulties with written language. As an outsider, however, it appeared that this construction of her as the 'good' dyslexic student was taking its toll, and she presented as having very fragile self-esteem and being physically vulnerable. As well as providing a focus for observations, I was also able to include discussion of these specific cases into interviews with staff. However, as will be discussed later, neither of these girls volunteered to be interviewed.

Interviews

The core of data collection consisted of group and individual semi-structured interviews with pupils and individual narrative interviews with relevant staff members. Some discussion of narrative interviews and analysis was covered in the previous chapter. In the opinion of Burr (2003), the verbal medium is crucial to understanding behaviour within organisations and therefore researchers should pay particular attention to collecting stories about what takes place. Riessman (2002) recommends open-ended questions as more likely to encourage the production of narrative. Engel (1993) suggests that in explanatory narratives participants reconstruct actions and events to coincide with culturally accepted beliefs. If this is the case, then explanatory narratives are a good indicator of the current climate - or range of climates - within the school. However, it is important to be aware of the limitations of interview. Maxwell, (2002) suggests that interviewing presents particular problems for establishing internal validity because the contact between the interviewer and interviewee is necessarily brief and the interviewer therefore has to make considerable assumptions about the interviewee's beliefs and actions based on limited interaction in a particular social

situation. A narrative interview, as opposed to a standardised interview, is a form of discourse where the '*researchers undergo changes as they gather data, and the people interviewed affect those doing the interviewing*' (Polkinghorne, 1988). This is particularly the case in grounded theory, where the iterative process of analysis requires that emerging themes are continually probed. Providing a verbal summary for the interviewee at the time of the interview and the opportunity for reviewing the transcript allows for clarification of any misunderstandings, but still the story is the one that is being told on one occasion for a specific audience and may be very different from that told to a different person on a different day. Supporters of the unstructured narrative interview, however, consider that this type of interview is less likely to produce the need for the interviewee to present themselves in 'socially valued images'. (Mishler, 1986: 249)

Y9 Pupil interviews

The course of the interviews with pupils has been discussed in detail in Chapter 3 as part of the comparison of methods of accessing the pupil voice. To summarise, the interview sweep comprised lunchtime sessions, lasting on average 30 minutes, with seven groups and one individual.   A breakdown of participants can be seen at Appendix xxx. Sessions were taped, with the explicit permission of the participants, and later transcribed. Interviews were loosely structured, with the first session using prompts from the classroom observations and pilot study; following the principles of theoretical sampling, coding from the first interview then provided additional prompts for the subsequent interviews.

Staff interviews

Staff interviews were scheduled for the end of the summer term, when it was hoped that there might be more free periods available. The lesson period of 35 minutes was used as a normal interview length, but with the opportunity to extend or continue at a later date if required. In at least one case, the interview extended over a double period, and even then much relevant information emerged after the tape-recorder had been switched off. As with the girls, interviews started with a

request for permission to record the interview and assurances about anonymity and confidentiality. It was noticeable that staff generally were more aware of the tape at the beginning and slightly defensive, possibly because of mistrust of the researcher's motives, but quickly relaxed. The entry question in each case was a request for an account of their experiences of teaching Y9 Set 3 during the year. This was deliberately non-directed in order to allow the interviewee to tell the story in their own way, thus allowing the possibility of making inferences about their epistemological beliefs concerning the nature of difference/difficulty and intervention. (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003). Certain probes were used if necessary (see Fig 5 below) and brief résumés of the conversation were provided.

- Do you think that setting pupils is helpful?
- Do you think your teaching varies across the sets?
- Do you find the information from the Individual Needs Department helpful in your teaching?
- Do you have much contact with the Individual Needs Department?
- Do you find it helpful to have in-class support for pupils with specific learning needs?
- Two pupils that particularly interested me in lessons were Lottie and Nicky. Could you tell me a little about your experiences in teaching them this year?

Fig 5

The aim was to see if any evidence of differentiation was apparent and to look for examples of differentiation in line with the dyslexia-friendly recommendations.

Further issues arose in the course of early interviews that could then be extended in later interviews.

Narrative interview with a sixth former

As recounted in Chapter 3, following the principles of theoretical sampling, an interview was arranged with a sixth former whose name kept coming up as an

example of a 'successful' dyslexic student during the course of the staff interviews. The resulting reflective narrative account was invaluable in helping to crystallise emerging themes, as well as indicating new issues for investigation.

Recording

In accordance with Lincoln & Guba's (1985) recommendations about keeping an audit trail so that an outsider could follow the processes, the following evidence was collated: official documents, such as the school's prospectus and policies; records of observations; copies of correspondence and email communications; tapes and transcripts of interviews with individuals; printouts of communications with the focus group (where agreed); memos; and a reflexive commentary in a research journal on the processes involved.

Throughout the period of data collection, interviews were transcribed manually into a series of notebooks, with tape counter references. As the transcriptions were not being analysed using electronic methods, they were not word-processed. Each interview was given a code relating to the notebook, the sweep and page reference. For example, (2) G3.21 would refer to the 21st page of the 3rd pupil interview in notebook 2. (S) denoted a staff interview, (RN) a retrospective narrative interview and (ISI) a member of the focus group.

Transcriptions were written on the right page only, leaving the left page for first level coding and comments. At this stage, It is debatable whether this forms part of data collection or data analysis; the distinction in a study using an iterative process is blurred and artificial; possibly data analysis properly begins at the next level of categorisation.

Data analysis

Data obtained from the Case study was categorised using a coding system derived from Grounded Theory, an iterative process of memoing and coding

(Miles and Huberman, 1984; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in order to identify emerging concepts, which could in turn be explored further and subjected to a constant comparison both within and across the data. The practicalities of this process are detailed later in the chapter.

In addition methods derived from explanative narrative analysis in terms of the pathognomic-interventionist (P-I) scale devised by Jordan and Stanovich (2003) were used in order to gauge whether the medical or environmental model of beliefs about special needs was predominant within the school. An example of a statement at the pathognomic (problems the responsibility of the pupil) end of the scale would be:

'she can't keep up with the others...'

Whereas a statement indicating interventionist beliefs could be:

'I haven't got the measure of x yet, what to do best for x...

Jordan and Stanovich used a scoring system so that data could be quantified. As in this case the information was not the central focus, but additional, it was not quantified but noted against each respondent.

It was intended that participants in the study would be given the opportunity to comment on the data and emerging theories, partly to fulfil ethical requirements, but also to establish a degree of member validation. However, this needed to be treated with caution; there is a difference between asking an interviewee to comment on the accuracy of an interview transcript (described by Seale, 1999, as a 'weak' version) and showing participants the researcher's description of their setting to obtain further responses that can in turn be included in the analysis, to presenting the entire findings and conclusions drawn. There is a dilemma here between the democratic principle of sharing the information and maintaining the anonymity promised to the participants. After deliberation, it was decided to offer participants the opportunity to view their interview transcripts – none chose to do so – and then to present a digest of the main findings to the Senior Management

for inclusion within the Development Plan. This removed the findings from the evidence base, but fulfilled the purpose of preserving anonymity.

In vivo coding

As discussed at the end of the Data Collection section, the first level of coding involved reading through the data and assigning initial codes. The next stage was to re-read the transcripts after an interval and begin a more systematic coding process, where each code was assigned a card and examples and references were systematically recorded. This process produced 46 codes, each of which was used as a heading for recording specific references in the texts, either of interview transcripts, memos, field notes or journal entries. (See Fig 6 below).

Active learning	Group size	Right kind of dyslexic
Ability	Homework	SATs
Avoidance	Humour	Self-esteem
Boredom	In-class support	Sets
Calm	Individual Needs Dep	Shouting
CD-special case	Integration of sets	Special Needs Discourse
Conflicting pressures	Involvement	'Stretching'
Consultation	KA -special case	Stress/over-reaction
Dyslexia-friendly	'Less able'	'Struggle'
Enthusiasm	Limiting	Subject specific
Ethos	NL -special case	Support
Favourites	Pace/speed	Treat as individual
Fear of failure	Patronising	Water Project
Feedback	Praise/feedback	Weak
Fun	Professional reflection	
Getting help	Relationships	

Fig 6

These codes were transferred to the concept-mapping program 'Mind Genius' (Gael, 2001) for the process of sorting into hierarchical categories. Some codes needed to be subsumed within other categories, either as negative or deviant cases or variations, whilst others needed to be subdivided. The concept of '*sets*', for instance, yielded 18 cards of references and was clearly too broad, whilst

'*stress*' yielded only one card with three references. Ideally at this stage a second coder could have been used to compare coding; as this was not possible within the scope of this study, a sample transcript was discussed with a group of fellow research students to see whether there was any degree of consensus. Although there was a difference of interpretation depending on the epistemological framework of the researchers, there was sufficient agreement to give confidence in the process. However, it is acknowledged that inevitably the perspective of the researcher will to a certain extent determine the coding framework.

As the process developed, it became evident that there was an overlap between some of the categories and they were further sorted hierarchically into a concept map. Some codes emerged from pupil interviews but did not appear in staff interviews, others only appeared on a few occasions. At this stage there appeared to be four main categories emerging:

- *Ethos*
- *Teacher characteristics*
- *Teacher discourse*
- *Ability grouping*
- *Support*

Two other codes, *'Subject specific'* and *'SATs',* did not fit comfortably with the other categories and were kept separate at this stage. It was also evident that the category '*Sets*', which was already emerging as a significant focus, would need further unpacking and expanding. At this stage the concept map looked like this:
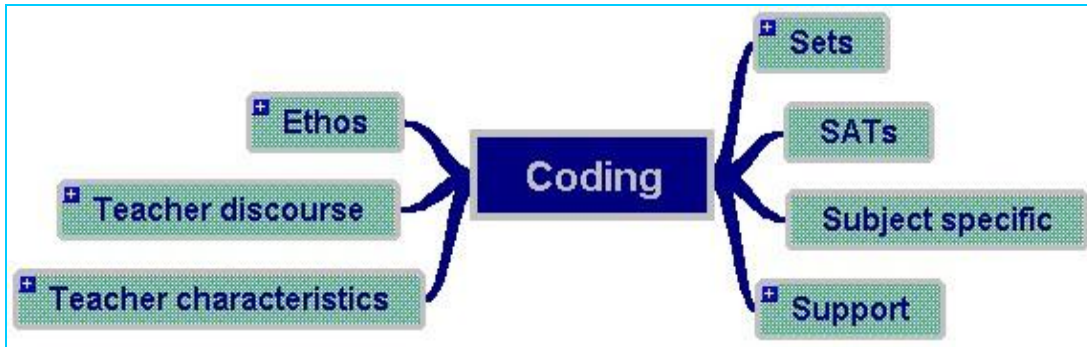
Fig 7. *(An expanded version, showing the subsidiary codes, is shown at Appendix G. 'Teacher characteristics' has been reported in the IFS (Chapter 3) and so does not form part of the final coding.)*

This process was done in the abstract, but was influenced by an emerging feeling for the significant areas for deeper analysis – Strauss &Corbin's '*what's going on here?' (1998:45)*

Having divorced the data from its context and manipulated it, it is then necessary to relocate it.

> '*Coding is much more than simply giving categories to data; it is also about conceptualising the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data and discovering the data'.* (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 30)

At this stage a descriptive narrative was produced under the main headings. This process was invaluable in identifying overarching themes and searching for core variables. The narrative text was shared with fellow students and the research supervisor and again the process of defending the choice helped in clarifying the core (higher level) issues. In order to counteract investigator bias, special attention was paid to 'deviant' or 'negative cases', where the data seemed at odds with the emerging concepts or the emerging categories needed modification.

The process of analysis itself was easier than deciding what to report, and demonstrated difficulties inherent in any qualitative research report. In order to avoid the temptation to simply list categories, it is important to delineate how

particular descriptions inform the categories. This will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

Chapter 5   Presentation of Findings

The process of coding described in the preceding chapter led to the production of three core variables that suggested a conflict between the principles embodied in the aspirations of the Head and the general ethos of the school and the responses to difference. In the following report of the findings, the aim is to provide sufficient evidence to allow the reader to evaluate the confirmability of the interpretations.

The order of considering the categories is not hierarchical, but works from the metacontext of the school towards the microcontext of the individual differences.

Ethos

Fig 8

This category was one of the later ones to emerge, but subsumed a widely referenced code of 'relationships'. On reflection the examples related to the atmosphere of the school, the philosophy and aspirations of the head and the perceived relationships between staff and pupils. It also, though, encompassed policies on admission and exclusion and the adoption of dyslexia-friendly ideology, as well as accounts of conflicting pressures.

Before looking at the individual categories, it is necessary to contextualise the findings.

Background Information gathering

As indicated in the previous chapter, the Head had already expressed an interest in implementing dyslexia friendly policy and was in the process of constructing the school's development plan to include a policy on inclusive practice. There is currently no written policy on admission – this will form part of the proposed School Development Plan – but currently entry is by way of interview and the school's own examination papers in English, Maths, Science and Verbal Reasoning. There is a difference in accounts of entry criteria – the official line is that all entrants should be capable of achieving A-C grades at GCSE and following an unmodified curriculum, but information from the Individual Needs Coordinator and Director of Studies suggests that these criteria are flexible. The initial interview with the Head is seen as important in assessing the suitability of the candidate in fitting in with the school profile; this is especially so in the case of entrants at 11 or 13 who have 'declared a history of SEN' and had a separate assessment by the Individual Needs coordinator; great emphasis is put on personality: '*ability to contribute*' (Head, 21/1/04), the implication being that dyslexic pupils can be accepted only if they are the 'right sort' of dyslexics.

Provision for dyslexic students is under review – hence the focus of this study. At present individual or small group help in Y1 - 4 in the Junior School is provided from the school's budget. In Y5 there is screening through Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) assessment and this information is used to highlight the need for additional support, which is subject to charging. In the Senior School, charges are made for any group or individual withdrawal lessons, but in-class support is funded from the school's budget. Durham University's assessment profiling PiPs, MidYIS and YELLIS is used mainly for accountability and value-added information, but also increasingly for individual profiling.

Some changes have already taken place: a coordinator for 'Individual Needs' has been appointed and there is greater identification & communication relating to pupils with specific needs.

The school's prospectus refers to '*a friendly, safe and forward-looking school*' where '*the pastoral care of each girl is at the heart of our philosophy*'. '*We hope girls come to school each day with growing confidence in themselves.*' There is an emphasis on '*a quiet and supportive atmosphere that respects and values individuals.*' '*We believe a girl can and will develop her gifts to the full when she feels happy and trusted in a secure, supportive and caring environment.*' Such ideals and sentiments are commonly expressed in promotional literature for all schools, but the overall impression as an outsider entering the school, with a wide experience of different educational settings, was indeed of a 'relaxed and friendly' atmosphere, where both staff and girls were welcoming, and this first impression was not dispelled by subsequent experiences over the course of two terms. In the course of interviews, this was referred to independently by several participants:

> '*I've never seen so many people smiling, walking round the corridors and looking you in the eyes and saying "good morning".*'
> (5) S5.16 (recently appointed male teacher)

> '*...the way in which he himself [the Head] relates to the girls and then gives other staff a licence to be able to do the same and so on, without a doubt that kind of encouraging atmosphere....*'
> (6) S7.15

The philosophy of the Head was seen as an important factor:

> '*I think that is why [..] as a Headmaster, I think he's got a very good vision on education, it's something that I agreed with right from the start and I like the sort of people that he's getting in, that he wants people that challenge the girls, be slightly different, from ...you know, and make it fun for them to come to school.*'
> *(5) S5.18*

The 'quiet and supportive atmosphere' aspired to in the prospectus will be examined in the section on support, but the idea of calmness came up in several contexts, most particularly in the account of a pupil who had transferred from a local – and well-respected – comprehensive school, who maintained:

> '*...it's just so much calmer...*'
> (1) G8.2

This impression was endorsed by a member of staff who had made a similar transition:

> *'...because there's a calmness that you can actually get to the ones where you see a glazed look, you actually have time to see the glazed look... '*
> (6) S10.12

To an outsider, the atmosphere in the staffroom and throughout the school appeared very supportive, and this was endorsed in the comments of a newer member of staff:

> *'...the staffroom here is very much one where they're here to actually get the girls further, to support them, not to be seen to be doing their job properly... and I think that's quite rare in education..'*
> (5) S5.16

The introduction of a number of younger and often male staff who are seen as more open to sharing of ideas and suggestions for change is seen – by senior staff – as counteracting the more reactionary core of 'ladies of a certain age' with restricted experience, who have spent most of their teaching careers within the school. This question of staff appointments, particularly of younger staff, emerged frequently, and was commented on by the girls:

> *'I like the young best...'*
> (1) G3.5

> *'I think we prefer the younger teachers, rather than the older ones...the older ones are, like, "fluffy".'*
> (2) G4.10

One of the older teachers, who was responsible for the comment about 'ladies of a certain age', actually a contemporary of those she referred to, expanded on this theme in her interview:

> *'The staff has got younger since I've been here and that has helped a little as well....I mean, it's nice to have the full stretch, but when I first came it was top-heavy with older people and not enough younger. I think, with more younger people coming into the system, it's evened itself out, and I think girls just get a bit more variety and they get different ways of doing*

things and that's good for them…'

<div align="center">(7) S12.20</div>

However, further probing suggested that it was attitude and approachability, rather than chronological age, that was significant. The teacher quoted above was universally seen by girls as an exception to their rule, and this was also picked up on by younger staff themselves:

'So, yes, she's obviously got the younger mind, kind of, which they can relate to…':

<div align="center">(7) S12.19</div>

The teacher in question said of herself:

'I don't actually speak to them any differently than I would in..what I say to them in the classrooms is what I say in the staffroom….it's what I am. I mean, what you see is what you get with me.'

<div align="center">(6) S7.10</div>

It was evident that that ease of communication and approachability was valued highly by the majority of pupils. When asked to give one recommendation that would improve conditions for learning, comments such as:

'…friendliness and communication in relationships...'

<div align="center">(2) G3.5</div>

and

'…remember what it's like to be our age and feel the things we're going through, like, you know, teenage stuff…'

<div align="center">(2) G5.8</div>

Equally, those members of staff who came in for criticism, were perceived as failing to treat pupils as individuals:

'…she doesn't even know who we are!'

<div align="center">Field notes 4/04</div>

'…some teachers treat us like 'young adults' and give us a bit of independence in what we do, and then there's other teachers..'

<div align="center">(2) G8.15</div>

'…other teachers you just don't talk to…

<div style="text-align: center;">(1) G2.9</div>

'…he'll stand there and read from a book, then the bell rings and he'll walk out the room. That's it. So you don't feel you've got a relationship with that teacher.'

<div style="text-align: center;">(1) G2.5</div>

Getting help.

This was an area where there was generally positive feedback from the girls. Some of the issues raised have been discussed in Chapter 3, but generally there was a consensus that in most lessons help was readily available, ideally at the point of need, but also at lunch and break times if required.

Self-esteem

The importance of self-esteem is acknowledged in the school's prospectus and the language is reflected in the narratives, either as an aspiration:

'...because I believe that if you can make them believe or give them confidence, that's the way forward and obviously the confidence is more likely to be brittle, potentially, than with a Set 2 or Set I.'

or as a descriptor:

'…she's got incredibly low self-esteem.'
<div style="text-align: center;">*(6) S9.4*</div>

An interesting anomaly was raised by one teacher considering that the SATs results of one of the girls qualified her to move up a set:

'…*obviously self-esteem would be greater, but I think she works better in the group where she can get a lot of help...'*
<div style="text-align: center;">*(7) S12.12*</div>

There was an interesting distinction between 'confidence' grounded in support, and 'self-esteem' in terms of description. 'Confidence' was the term used more often by the girls in relation to support.

'…important to tell a student how they're doing ..if they're doing well, give them praise, give them confidence...'

(1) G1.5

Professional reflection

In light of comments in the previous chapter about insecurity felt by staff about being observed and the need for reassurance, the other side of this was evidence of a high degree of professional reflection on their practice:

> *'…obviously, we've learned as it's [Water project] gone on and we've seen what's worked and what hasn't worked...'*
> *(3) S1.2*

> *'I'm probably guilty of not trying trendy new ways of doing things[..]they do like debating - that's what I mean by 'trendy ' lessons – we probably don't do enough 'trendy lessons...'*
> *(4) S4.12*

> *'…yea, I probably should have…adapted… some things.'*
> (7) S10.18

As one teacher commented:

> *'...in teaching you're always looking at "can I do it better, can I teach it better, can I mark it better, can I get to them better?" – it's the thing that makes teachers…teach.'*
> (7) S10.19/20

During the course of the research, several members of staff from different departments made informal contact requesting feedback and suggestions for improving practice (despite the fact that it had been emphasised at the outset that this was not the researcher's role.)

Journal entries 8/3/04 & 25/5/04

The size and organisation of the school with several departments having only one or two members means that it is more difficult to share ideas and practice, although the introduction of an appraisal system and associated observations is seen as introducing a greater openness. There was strong opinion expressed by the key players in the Senior School that observation and anecdotal sharing of

effective strategies was more effective than a 'top down' delivery of advice. '*leave materials lying around....*'(Pastoral Head) .

Conflicting pressures

The number of pupils in school has increased and this has led to an increase in group sizes to an average of 18 per set. This is significant, given the importance given to the use of setting to cope with difference. The head reports that some staff are beginning to raise the question '*what sort of school are we?*'

The issue of conflicting pressures was one that was raised frequently in staff narratives. Some were a feature of teaching generally, but there are other issues that relate specifically to the fee-paying context.

> *'I think they feel very threatened by the fact that parents are paying and that they're expected to churn out results, it's quite a stressing situation to be working in…'* (6) S8.7

> *'I mean, there are possibilities, all sorts of things one could do, but I don't know the parents….I think they'd rather we weren't doing it [French] than tinkering with things like that [differentiation].'* (6) S9.5

> *'I don't do enough of it, because there's pressure to get things done and parents don't understand and it's part of learning, too and I think there's a lot of parental pressure in the school and I don't think one's supported, always…'* (7) S11.13

> *'…trying to get through a certain amount and trying to make it stimulating – you know, you've got all these other things.'* (4) S2.13

Perhaps the most honest example came from a member of staff, highly regarded by both peers and pupils for the efforts she made to accommodate difference, who admitted that the experience of having put this effort in and then seeing what she considered to be disappointing SATs results, was very demoralising:

'…perhaps my expectations are quite high, but I do find it quite demoralising, particularly when you do something like exams with them […] the exams just highlight how happily you're going along with this bottom set and so we're in our little cocoon and suddenly you feel hugely exposed and vulnerable…'
(6) S7.1/3

Another pressure that was less overtly expressed in the interviews with staff but was underlying much of the discourse, was the perceived danger of being seen as too effective in meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and consequently attracting an imbalance of these pupils. The admissions secretary had no inhibitions about stating this explicitly (Field Notes 2/04) This might seem to be a feature of fee-paying selection where parents are able to gravitate towards schools that they feel will meet the needs of their pupils, but this is also a concern of successful inclusive state schools. (Avramidis et al, 2002; Ofsted, 2004).

Having looked at the wider context of the School, the next stage is to illustrate those areas where the practice and beliefs appeared to be at odds with the general ethos, starting with the role of the Individual Needs Department.

Individual Needs Department

The need for validation of practice observed in the preceding section was particularly evident in contact with the SENCO who was very aware of lack of a clear job description and the adhoc nature of her post. In common with many SENCOs in private schools, she was working in isolation and without the support network available to those in a similar position in state schools.

*'I think that the way that – well, I **wasn't** introduced to the staff, just plonked in amongst it and I don't think [the head] really knew what he wanted me to do anyway – so I've just been fumbling along…'*
(6) S8.4

'…what would be helpful to have a sort of action plan, where we should be going…' (6) S8.13

This ambivalence about the role of the Individual Needs Department was reflected in the response of the staff when prompted about their contact; it was noticeable that few volunteered any comments in their narratives about working with difference. The dissemination of information about pupils' individual needs was seen as informative, but suggestions for teaching strategies were not necessarily adopted.

'I tend not to – I look at that list and I take half a note of who's there and then when problems arise I'll go back to the list and look...'
(5) S3.11

' Well, I do **read** *the strips she puts out, I read them, I'm not sure I take them in fully...'*
(6) S4.9
'…she, she hands on the IEPs…she gives us a personal copy of each one for each child we teach.'
(6) S6.14

How far these slips could realistically be called IEPs (Individual Education Plans) is debatable. However, those members of staff who demonstrated a more interventionist attitude in their narratives (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003) referred to the value of informal discussion with the coordinator:

'No, it's more ad hoc, really, it's conversations with R, handouts from her – she'll make points about particular girls at the Monday morning briefing and that draws our attention to that issue...'
(6) S6.15

'…we often have, you know, four or five conversations a week about those girls and she tells me what she's done with them and would this be helpful in my subject, or could she have a past paper , that sort of thing...I've found that support very useful...'
(4) S5.14

This corresponds with the opinion of one of the senior members of staff, who had suggested that more could be achieved by subtle methods *'leaving examples lying around'* rather than by explicit exhortations. As one person put it:

'I've not found the need to go and ask her for any strategies or anything, but I think I would have no problem and if something was proving

particularly difficult, I could go up to her and say, 'Look, I've tried this and I've tried this, any more ideas?'

(7) S12.14

One of the ways in which the school had been addressing meeting individual needs before the appointment of the SENCO was through in-class support and initially she had fitted into this pattern. It became clear that this had not been a success as it challenged the power of the subject teacher:

'I don't think she's worked very well when she's been in class supporting, I don't think that's worked very well and there's been a lot of people that've been put off by the way that she – is – within a classroom setting.'
(7) S12.21

Further enquiry suggested that this meant that she was not conforming to the perception of the support as support for the pupil, rather than for the teacher.

'…that's not your role to tell me how to teach my lesson – your role is to get in there and help when it's their turn to have a go at the task.'
(7) S12.23

This balance of power was obviously also an issue for the SENCO herself:

'I don't do much of the advisory role...I'm always afraid, because I think they're quite scary, really, the Senior School staff, and I'm always afraid as if it sounds as if I'm teaching my grandmother to suck eggs...'
(5) S8.15

And yet this was something she felt should form part of her role:

'…I'm often happy to do that for people, just help them with their differentiation, but I can't if I don't know what the problem is in the first place...'
(6) S8.6

Since the beginning of the academic year, she had had no time in class. This had the downside that her perception of what was happening was possibly over-critical because it was based on staffroom discourse and hearsay – barriers to communication on both sides.

One member of staff commented that there seemed to be little or no stigma attached to receiving help from the Individual Needs Department:

> *'I think, perhaps you know better than me, because you've asked them all, but I don't think there's too much stigma attached to getting extra help. There are a few that refused to see [the SENCO].'*
> *(7) S12.26*

In fact, girls had not been asked directly about their perceptions of the Individual Needs Department unless it arose in their conversations, but several references bore out the general impression:

> *'…it's like, when we were in Individual Needs with that teacher – what's her name? – she was saying…'*
> Field notes – conversation in English lesson 13/5/04

> *'I'm kind of dyslexic, and Mrs X, she gave me like stuff to help...I don't think I really need individual…'*
> *(2) G5.5*

> *'Mrs X helped me a lot…setting out my diary…and…organisation and stuff..'* *(3) G8.4*

> *'I mean. I've been told if I ever need help I can always come and find her…but I've found I've never needed to.'*
> *(4) RN 27*

This kind of 'surgery' approach where help could be given or offered as required was seen as most helpful by the girls and by staff. It does raise questions, though about timetabling – how is time and access allowed for such ad hoc provision? There is a tendency to want to timetable in individual lessons on a regular basis and fill in the available time, to be seen to be 'meeting needs' and yet that removes the flexibility that seems to be valued. The SENCO herself acknowledged this when asked for her 'wish list':

> *'…what I would like it to be[…] I'd like to be in a central position, sort of off the library, sort of thing, with the door open….because I feel there's lots of contribution I could make if a child came to me and said "I can't understand this" and I could just say, " take this part and take that part – look at it like this." '*
> *(6) S8.10*

The problem with such an approach is that it takes time to build up the reputation and there might be some girls who would never take advantage of help offered. However, the alternative, compulsory attendance, is no more assured of success, and was the subject of the only really negative comment:

> '…she wanted to give me the lessons, and it really put me down. She didn't talk to me about it, she talked to my parents first – so I thought like "ok, so I don't get a say in it"… apparently I was rude to her, but I really didn't want to do it – because it would put me down so much…just the way it was handled.'
>
> *(1) G1.6*

This case was interesting because of the conflicting accounts it engendered. It was evident that this pupil felt very strongly that it was the lack of consultation that was the root of her reaction; other staff had heard about the perceived 'rudeness', while the SENCO had taken it as a personal affront:

> 'Well, that disappointed me, because I thought, if that's the perception, that you only go to Mrs X if you're thick, sort of thing, I didn't want that perception…'
>
> *(6) S8.10*

The problem for all involved is the conflict between being seen to be addressing the needs of the pupils and meeting the requirements of SENDA, including having regard to the possibility of future litigation, while also taking into account the wishes of the pupil. This is particularly a problem at the adolescent stage when pressures not to be seen as different in any way are particularly strong. The sixth-former in her retrospective narrative account acknowledged that this was the point at which she began to rebel against the support she had had throughout her schooling:

> 'I thought it was patronising and I started to get – uppity – about it and I thought I could do it now and I don't know, I think I became a bit too confident for myself and thought I didn't need the help any more, that I could do it fine.'
>
> *(4) RN.26*

In fact, though, she did manage from then on without individual support lessons, so perhaps her assessment was correct. The Individual Needs Department were, however, continuing to provide indirect support with issues such as examination arrangements.

In-class support

In-class support had been in place for several years in English and Maths, pre-dating the setting up of the Individual Needs Department. This support was provided by a retired teacher, and a non-teaching assistant. Reactions to this provision, from both staff and pupils was generally positive, although there were exceptions:

> '*I find her quite patronising. You feel, like, we're Set 3, we're thick, so we have two people with us, because they can't handle us[…].it's so patronising , cos we might not be as clever at that subject, but she makes us sound, as if we're three – Mr E doesn't do that...'*
> *(1) G2.2*

The fact that the support teacher was not a subject specialist was considered relevant by this particular girl, who felt strongly:

> '*I don't like being told how to do it by someone who isn't a Maths teacher or anything and is really patronising..'*
> *(2) G2.3*

This pupil was very sensitive about the support and this had been noted by the support teacher, as well as the subject teacher, who commented:

> '*that's true, she's never enjoyed it, no…the rest of them are pretty fine about it. We were talking about it in the lesson yesterday and I was saying they're obviously moving from Y9 into Y10, that level of support may not be there any more and they were quite disappointed...'*
> *(7) S12.7*

This appeared to be borne out in the majority of comments from other girls:

> '*…it's reassuring, because then you know whether you're doing anything right…'*
> *(3) G8.4*

'It's easier because you can like, ask one teacher….then you've always got someone else to help you…and it's explained in the same way so you don't get confused..'   *(3) G8.3*

A pupil who was in a set with no support available thought:

'I would probably find another person helpful, because you can – one teacher can't like, help you all the time, there's just so many other people to help…like when you want some individual help it's easier to get...'
(2) G4.6

The sixth former, Catherine, in her retrospective account, valued the individual support she had received as a result of her Statement:

'Mrs T used to sit in lessons with me and she used to write down notes for me because I used to find it hard writing notes. Does anyone else here get that help, that attention?'
(4) RN.25

Staff who had the support teacher working within their class also valued it:

''Superb! And it doesn't matter that she's not a Maths teacher because she's just got such a wonderful way with the kids and such a lovely - what is it? – non-confrontational relaxing attitude with kids and they respond to it, she'll never tell them they're stupid for not getting that…'
(7) S12.9

It should be noted that this is the same teacher that the girl mentioned earlier described as 'patronising' so perceptions differed. However, the subject teacher suggested:

*'…sometimes she **needs** it, but she doesn't like taking it, because it's all too slow, and so on, so even with a proper teacher, she will be impatient.'*
(6) S7.23

Not all teachers had been keen to have support staff in their lessons, and within the Maths lessons there had been a history of objections to a non-specialist being used. As with the SENCO, too, there had been issues of power relations in the classroom, and it was significant that the Director of Studies remarked:

'I think [she] works, has worked, well, because again she hasn't been a threat to the teacher, the atmosphere has remained quite relaxed…'

He contrasted her role:

> *'She wasn't there to teach and was prepared to say, "Ok, this is the way you're doing it and I'll watch, I will observe and when it comes to helping out, I will follow your methods"…'*

with that of the SENCO:

> *'It'll be, "right, I've watched your method, I think you could do it better by doing this and this and this"[..]and there's been a few teachers who've been upset by it really...'*
>
> *(7) S12.23*

This in-class support was only available within Set 3 classes, which leads into the main way in which the school attempts to deal with difference: the use of setting and manipulation of group sizes.

> *'I'm in Set 3 for everything and you get people coming in for extra help and stuff and that makes you think you're really thick!'*
>
> *(1) G2.6*

Ability Grouping - Use of sets
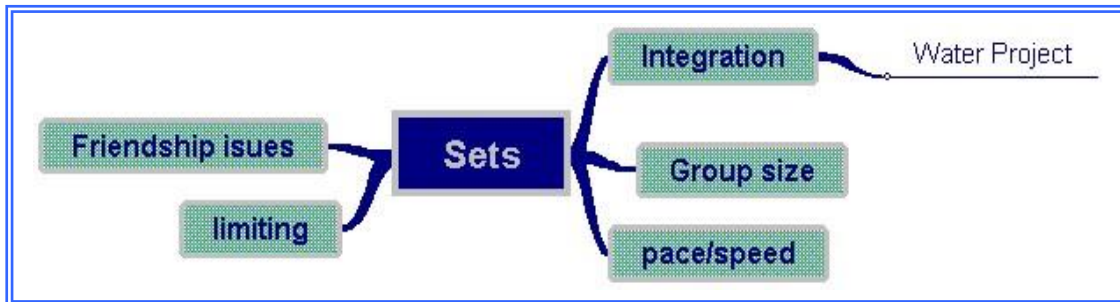
Fig 9.

The use of sets was a focus in the narratives. As a result of observations during the participation stage, it was a prompt in discussions with both girls and staff. Following the SATS in the summer term, there were activities in both English and Science (the 'Water Project'), where the year group was integrated, and this provided a useful lead in to discussions.

There was a general acceptance from the staff that setting was a necessary means of catering for difference. Even those who had a more critical approach felt that it was preferable to the alternative:

> *'I think the thing about sets is you can see lots of things that are wrong with it, but are the alternatives any better than it? I mean, having somebody from Set 1 and somebody from Set 3 in the same set and trying to teach them the same things, unless you are an extremely good teacher...I suspect most of us are **not** that good, is to stimulate both ends of the spectrum…'*
> (4) S2.11

> *'...the disadvantage, of course, of the setting is you give kids levels, generally I'm not a big fan of that…having said that , if one sets them, the ability range is a lot smaller and the progress is much more than with the mixed set...'*
> (5) S3.2

> *'...two trains of thought are – are we labelling them, on one hand, and on the other, it's much easier to teach...'*
> (5) S3.19

Although there was concern for labelling, the practical issue of ease of teaching over-rode these ethical considerations. Those staff members who had had experience of mixed ability teaching had quickly embraced the idea of setting:

> *'It's working well for me. I've taught both ways and they both have their merits. I've found it personally easier to teach in Sets than not...'*
> (5) S5.11

Apart from ease of teaching, there was a tendency to justify setting on the grounds that pupils (specifically the 'less able') were more comfortable within that system, with its suggestion of 'cosiness'.

> *'I think they probably don't enjoy the notion of being Set 3 and that makes you wonder if there is some other way...but within the framework they're actually more comfortable, more supported…'*
> (6) S9.10

'They need to feel safe in that group and not having people constantly putting up their hands and getting the right answer...'
(4) S2.23

The same arguments often came from the girls:

'…it helps being with people the same level as us – like more brainy people go on ahead and 'less able' people (I don't know how to put it) and then some people who take stuff in really slowly and the other people who are not so slow and - not necessarily less clever – than they are, but they take it in quicker and then you're doing the same things for a really long time and also it helps because there's stuff that others find difficult that others don't...'

(1) G3.3

This extract was quoted at length because it shows an interesting attempt to grapple with 'politically correct' language – this was a girl in Set 2. Another example where this was less successful but possibly more indicative of thinking:

'It's a good thing…say if someone from the current Set 3 was placed into a group with people who had greater – capabilities – it would be really difficult for them and the teacher, and for the rest of the class to kind of cope with how it works...'
(2) G6.4

The same arguments could justify exclusion and reflect the pathognomic end of the spectrum. The same girl had obviously reflected on the significance of what she was saying, because she continued:

'I suppose in other schools it could be viewed as an – admission – of bullying, but not here…'
(ibid)

Others showed a mature awareness of the potential problems:

'...but I do think it's good to have sets, because you are going to work to different standards, so it's going to help you...you want to be with people who are the same ability as you, else it's frustrating, but sometimes it can cause problems...'
(3) G7.43

On the face of it, this seems reasonable, but as the interviews progressed, there was a growing unease about the attitude of some of the girls in the higher sets,

particularly when it came to discussion of the Water Project, a whole year Science activity where the girls worked in groups independently on researching topics related to water, culminating in presentations at the end of term. There was a great deal of positive reaction to this, ranging from:

> *'I think it helps you develop your own sense of what you're capable of to do – of doing, even! – and it really does make you more confident in the way that you work – and the results that you get from it..'*
>
> *(2) G6.9*

to

> *'…we have a Water Project and that's nice, it's given us something to focus on...'*　　　　*(2) G5.1*

The ability to work in a group was a factor in judging the overall marking for the project:

> *'…they have to work together with people they don't normally work with, people who aren't necessarily their friends...'*
>
> *(3) S1.3*

and this was appreciated by some of the girls:

> *'…'cos in my group, people in Set 3 that I'd never work with – we work with people we don't usually work with...good idea, yea, very good..'*
>
> *(2) G4.8*

> *'…all mixed up, in my set there's two people from Set 1, and one from Set 2 and two Set 3s. So it's totally mixed abilities and everyone's good at something, it's good to....'*
>
> *(2) G6.4*

 but it was evident that this was lost on some of the participants
:

> *'…and it's obviously – people are in different sets for a reason – basically they can achieve different standards with a different amount of time, and given the amount of time they have, maybe we want to - do more with it , and they don't have such big views for it – and so we have to push standards a bit harder...they'll say, "Well, I don't think we need to do all this work, but for **us** – it's more important, to achieve a higher standard, because we want to stay in the set...'*
>
> *(2) G7.29*

Considering the small size of the school, the segregation of the sets was very marked. The SENCO, whose daughter is a pupil at the school, commented:

'It's very strong, isn't it...I've found the labelling very stern when I first arrived…I suppose, when you've worked in the environment, you don't notice it as much, but at first...'

(6) S8.12

Integration of Sets

This segregation had two noticeable effects. One was the influence on friendship groups and the other was the frequent inability to relate across the set divides: at both ends of the spectrum girls talked of being intimidated by the other groups. It might have been anticipated that girls in Set 3 could feel intimidated by working with those they felt to be more able:

'English sets – smaller groups and not so intimidated – if you have like discussions and things – I feel intimidated with about 17 other people, whereas in lower sets you have less people...'
(2) G4.5-6

but it was more surprising to hear it the other way about:

'…with people you don't know and who you might feel a bit intimidated by….it's kind of like you can't really tell them what you're opinion is...'
(3) G7.24

'I don't know if it's because they're intimidated or because they just really don't know how to like…attack the project…it just feels like they don't really want to – take control of it and say what they want to do…'
(3) G7.33

*'...splitting up the Sets makes it more difficult because if you've got…in my group, there's two people from Set 1 and then there's like, there's only one girl from Set 3 and […] we're all a bit worried about asking her to do stuff because we don't know…we'll ask her to do something and she's like "I don't know what to do…" and she doesn't even know how to do it type of thing, so we're all worried if we give her a subject and she doesn't know how to do it, she's not going to get it **right**…'*
(3) G7.27

'…with mixed set groups, we don't know whether we're expected to achieve their highest standard or our lowest, and that's why it's a good idea not to split up sets, like Set 3's standards going to be different to Set 1 standards…'
(3) G7 27

It should be noted that the preceding comments all came from one particular group of girls, who were evidently highly competitive in their approach. At one

point researcher impartiality was abandoned and the girls were asked whether the ability to work as a team with people with different strengths was not an important life-skill; the response was salutary:

> *'When you're in life, doing a project for a business, you can expect everyone to – that's actually been put on to do this project - to work..'*
> (3) G7.31

This stratification and stereotyping according to Sets was mentioned by one girl in Set 3:

> *'Even then, a girl in my group, she said to me because we had to write a speech in [public speaking]]"I don't think you'd better write the speech, I'd better write the speech because I'm in Set 1 for English" – and you're just thinking [?] They know they're clever, like certain people make sure you know.'*
> (1) G2.7

Even more concerning was the way that this could be reinforced by teachers:

> *'...like reading stuff out in PSE* [one of the few subjects not set] *she says "who went to Ironbridge" and we said "Well, we all did!" and she says "Anyone in Set 1 got to Ironbridge?" and it was really stupid, it wasn't like anything you know – intelligent – you had to do…'*
> (1) G3.11

It could be suggested that the teacher in question might have been wanting to avoid putting someone on the spot about reading aloud, but this could perhaps have been overcome by asking for volunteers.

This stereotyping was remarked on by the Sixth former reflecting on her earlier experience of working on the Water Project and other integrated activities. This girl had recently gained A grades in her A/S examination, taken early, so her comments are particularly telling:

> *'I was used, because I'm quite artistic, to do - presentation – I was the presentation girl, I was never the reading girl, I was never the research girl, I was always the artistic girl, I've always been that – that's been my role, throughout the whole school…'*
> (4) RN.14

Friendship groups

The intense stratification had implications for friendship groups, particularly for those girls who had come up through the Junior School and then been divided into ability groups soon after entry into the Senior School. Some had made an effort to retain friendships, but others felt that it was too difficult:

> '...like you're going to be more friendly with people you have something in common with…'
>
> *(3) G7.43*
>
> '…normally there isn't much mixing between sets because there's not much time to sort of make friendships because you're not in the same lessons…'
>
> *(2) G6.4*
>
> '…we're really good friends and we don't get to see each other, because we're not in the same set for anything..'
>
> *(2) G5.3*

For many girls, friendship groups and set dynamics were so closely related that they found it difficult to relate to anyone outside this groups:

> '…you can't really talk to them because they're not really your friends..'
>
> *(2) G.3*

This has to be considered in the Y9 context where adolescent friendship issues are particularly prominent. With the benefit of hindsight, the Sixth Former commented:

> 'I've spent my whole life being in Set 3…it was never an issue with me and my friends…they're very understanding about that'.
>
> *(4) RN.11*

It would seem that those who benefited most from the setting were those in the higher sets, but when asked whether they would prefer an integrated system, there was an emphatic 'no' from the girls who spent most of their time in Set 3. The reasons they gave ranged from class size, pace and confidence, as well as the availability of support. These were echoed in the staff narratives, when asked about differences in teaching between the sets.

Class/group size

The appeal of private schools has to a large extent been based on the small size of classes, with its suggestion of more individual attention. Certainly, class and group size was a significant factor for the staff, with several commenting that sizes had been creeping up recently. As more 'lower ability' pupils had been admitted, the Set 3 group was kept artificially low at the expense of the two other sets, although these numbers were still much below those in state schools. Because the school was not designed for large groups, however, there could be logistical problems:

> '…this year we have been absolutely stuffed because we've got 55 or whatever, and we've got two groups of 21 or 22 and we've can't physically fit in any more in there [Science lab] in order to get a small set 3 we cannot physically manipulate them in the way we'd like to...'
> (2) S2.22

In other words, there was little flexibility for movement between sets.

Class size was an issue that divided the established members of staff from the more recent incomers:

> '…the smallest Set I ever had in a State school was Set 2 , Y9 – I had them for Y8 and 9 – was 24, but you could go up to 28, 29 even. 22 well-behaved kids is easy, 24 fairly rowdy ones, you have to work at your relationship with them…'
> (6) S10.13

> 'I mean, I've got classes here from as little as 8, to, I think 24 is now my largest and that's probably the largest I've taught here and at my last school…I don't think there's any intention of going above say 24…'
> (5) S5.18

Although small group sizes, particularly in Set 3, were generally seen as desirable, one disadvantage was mentioned in relation to attempting differentiation:

> '…because, especially in that smaller group, there's no disguising who's doing something different[…] she said "but I don't want the others to think I can't do it".'
> (6) S8.8

One effect of having the smaller sized Set 3 was the consequences for the second set, where some considered that there were girls who missed out on the attention available, raising equity issues:

> '...there are others who are quiet little mice and can disappear and have disappeared a bit and I don't think have done as well as if they were with someone who had a smaller group and they could be watched..'
> (7) S11.3

In retrospect, it would have been useful to have spent some time in Set 2 lessons observing responses to difference within a larger group. The sixth former, Catherine, felt very strongly that her success in the school could be attributed to the small size and the fact that staff had got to know her so well:

> 'It's been the small groups, the small years, they've been able to concentrate on you...'
> (4) RN.13

Differences and limitations

Differentiation within sets was not observed nor did it form any significant part of the narratives, although one teacher made some reference to 'differentiation by outcome'. When asked about difference, the responses were related to adaptations between sets:

> '...teaching styles very similar, although I have tried to do different things, to be fair…we did equations with little bits of paper – stuck them in the right order – which I wouldn't do with Set1/2…so little bits of pieces are probably different, but I think the overall way that I go about it is probably the same..'
> (7) S12.18

Interestingly, what was important for the girls in Set 3 was the perception that they were following the same programme of study as the other sets, and there was a strong exception taken to any suggestion that they were being treated differently:

> '...some subjects, there's completely different teaching standards – oh, not standards – and I think they should have exactly the same teaching methods otherwise it's unfair on one of the sets..'
> (1) G1.5

> *'In English, they teach the same ways, say if Mrs X is teaching Set 3, she'd do it how Mrs Y would do i.t'*
>
> *(1) ibid*

They liked to be reassured that they were covering the same ground, although
> *'...sometimes so patronising - "the other sets they're doing higher than you" – but then it's quite nice to hear other sets are not doing so well, like "Set 1 didn't get this" – but then you feel so much thicker...'*
>
> *(1) G2.6*

Pace/speed

There was a real need to be seen to be doing the same work, just at a different pace:
> *'...we do the same work, just at different speeds.'*
>
> *(3) G8.5*
> *'...yes, because everyone can work at their own pace...but not for Art. PE, stuff like that.'*
>
> *(2) G5.4*
> *'So Set 3, definitely slower pace, take things more gently...'*
>
> *(3) S1.12*

although as one of the Science teachers commented:

> *'...interesting...but how do they think we get more time?'*
>
> *(4) S2.28*

The way they got it was usually by limiting the scope and range of what they covered.

> *'Set 3, I try very much to keep it to the bare basics...'*
>
> *(4) S2.12*

There was very much a feeling that in the higher sets, issues could be explored in more depth, with opportunities for more applied work, whereas the work in Set 3 had to be limited to 'basics'.

> *'I would have much more discussions with Set 1...I'd give them, try to give them, a lot more open-ended stuff... whereas with Set 3, because they'd just find it absolutely nightmarish anyway, we'd probably do the theory first and then have a look at it...'*
>
> *(4) S3.14 (Science)*

> *'...Set 3, we study more basics and don't go into so much grammar...'*
>
> *(1) G3.3 (French)*

'Set 1 are very quick, they get the argument very quickly and are already looking for flaws straight away…Set 2 need a little bit more, you know, sort of taking them through the argument…Set 3 definitely need the argument put in at least two or three different ways before they've grasped it...'
(5) S5.2 (RS)

'I think that you have to be …I'm kinder to that lot [Set3] compared to a Set 2 or 1, I treat them more with kid gloves than I would a Set 2 or Set 1 group...'
(7) S12.17

Active learning/involvement

In light of the importance placed by the girls on this aspect, it was noticeable that several members of staff focused on strategies specifically for the bottom set.

'Less chalk and talk and more…I know, they switch off very quickly if you spend too long explaining a problem…'
(7) S12.20

'but the other thing I find with that, they do quite like is being given a role and do a debate...they do like debating…'
(6) S4.12

'I do, yea, I do a lot of creative stuff with them, because I think that's the sort of stuff that holds their interest and enables them to evaluate what we are doing in a creative way...'
(5) S5.6

Movement between sets

It might appear from this account that Set 3 was an autonomous group. To a certain extent this was true, but there were certain subjects (Art, Music, DT and PE) where the year was split three ways on an alphabetical divide. During the observations the decision was made to follow the third column of the timetable, which generally corresponded to Set 3, but for these subjects was a different grouping. The first lesson observed happened to be Art, and the grouping was explained:

'…it's not sets, it's just how the timetable works – we call ourselves Set1 because we're Set 3 for everything else'
Field notes 4/04

The implications of this took on a greater significance at a later date following the end of year examinations, which will be discussed at the end of this section.

Apart from the subjects mentioned above, the only other subject not taught in ability sets was PSE, which was taught in form groups. It seemed odd that this was the only time spent in these groups, apart from morning and afternoon registration.

Some girls were in Set 3 for some subjects and not for others –'Nicky', the 'good ' dyslexic, was for instance in Set 2 for Science. Generally, however, the Set 3 group was fairly well defined. There was a possibility of movement, at least in theory, and some evidence of consultation with girls about the choice of sets, although this tended to be a choice over moving down or not moving up. Certainly, there was recognition that for some girls they preferred the 'comfort' of being at the top of a lower set:

> '*I think she likes to be the top of the bottom group rather than the bottom of the next group...*'
>
> (4) S2.21

whereas others

> '*...would like to be at the bottom of Set 2...because they like the challenge of - having competition that other students give them.*'
>
> *(5) S3.3*

One of the girls talked of having been 'put down to Set 2' and when asked how she'd felt about that, replied:

> '*I offered to move down, I wanted to move down...*'
>
> *(1) G3.4*

while there were several instances of girls remaining in Set 3 because they preferred the smaller groups, despite being considered able to cope with Set 2 work.

> *'It's very difficult, moving them on, because of the bureaucracy and having to fill in forms, or the parents come back…'*

(5) S4.14

'…we do have setting meetings[…] and if the results are way out you do think, "well, should that person be moved?", but I think it often does more harm than good just to move someone because they're doing well...'
(5) S5.10

'H and N have the right to move into another group, though what the benefits of that would be, I don't really know…'
(7) S12.12

Once the sets were made up, it was not easy to change and they were seen as being a fairly reliable indicator of potential:

'…because I could not believe how clear the divides were between the settings…you kind of get top set getting 80-90%, second set 70-60%, then 60-50% for the third set, it's really funny, it's so clear cut...'
(5) S5.8

When the researcher suggested that this could be a result of expectations being fulfilled, this was rejected. However, one incident led to a question mark over this. The Art teacher in whose lesson the conversation was reported about the girls calling themselves Set 1 '*because we're Set 3 for everything else'* was unable to take part in the interview series, but over conversation in the staffroom, she referred to this Set as '*very weak'* and when this was queried, as they were not set on ability, she brought out the end of year examination results, which showed a similar range of marks to that described in the quote above. If the sets were divided purely on an alphabetical split, it seemed suspiciously as though this could be a case of fulfilling expectations.

Research Journal 2/7/04

There were two cases where the setting system was being challenged. In English the girls were going to be divided vertically when they moved into Y10 because of a reservation about having a 'dregs' set, and in DT the teacher engaged in what he referred to as 'social engineering' and split across the three form groups horizontally to make three new groups. (Field notes) This was possible only because Technology was divided between three disciplines, all timetabled at the

same time, so they were able to do this independently of other subjects, with no implications for timetabling.

It will be evident from the preceding account that there were several concerns over the use of sets to address difference, which will be discussed in the next chapter. However, it is possible in being critical of some aspects, to lose sight of the fact that the majority of the girls liked the system, despite its limitations:

> *'I…being in Sets I found it was kind of nice because the smaller group…that helped confidence...'*
>
> *(2) G4.5*

Certainly, it worked for the girls in terms of outcomes. Perhaps the last word in this section belongs to the Y9 informant, who had come into Y8 from another school where she had been the victim of bullying and had nothing but praise for the way everything worked:

> *'I don't mind being in Set 3, because Set 3 here is like Set 1 in a different school..'*
>
> *(2) G8.5*

Teacher discourse -' the right sort of dyslexic'
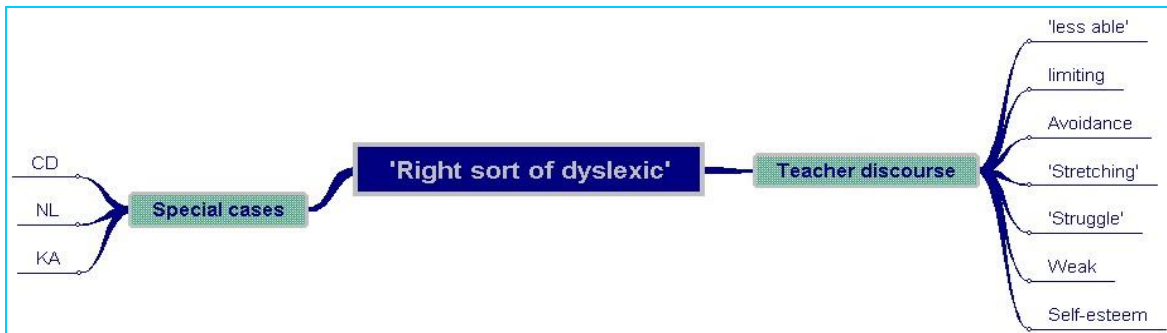
Fig 10.

This category, more than any other, allows for interpretation of data in terms of the pathognomic–interventionist scale (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003). The language

used in relation to pupils in Set 3 is examined specifically here, although it needs to be considered also in relation to the discussion of the use of Sets.

Perhaps the most commonly heard adjective used both in informal conversations in the staffroom and in the narratives, was 'weak'. As was noted in the case study chapter, the key informant in Y9 was almost universally referred to as *'but she's very weak'* when her organisation skills were praised, although this did change after the SATs results, where she had done better than expected. However, there were numerous other example, including these:

> *'…they're a very weak set..'*
> Field Notes

> *'I think it's because she is so weak that she's embarrassed and doesn't know a way of dealing with it…'*
> (5) S5.13

> *'…we've worked out we've really got three weak ones, in each group now…we split into three and three…'*
> (6) S7.20

Linked with 'weak', was the use of 'less able':

> *'…a less able group will sort of just stick to what's there and not think beyond it...'*
> (4) S2.3
> *'I think it's only ability that's the difference between a good and a bad grade, not because they've not had the opportunity to study it in depth or any further…'*
> (5) S5.9

> *'I think the spread of ability is quite wide [in Y9], you've probably got more at the tail end.'*
> *(6) S8.8*

This talk of 'spread' is interesting because there was often mention of a concern that if too many pupils perceived as having needs were admitted, it would reduce the spread – what was meant by this was that there might be a loss of 'more able' pupils, rather than a wider distribution.

Another term that fits this pattern is 'needy:

'…*my heart sinks a little bit, I think, because they're quite needy...*'

This discourse is at the pathognomic end of the spectrum, with a belief that the problem lies within the child, rather than requiring any adaptation of the environment. The use of the title 'Individual Needs' itself, although seen as a progression from the former 'Remedial' label, itself has pathognomic connotations.

Certain contexts seemed to lend themselves to this kind of discourse:

'...*these pastoral sessions can become fairly negative. We are trying to put that right, try to be more up-beat about them [….] sometimes they get into that kind of groove...let's despair of….*'
(7) S7.18

It was in a Y9 pastoral session that the comment, '*All bottom set are strange*' was recorded.

The remark about the negative aspect of pastoral meetings came from a member of the executive, but was echoed by a younger member of staff, himself dyslexic, who commented:

'…*it surprises me – some of the staff don't know they're born – we are a very selective school – and when you consider they rarely get kids who can't get a grade at C, a lot of staff seem to be complaining for complaining's sake...*'
(5) S3.14

and yet, one teacher talked of a pupil within this context:

'…*who had such – specialist - needs that couldn't be incorporated into normal lessons.*'
(3) S1.6

There was also a tendency to talk collectively about the bottom set, rather than see them as individuals:

> *'I do find them **extremely** different from Sets 1 and2, they're like worlds apart, as far as I'm concerned...'*
> (5)S4.1

In conversation with the executive about admissions policy, another discourse, that of the 'right sort' of difference was voiced. This was strongly reinforced in the narratives when reference was made to the special cases chosen as focus for discussion. As was discussed in both Chapter 3 (IFS) and in the methodology chapter, one sixth former was mentioned so frequently as a 'success story' that she was included, whereas the other two were within the target Y9 group, but at different ends of the spectrum.

Special cases

Nicky conformed to the ideal type of dyslexic pupil, who had the personality and attributes deemed desirable. Not only did she *'work like a Trojan'*, but she was also described as *'best in group'* and '*star pupil'* in discussion at the pastoral meeting

In the narratives, the words 'conscientious', hard-working' and 'non-demanding' recur. The latter is significant; she is seen as making little demand on teachers, other than a willingness to accept her 'bizarre' spelling;

> *'I'm not worried about her being dyslexic, because I can always understand it and read it..'.*
> *(5) S4.8*
> '*She just gets on with anything you ask her to, you know, and internalises it all and doesn't say anything...'*
> *(6) S9.3*

Perhaps most concerning was a comment from a member of staff that Nicky had missed a number of Science lessons for music lessons: the only concession to her difficulties was:

> *'she sat in the front, we made sure of that, and things like that, **she copied up notes that were missed** (author's emphasis)*
> *(7) S10.18*

The fact that parents were supportive was also seen as a factor in making her a desirable pupil;

> *'I mean, I **know** what her problems are, but she is such an incredible hard-worker, and has this amazing back-up at home...'*
> *(5) S4.8*

In view of the problems that were beginning to emerge during the period of this study over possible anorexia, it is surprising that the pressures on this pupil were not more widely recognised.

This discourse of the 'good dyslexic' was strongly reflected in the case of the sixth former, Catherine, with the advantage that she was able and very willing to reflect on the experience of having been a pioneer dyslexic in the school.

Like Nicky, Catherine was described as a 'hard-worker'

> *'...she was a really hard-worker, you know.'*
> *(7) S10.19*

> *'I think she deserves it, the hard work and effort she's put in and for it all to start paying off now, it's wonderful to see...'*
> *(7) S12.17*

> *'...she's very good at identifying her problem and addressing it....and that's why she has succeeded as well as she has...'*
> *(3) S1.10*

There was an acknowledgement from some staff, especially in the Science department, that mistakes had been made:

> *'I do feel, perhaps, she could have done [a higher tier at GCSE].with the benefit of hindsight, when you look back...'*
> *(3) S1.9*

Catherine herself said:

> *'I had basically to cope with – there wasn't much done, because, I think, I was the first student to be dyslexic – that was actually realised.'*
> *(4) RN.4*

She was aware that her success could prove a disadvantage to subsequent students:

> '…because I am , as [the head] calls me a 'success story' they will compare, probably, most dyslexic girls to - not being sort of - to me...'
>
> (4) RN.19

She was also very critical of the fact that students who she perceived as having similar requirements for assistance, but who did not have the dyslexic 'label' were not given the help she had received. She considered the greatest strength of the school was the small group sizes, which had allowed the staff to get to know her strengths and weaknesses over the years.

In stark contrast to these two pictures of the 'ideal' dyslexic was the case of 'Lottie' who did not conform to the type.

At the time of the research, Lottie, in addition to her identified literacy difficulties, had dislocated her shoulder; this was a frequent problem, masking an underlying problem with the shoulder joint that was likely to require major surgery. It was noticeable (Research Journal) that no provision was made for alternative means of recording (this was Lottie's writing arm) and that the expectation was that she would copy up notes once she was able to write again.

> 'She did miss quite a few sessions [through hospital sessions] - didn't make much effort to catch up...I mean , she collected the homework, but she didn't do it, so well…with her, it's the lack of organisation, the attention seeking behaviour...'
>
> (6) S6.14

Unlike with Nicky and Catherine, where there was a fairly uniform perception of their situation, responses to Lottie showed a variation. The majority of staff saw her as being 'difficult' and not making an effort to help herself:

> 'She can be awkward.'
>
> Field notes – Music

> '[Lottie] I would argue, is just…there's not enough organisation…'

(6) S6.13

'[Lottie] isn't the type that's ever going to hide under a stone, she's very much more up-front.'
(7) S12.14

'...after two weeks of doing it. Lottie puts up her hand and shouts out "Where is the Gambia – is it in South America?", you know, that kind of thing, so I don't know how I'm going to cope next year...'
(4) S1 14

It should be noted at this point that in the IEP for Lottie it states:

*'Clarify that [Lottie] has understood by questioning. She often **does not** understand what she is expected to do. She is not just being awkward.'*

In contrast to these reactions, there were other members of staff whose attitude was more sympathetic:

'…she finds it very difficult to give off the right – um – image and attitude….when I was her form tutor, I was trying to make her understand the path of least resistance would actually get her further and I'm not sure I ever went through to her...'
(5) S5.13

'I think in a way, coming here has done her no favours at all [….] she said to her parents" I don't like being where people are cleverer than I am …I don't think she's very happy...'
(6) S9.12

'I feel very sorry for her, she doesn't feel particularly happy here, I know there are all sorts of issues – friendship issues area a big thing, but also I think with the work as well...'
(4) S1.14

'…she , she finds the work really hard and I really feel for her, because sometimes I can see her putting the effort in...'
(6) S5.14

And yet, despite the sympathy, there is little to suggest any attempts to find ways of accommodating to the difference. The SENCO, referring to a teacher who was normally noted for her willingness to adapt, noted:

'she gets very frustrated with Lottie, she says "she won't read" and she gets so - frustrated – that she can't be bothered.'

(7) S8.15

Only one narrative suggested an interventionist perspective:

> *'I mean, Lottie – I haven't got the measure of Lottie at all and what to do best for her…she has quite a lot of trouble believing in herself and also getting down to things and ...the avoidance tactics etc, etc..'*
> *(4) S2.24*

This raises the question of whether the Individual Needs support would be better targeted at both advocacy for the student and in guidance on dealing with staff, rather than with skills support at this stage.

There were some signs of a change in attitude brought about mainly by the results of the SATs and end of year exams. In some cases this was somewhat grudging:

> *'…she must have done some work, because her exam mark was 59% - it was the third highest , which did astound me and I thought the complete lack of organisation..'*
> *(6) S6.13*

On a more positive note, the Director of Studies commented:

> *'She's very - very bouncy at the moment, seems to be pleasantly surprised at what she's actually achieved in these exams; Science was 5, Maths was 6, and that's on the way to GCSE, which is what we are aiming for and something that was always mentioned with lots of sucking in of teeth when Lottie was kind of… but I think it might now, I think she might actually believe it…'*
> (7) S12.15

Not only, therefore are attitudes relative to the pupil's response, but also to their performance, especially as judged by external criteria. Again, the suggestion of reward for the teacher is involved.

Summary

Having looked at the context of the school and the three areas that appear to constitute the barriers to successful inclusive practice, these will now be examined in relation to existing literature.

Chapter 6   Discussion and evaluation

It is worth returning at this point to the questions posed at the outset:

How does a private school respond to issues of difference in the light of the requirements of SENDA? If the impetus for change is external rather than internal, can it be successfully implemented to make a significant difference to the experience of individuals within the system?

- How receptive are private schools likely to be to adopting more inclusive policies and practice?
- What are the potential barriers to successful implementation of such practices?
- What are the perceptions of students about inclusive practice and how do these relate to the ideals expressed by advocates of dyslexia friendly schools?

Schofield (2000) advises that having chosen a critical case sample, it is important to be open to the possibility 'of having one's expectations about the phenomena disconfirmed' (p93). The original aim of this study assumed that the focus of an examination of responses to difference in an independent school would be on dyslexia-friendly provision. However, the data shows that dyslexic pupils, albeit of the 'right sort' – a concept that will be explored further in this chapter – are more likely to be accommodated than those presenting with difficulties such as mild ADD or dyspraxia, that are seen as more challenging to the teacher. Although dyslexia-friendly practice was taken as a starting point and formed the focus for discussion, it is important to reiterate that aim of the study was to examine the school's response to individual learning needs generally in light of the current climate of inclusive practice.

Areas that emerged as particularly significant, either in explaining current practice or identifying potential barriers to inclusive practice, included:

> - The use of ability grouping - essentially a form of segregation
>   - o 'Cocoon' of sets – contributes to fear of failure
>   - o Self-fulfilling prophecy
>   - o Adverse effect on inclusion
> - Some differences are more acceptable than others
>   - o Discourse of 'right sort of dyslexic'
> - Professional envy and power relations relating to the role of SENCO
>   - o Conflicting perceptions of role of In-class support
> - Conflicting pressures on institution and individuals at macro and micro level

Fig 11.

Some of these had been at least partially anticipated in the original rationale and literature search, whilst others were unexpected. At this stage it was necessary to return to the literature for further clarification.

'Right sort of dyslexic' – some differences are more acceptable than others

There was a noticeable conflict between the 'caring' ethos promoted by the school, and apparent in individual teacher narratives, and the seemingly 'uncaring' attitude towards 'Lottie'.

Along with the implications of setting, this was probably the most significant finding and constitutes the 'core variable' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The discourse of the 'successful' dyslexic and the emphasis on acceptability both within the admissions process and in the reactions of staff was marked. Bourne (1994) in looking at the inclusion of black pupils finds the acceptance or rejection of applicants appears to be based on 'attractiveness' as well as academic achievement. Bandura notes that

'physical attractiveness and sociable temperament help to draw nurturing caretaking'(1997:172), which will in turn lead to the development of a sense of personal efficacy.

There are two sides to this: there is the argument, partly a self-fulfilling prophecy in the case of 'Lottie', that it is in the interests of the pupil that they will be comfortable within the system, and in fact there were concerns expressed by some of the SENCO discussion group that commercial pressures were encouraging schools to take on pupils who did not fit the profile of the school intake, and were likely to have a difficult time as 'different' with potentially adverse affects on self-esteem. Equally, the strain on those pupils who conform to the role of the 'good dyslexic' is evident, but not recognised by the staff.

There is a strong current of staff needing reward for their efforts and of a transactional reciprocity; if the girls were not seen as keeping their side of the bargain, then there was no reciprocation. In a culture where attainment in external assessments is the measure of the school's efficacy, a low-achieving student challenges the teacher's sense of self-efficacy. This ties in with the pathognomic view (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003) of difficulties as being the responsibility of the pupils rather than requiring intervention. The case, reported on p115, of the pupil who turned down additional support, shows how this affected even the SENCO, who felt her identity was being threatened. And yet, if the pupil did keep their side of the bargain, then there was more likely to be an interventionist response from some staff. Jordan and Stonavich's scale suggests a linear progression from pathognomic to interventionist, although also allowing for 'mid-range beliefs' which they describe as representing a vacillation between the two beliefs, but also as indicative of teachers' struggles to reconcile personal beliefs with policies & procedures that favoured a different perspective. The findings from the present study suggest that at least one other dimension should be added to the model.

Jordan and Stanovich (op cit) suggest that teachers' epistemological beliefs can be changed through 'seeing the results of successful practice in the achievements of students through a collaborative culture of practice. Certain elements within the private school setting appear to act as barriers to this collaboration and these will be examined next.

Ability grouping

It perhaps should have been anticipated that ability grouping – in effect, creating an isolated bottom set to cope with difference – would emerge as a major issue, but perhaps in the context of private schools it is so embedded in practice as to pass unremarked until a study such as this starts to examine the system. In reviewing the literature on inclusion for Chapter 2, setting was not identified as a significant factor, and yet it is increasingly being reintroduced in maintained schools in response to recommendations for implementing the National Curriculum and raising standards. However, in a return to the literature, there is mention of 'attainment grouping' in Booth & Ainscow's (1985) study of 'Richard Lovell' School, where there is discussion of the number of different ways in which pupils are stratified, either by age, attainment or potential, but this relates to a period before the emphasis on inclusive practice. Indeed, much of the UK literature relating to ability grouping dates back to the 1960s and 1970s and the debate over the introduction of comprehensive schooling, although there has been more recent work in the USA. Two extensive reviews of the literature relating to ability grouping were carried out in the 1990s, (Hallam & Toutounji, 1996; Suknandan & Lee, 1998). In order to assess the implications for the UK context, Hallam (2002) carried out another survey of the literature, particularly in relation to primary schools, prior to an investigation into primary school pupils' perceptions of different types of grouping. There is also a considerable body of research in Scotland, which could be explained by a difference in practice or because a different political climate allows for more open discussion of such issues.

There are problems with comparisons of research as there are so many permutations of ability grouping, from mixed ability teaching at one end of the spectrum to streaming at the other. The main distinction between setting and streaming is that streaming is based on an assessment of general ability, whereas setting is ostensibly based on ability in a particular subject. However, timetabling constraints often make it difficult to move across sets for different subjects; in St Michael's, the system used was officially setting, and there were instances of pupils being in different sets for English and Maths, but effectively there was an element of streaming.

In a study of the experiences of over 6000 pupils in 45 secondary schools, Hallam et al (2004) found that girls were more likely to prefer setting, but that those in lower sets tended to prefer mixed ability teaching. This contrasts with the finding from St Michael's, where those in the lower sets were likely to prefer the security of the smaller sets. It is possible that size could have been a feature here. However, a common finding between the two studies was that appropriate level of work was an issue in the preference for sets and that teacher skills and personality were a reason for pupils' preference for a particular set. Their finding that pupils did not necessarily see being in the top set as desirable was also reflected in St Michael's.

Discussion about 'pace' as the main differentiation between the teaching in sets is discussed in various studies (Boaler, 1997, Oakes, 1982 & 1985) that suggested that top sets were subject to faster pace, more urgency and higher expectations than lower sets. There is also criticism of the lack of differentiation within sets:

> *'In a settled, class-taught, textbook lesson, the lesson structure ignores the individual needs of the students, which means that any individual who deviates from the prototype model student is disadvantaged.'*
> *(Boaler, 1997, pp172-3, cited in Sukhnandan & Lee, 1998)*

This was noted in the staff interviews, where the response to difference within sets was to expect smaller and smaller groups to obtain some

homogeneity within the group. However, observations suggested that those staff with more interventionist beliefs did make some accommodation for individuals, as long as there was some return from the student.

There is a dilemma about the comfortable cocoon of being in the smaller bottom set, with its suggestions of cosiness and nurturing, against the lack of confidence expressed about being taken out of this situation. The concerns over the attitude of the higher achievers to collaborative working and the social isolation of the lower achievers, which have implications for the community within the school and beyond, have to be set against the positive affects on self-esteem of the referent group. To a certain extent this reflects the findings of Humphrey and Mullins (2002) and Thomson and Hartley (1980), as well as the wider argument about segregation versus integration. However, the commitment to ability grouping within private schools constitutes a potentially significant barrier to developing a more inclusive, as opposed to integrated, provision.

Professional envy and power relations relating to the role of SENCO

The role of the SENCO has been seen as a portmanteau role, although within the state sector it has gained more recognition with the increase in legislation and statutory requirements (Wearmouth, 2002). Increasingly, in state secondary schools, SENCOs are positioned as part of the management team, providing certain status and credibility, although Blandford (2004) commenting on Ofsted's recent publication '*Towards Inclusive Schools',* considers that 'SENCOs are rarely trained, either as experts in SEN or as managers' and argues for more support and training. However, the situation in private schools is even less clear-cut, with some schools appointing SENCOs without a clear mandate, and often without any explanation to the staff. It is then left to the individual to develop the role according to the school setting and their own personal philosophy. Where the department has no clearly defined status, there can be issues

of power conflicts between subject teachers and support teachers; accusations of 'empire building' have been quoted, and there is also evidence of what Richards (2004) has described as 'professional envy', where the work of the learning support department is seen as a soft option, mainly based on the pupil-teacher ratio and not requiring the same degree of professionalism as subject teaching. One way of overcoming this is for the support teacher to have another (mainstream) role in school in order to build credibility, not only with staff but also with pupils, who see the individual as a 'real' teacher. This, however, detracts from the time available for the main role.

Thomas et al (1998) in an overview of studies of different patterns of support for inclusion suggest two models: coordination and advice or in-class support. The first, based on the work of O'Brien and Forest (1989) in Canada, advocates 'inclusion coordinators' whose role is to

> *'act as intermediary between family and classteacher, preparing and advising both parties, but steering classteachers in the direction of making their own assessments of the child's strengths and weaknesses, rather than relying on that of specialists'.*(Thomas et al, 1998:28)

Opposed to this is the role of the support teacher working alongside the classteacher. Best (1991) characterises the ideal class teacher/support teacher relationship as '*based on mutual trust and perception of equal status, long experience of each other's ways of working, excellent two-way briefing and planning and constructive evaluation of each lesson*'. In St Michael's, the latter applied to the Maths in-class support, but mainly because the roles were clearly defined and there was no challenge to the authority of the subject teacher, whereas the SENCO appeared to function best in the former role within the establishment, although she would have preferred to take on both mantles. This is more in line with the findings of Thomas (1992) who reflected on the personal and professional tensions created by support teaching. Although he was looking mainly at the role of LSA's, this was clearly an issue with the SENCO and emphasised the

need for a clear definition of the SENCO's role, especially in a setting where observation and collaborative working are not yet the norm.

Evidence from a variety of studies (Clark et al, 1999; Avramidis et al 2002) has suggested that one of the most effective ways of changing teachers' beliefs about inclusion is through experience in collaborating with colleagues, such as resource teachers, in working with students with disabilities and modelling best practice. Unless this collaborative role can be encouraged, the culture of autonomy within the classroom and resistance to the presence of outsiders is likely to present barriers to change in beliefs that could then be reflected in practice.

The role of the management in supporting this change is pivotal. There was no doubting the good intentions of the Head and his immediate team in St Michaels, but this had not been negotiated with the staff and the SENCO felt strongly that her position had not been explained, let alone negotiated. Shaughnessy and Jennifer (2004) in an evaluation of the implementation of an anti-bullying programme found that schools most able to cope with change have 'an open management style and are prepared to involve the children in their decision-making'. They identified three models of readiness to implement change: 'the Circular Model, the Corkscrew Model and the String Model', (ibid: 6). In many ways St Michael's could be seen to fit their ideal Circular Model, except in the aspect of communication between staff and management in development of shared priorities and reducing professional isolation. This resonates with theories of educational change, where change is considered more likely in schools where

> *'Individuals work in organisations which enable them to explore the meaning of change, where meanings are shared with other individuals and where, therefore, a genuine cultural transformation takes place.' (*Clark et al, 1999: 167)

Leroy and Simpson (1996) using a model presented by Knoster (1991), reproduced below, suggest that a combination of 'vision, skills, incentives,

resources, and action planning ' is required for successful implementation of change, and that neglect of any one component can produce barriers. In private schools where the only motivation for change is external and vision is missing, the confusion outcome is most likely. However, in St Michael's the head had the vision, or at least commitment, but incentives and action plan were missing. If the action plan includes communication, then this was certainly a barrier in St Michael's but the model does not sufficiently fit the case to account for contradictions such as the desire for professional reassurance and advice against the resistance to the use of differentiation or lack of interventionist perspectives in the case of the 'wrong sort' of difference.

Fig12.

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	≡ CHANGE
	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	≡ CONFUSION
Vision		Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	≡ ANXIETY
Vision	Skills		Resources	Action Plan	≡ RESISTANCE
Vision	Skills	Incentives		Action Plan	≡ FRUSTRATION
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources		≡ TREADMILL
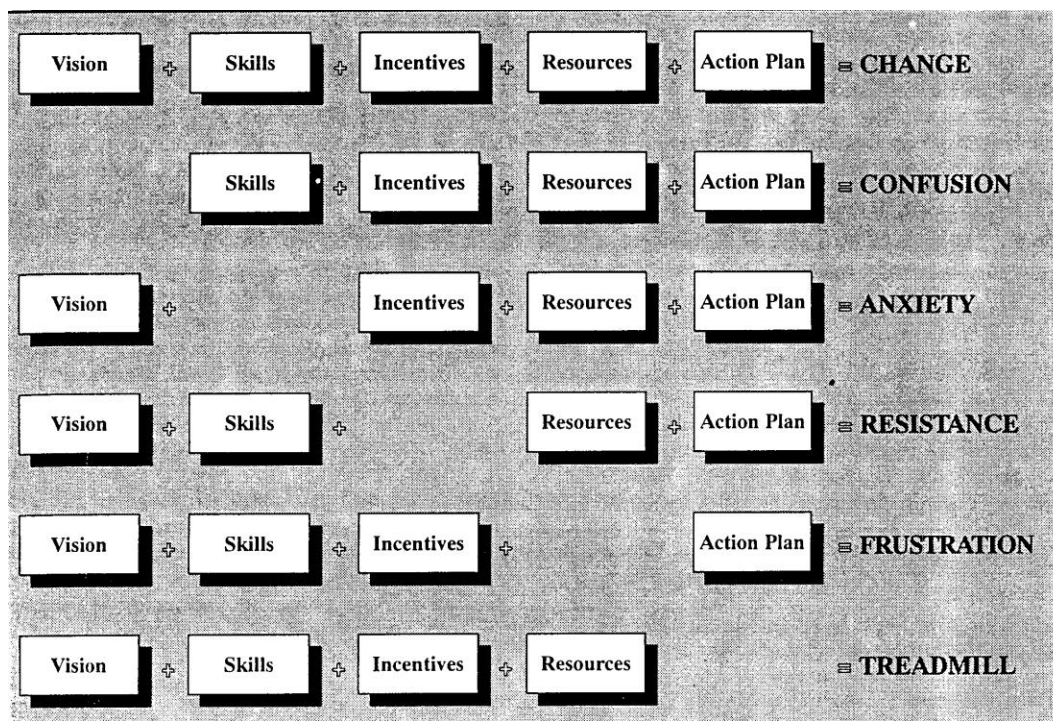
- Adapted from Knoster, T. (1991) Presentation to TASH Conference. Washington, D.C.
  Adapted by Knoster from Enterprise Group, Ltd.

In their ESRC sponsored case study of four secondary schools and their response to diversity, Clark et al examined a number of theoretical explanations for dilemmas over the response to diversity. They questioned the theory of a change process that over time leads to 'an increasing consensus around new practices' (1996: 167) as in one school that had been working for over ten years towards a more inclusive ethos, there was

still evidence that not all staff were in sympathy with the ideal. In St Michael's, the appointment of new younger staff with a more inclusive belief was a step on the way to change, but the need to influence more established teachers had not been addressed. This could be related to conflict perspectives (Clark et al, ibid: 169) where it is suggested that it is unlikely that the different factions and interests within a school are likely to reach consensus. Fulcher (1989) suggests that this is the reason that externally imposed reforms do not necessarily lead to changes in practice at the micro-level, but requires a constant struggle between supporters and opponents of change; *'there are struggles between contenders of competing objectives, either about objectives, or about how to achieve them…'* (1989:11) Jordan & Stanovich (2003), in contrast, suggest that '*where the staff of a school has a majority consensus, the beliefs seem to take on the characteristics of a cultural school norm'*.(ibid, 8 of 14). However, Clark et al's final theoretical explanation, the 'dilemmatic perspective', with its suggestion that education is essentially characterised by a series of unresolved dilemmas, is perhaps most suited to the situation in regard to private schools, who have to attempt to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable pressures. Some of these are examined next.

Conflicts and dilemmas

The existence of conflicting pressures through the twin demands of SENDA and a growing awareness of inclusive ideology on the one hand, and a need to maintain or improve standing in the various league table on the other, was predicted at the outset. Interestingly, it did not feature strongly in the staff interviews, although it was an issue in discussion with key informants about admissions policy. Parental pressure, though, was a significant issue and was often used as rationale for not introducing more inclusive practice: '*our parents wouldn't like that...'* The perception is that parents are buying in to a traditional education, and also making a conscious choice to opt out of the more inclusive state system and there are fears about alienating them through making changes. However, there are also pressures from parents of children with special educational needs

who feel that the smaller classes and traditional 'caring' ethos of the school will be of benefit to their daughters. In discussion with the focus group, one SENCO talked of her opinion that the school was denying the equal opportunities by accepting pupils with additional needs who did not meet the entrance requirements of the majority of the pupils and not considering possible effects on self-esteem. Although this was not so evident at St Michael's, it links to the issue of the 'ideal dyslexic' and the strain placed on the student to maintain this persona. Peer and Reid (2002) talk of the danger of the pressures felt by staff to achieve results being transferred to learners and the consequent stress on pupils with special needs.

There is conflict evident also between the school's stated emphasis on the importance of the individual and the prominence given to achievement, particularly in external examinations. Success was judged in terms of examination results, and it was noticeable that opinions of Lottie began to change in the light of her favourable SATs results. The emphasis placed on small class size which has been recorded as a significant factor in the choice of private schooling (West & Noden 1998) was threatened by the creation of ever smaller bottom sets to create a homogeneous group and the consequently larger middle and top sets.

There is a dilemma for the Individual Needs department over whether to cater for the individual through 'identifying, assessing and meeting the special literacy needs of individual students' (Wearmouth, 2002) through withdrawal system, or through liasing with staff to assist in improving the environment in the classroom.

Some dilemmas were apparent at the school level, whereas others were related to individuals. For instance, for some of the younger staff or those with more interventionist beliefs, there was a conflict between their concerns about the principles of ability grouping and the pragmatic argument that they felt it made their job easier. For others, there was a

conflict between professional reflection and a desire for feedback on their practice versus a wish to retain autonomy in the classroom.

There is a certain irony in that before the advent of league tables, and a more overt comparison, not only with rival private schools but also with neighbouring comprehensive schools, less academically selective but socially acceptable private schools would have been more inclusive academically, although not socially – although perhaps integrated rather than inclusive. Many of these schools have now found themselves in the position of having to compete with schools in the maintained sector and to focus more on measurable attainment, which has led to a greater emphasis on academic selection and a reluctance to accept students who might compromise their position. This has led to greater pressure on those schools who advertise their willingness to accept pupils with learning difficulties and the unwelcome label of 'being known for special needs, which in turn deters parents seeking a more academic profile, and potentially changing the character of the school. This in turn can alienate certain members of staff who are not in sympathy and are tempted to move elsewhere.

Private schools can do inclusion on their own terms; if the student fits the template of the ideal student, every effort will be made to ensure their success and an interventionist perspective is more likely to be adopted. However, if the student doesn't play the game, it is a different matter and there is a tendency to return to the pathognomic stance of placing the responsibility firmly 'within child'. The ingrained reliance on ability grouping makes full inclusion and differentiation less likely. Pressures on staff to demonstrate success through the measurable targets of exam results create conflicts and reduce satisfaction – although intensified in the private sector, this is also increasingly a problem in the state sector, with the growing reliance on League Tables.

Chapter 7   Conclusions and recommendations

Reflection on suitability of methods

The discussion over the choice of naturalistic inquiry versus grounded theory in Chapter 4 concluded that the deciding factor was the proposed outcome for the study. Grounded theory seeks to develop categories with more general analytical frameworks that have relevance outside the setting of the research, whilst naturalistic inquiry seeks to produce a rich account of the case that can lead the reader to judge the relevance of the study and its conclusions to their own situation. Within a symbolic interactionist perspective which acknowledges the possibility of change in institutions, the use of grounded theory methods within a naturalistic case study has allowed the researcher to go beyond a descriptive study to propose a set of barriers to successful development of inclusive practice that would need to be considered in any private school setting and is likely to feature also in schools within the wider maintained sector.

The use of a 'bricolage' of methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) within a single case allowed for a range of perspectives that uncovered a more complex reality than might have emerged solely from the interviews that formed the core of the study. For instance, a discourse analysis of staff references to the Set 3 group in the case study school might have led to the conclusion that the constant references to 'weaknesses' and the use of collective descriptions of the group implied a failure to acknowledge the individuality of the students. In contrast, participation in the lessons, together with conversations within the interviews with both staff and pupils showed a considerable concern for individual needs and differences. The use of narrative interviews allowed for a richer data than would have been possible with questionnaires or surveys, but the voluntary nature of participation meant that some dissenting views could have been missed. Ethical constraints prevented the following up of issues that could have been significant; for instance, it was suggested that the end of year reports

would have revealed a great deal about attitudes of staff, but it was not considered ethical to access these without specific consent from both pupil and all members of staff, which would have been unworkable.

Limitations

One of the disadvantages of an emerging study is that it is difficult to control. Some critics have described such studies as 'self-indulgent' and lacking the rigor of a hypothetico-deductive study. However, the counter to this is that the problem/issue has arisen directly from the situation studied and from the participants, rather than any preconception about findings. One preconception acknowledged by the author was an expectation that the findings were likely to be critical of current practice; the study has modified that view and shown a much more complex situation.

Inevitably, there are always more layers that could be uncovered; for instance, one limitation of focusing on the third set was that the effects of larger group size on Set 2 could not be observed.

The role of parents emerged as significant both in pressure on staff and an excuse for postponing change, and also in the support for the 'successful' dyslexics. It would have been helpful to have their perspectives, although both access and sampling could have been difficult.

It was unfortunate that more response from the focus group was not forthcoming, as it would have added a degree of external verification. In retrospect it was probably rather optimistic to expect enthusiastic participation from SENCOs who are under considerable pressures on their time, although in principle they had expressed an enthusiasm for the sharing of information.

Finally, it should be noted that this research is time-bound. There was a suggestion in the evidence from the interviews that there had been a shift in thinking at St Michael's since the appointment of the new head and of

new, younger staff. Given that the Head's aim was to make the school more dyslexia-friendly, a similar investigation in a year's time could reveal a change of attitudes, although it is likely that the conflicts and dilemmas would still remain, just with a different balance. It seems unlikely also that the exclusion on entry of those who do not fit the pattern of the 'right sort of dyslexic' will have changed. An examination of the pattern of applications and acceptances would be illuminating here, but it is unlikely that such an investigation would ever be considered acceptable.

Significance

Despite these limitations, the significance of this research can be seen as a critical case of 'what could be' (Schofield, 2000:84). Studying the situation in a school that is in the process of change and representative of a certain sector of private education provides a microcosm of issues both in schools in similar settings and also in the wider educational climate. Goodson (1999, cited in Wellington, 2002:182) advocates the researcher's role as 'moral witness' or critical commentator on initiatives and developments in education, in this case the development of inclusive ideology, while maintaining a critical distance from events and policies. Mortimore (2000) similarly suggests that researchers should 'ask difficult questions' and 'speak up for what we believe is right'. (in ibid:182) In an era when 'political correctness' can limit debate about new initiatives and ideologies, study of practice in private schools allows for a less inhibited response on one level, which could indicate underlying currents in the maintained sector – or a complete contrast in philosophy between the two sectors.

Implications - what can be done?

The findings from this study suggest that the role of the SENCO within private schools should be clearly defined following negotiation with staff in order to develop shared aims and common definitions to facilitate discussion. Improving communication and cross-fertilisation of ideas about inclusive practice through observation and co-operative teaching could

counter the effects of anxiety and isolation. There was a noticeable desire for feedback on teaching and a degree of professional reflection that was not being developed; to a certain extent this is a product of the comparatively small size of private schools that means that departments may have only one or two members of staff to share ideas with. The findings related to pupil perceptions of good practice would provide a good basis for discussions.

It is unlikely that private schools will be persuaded to abandon ability grouping, but there are ways in which the negative affects could be reduced, through more use of social and heterogeneous grouping for non-academic subjects and awareness of the barriers to movement between sets, to avoid the slide from setting to streaming.

Perhaps most importantly, the issue of the pathognomic attitudes towards pupils who do not conform to the pattern of the 'good' dyslexic or pupils with SEN, as well as the strain imposed on those that do, needs to be aired. In the meantime, there is a role for the SENCO in providing guidance in building relationships with staff, as advocated by Johnson (2004), as well as fulfilling the role of advocate for these pupils.

Ideas for future research

The issue of the interaction between the 'attractiveness' of the pupil and the teachers' beliefs about the situation of difficulties merits further investigation, as does the relationship between stress and maintaining a 'good' response.

A survey of the diversity of the role of the SENCO in private schools and how it is constructed by other members of staff would indicate whether the issue of professional envy is general in the sector or specifically related to the way in which it is introduced.

Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that the task of moving a school to a more inclusive community is considerably more complex and messy than is suggested in much of the literature. Similarly, the introduction of dyslexia-friendly practice is not simply a matter of changing practice but of influencing teachers' beliefs about the nature of disability. In order to bring about such changes, there is a need for greater collaboration, but the culture of a private school can present significant barriers to such collaboration, including:

- The culture of autonomy in the classroom and suspicion of collaborative work;
- A high level of dependence on ability grouping;
- Power relations and lack of clarity about the role of the SENCO;

The starting point for this research was whether private schools and dyslexia-friendly practice were mutually exclusive concepts. The data suggest that a private school could be dyslexia-friendly if the pupils' own definitions of helpful and unhelpful practice are used as the criteria, rather than the more instrumental criteria of the BDA/DfES guidance.

Where it breaks down is when the student's profile is not attractive to the school and requires effort in catering for their different needs. Those that 'fit' the school's template can be included, but those who might benefit most in the long term are likely to be rejected at the outset, because there is no obvious reward for the school or staff. Those who are accepted but subsequently fail to conform to the blueprint of the 'good' student may be more vulnerable to developing low self-esteem. And yet we are talking here about a generally conscientious, caring staff in a 'good' school – what are the implications for those in a less fortunate position?

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Appendix A   IFS – First level coding

Perceptions of study
- Staff
  - Role play
  - Stereotyping of Y9
    - Passing comments
- Pupils
  - 'Hang out'
  - wanted fuller participation

General concerns at beg of year
- relationships
  - peer pressure
  - competition
- work pressures
  - GCSE decisions
  - Expectations
- Environment
  - temperature
  - Food
  - Prep
- Lack of choices

concepts

Logistics
- Equipment
  - Access
  - Remembering
- Movement
- Laptops
  - Problems
  - Battery/power
- Interruptions
  - Music lessons
  - Fire alarms

Pupil reactions
- Common
  - Strategies
    - Multi-tasking
      - Doing other work
      - conversations
    - Task oriented
    - Avoidance
    - Creativity
  - Group dynamics
    - Rituals
      - sweet sharing
    - Mutual support
      - Seeking reassurance/confirmation
    - Competitiveness
      - Ratings/ranking
      - Comparisons
    - Marginalised
    - Solidarity of AES group
    - Consensus on bad teachers
      - Boring
- Individual
  - Sensitivity
    - over-reaction
    - external locus
    - Not fair
    - Reluctance to accept praise
    - Insecurity
    - Resentful
  - Presentation of self
    - Different in diff contexts
      - Academic
      - social
      - Subject specific
  - Attitudes to Support
    - Patronising
      - Comments

Teaching strategies
- Positive
  - variety
  - signposts
  - Setting prep early
  - Participation
  - Multi-sensory
  - Prompts/pre-empting problems
- Negative
  - Prep set late
  - putting down/teasing

Appendix B   Year Nine Questionnaire

A.   These are the issues that concerned me at the beginning of year:

		Agree	Disagree
1	Relationships		
2	Peer pressure		
3	Competition		
4	Work pressures		
5	GCSE decisions		
6	Expectations		
7	The working environment		
8	Lack of choices		

B.   These are the practical issues that prevent me getting on in lessons:

		Agree	Disagree
1.	Remembering to have the right equipment		
2.	Being unable to get access to the equipment		
3.	Moving around between lessons		
4.	Problems with laptops not working		
5.	Not having power for laptops		
6.	Interruptions for music lessons/fire alarms		

C.   These are the things I find helpful in lessons:

		Agree	Disagree
1.	Having a variety of activities		
2.	Using all the senses – see, hear do		
3.	Giving prompts/signposts about what is coming next		
4.	Anticipating problems and giving help if necessary		
5.	Setting prep early		

D.   These are the things I don't like:

		Agree	Disagree
1.	Teacher who are sarcastic or criticise publicly		
2.	Prep set late		
3.	Teachers who say 'I've told you once – why weren't you listening		
4.	Lessons that are' boring'		

E.   Do you have any support from AES?   Yes/No
If no, please go on to G.
If yes, how often?

F.   This is what I feel about AES lessons

		Agree	Disagree
1.	I resent having extra lessons		
2.	I did not have any say in having it		
3.	I find the work helpful		
4.	I find the work too simple		
5.	I find the teachers patronising		
6.	I would like to have a break and have help later if I need it		
7.	It is useful to have someone to talk through any problems with work		

G.   If there is any issue that you feel is important, please use the space below to tell me. If you think of anything later, you can put a note on the board outside the staffroom or send me an email.

Thank you very much for all your help.

Appendix C   Consent letter

To all parents of girls in Year 9

As part of a doctoral research project, Mrs Elizabeth Collins will be spending some time over recent weeks taking part in lessons with Year 9, looking at the experiences of the whole year in general and of dyslexic pupils in particular. The next stage of the research will involve informal interviews with girls and members of staff, parents if available, and use of questionnaires. The interviews with the girls are planned for the week beginning xxxx and will take place over the lunch breaks each day that week.

The girls have been informed in general terms of the reasons for the research. They will be invited to sign up if they wish to take part in interviews and have the right to refuse to participate whenever and for whatever reason they wish.

Every effort will be made to ensure that information is confidential; neither the school nor any individuals will be identified in the final report. Data gathering devices such as tape recorders will only be used with the permission of the girls.

If you have any concerns or questions about the research, Mrs Collins will be happy to discuss the project in more detail. She can be contacted either via a message at the school or by email: lizcollins@catdev.com.

Basic letter was topped and tailed by each school.

Appendix D   Comparison across studies

	St Martha (insider)		CMC	St Michael (outsider)			BDA pack	MJ (2004)
	Obs	Qu	KT	Obs	Int	Cath	BDA	
Positive								
Variety of activities	√			√				
Multi-sensory	√		√				√	√
Use of prompts/signposts	√						√	√
Anticipating problems/giving help	√			√	√			
Setting homework early	√			√				√
Appropriate homework					√			
Active involvement			√	√	√			
Relevance			√					
Being treated as individual					√			√
Fun/humour			√	√	√		√	
Enthusiasm for subject			√		√			√
'Referent peer group'					√			
Praise/feedback				√	√			
Patient					√			√
Allow time					√			√
negative								
Irrelevant activities			√	√				
Put downs	√			√				√
public criticism	√							
homework set late	√							
'I've told you once already – why weren't you listening?	√		√		√			√
'boring' lessons			√	√	√			
'patronising'		√*		√				
Not being consulted		√						
'shouting'					√			√
'favouritism'/bearing grudges			√		√			
Over-controlling/intervention			√		√			
Lack of control/choice	√				√			
Setting homework late	√		√					

Appendix E   Presentation Outline

St Michael's staff meeting - March 2004

1.   Research Topic

- Dyslexia friendly schools
- Implementation of change
- Process – barriers
- Private schools – why?
- Y9 focus

2.   Why St Michael's?

- Pilot study at St Martha's
- Target population – Y9 + girls + locality
- Opportunity – contact with Head
- Process of change started
- Potential benefit - feedback

3.   Provisional programme

- Interviews with key gatekeepers
- Introductions to Y9 and shadowing
- Informal contacts
- Attendance at meetings etc
- Individual interviews in Summer Term
- Feedback – July or September

4.   Ethical Issues

- Anonymity – use of pseudonyms
- Right to opt out – 'opt in' for interviews
- But 'opt out' in advance for classroom observations.
- Role in classrooms – observer or participant as desired – but not teacher.

NB. Not 'assessing' but observing.

Appendix F   Summary of data collected

St Martha's 2003 (School A)	Participant Observation	Group presentation (feedback)	Focus group (feedback)	
	Set 3 - whole year	19 in total: 6 on AES (sp needs) register	17 8 on AES register	
School B	CMC – individual pupil			
St Michael's 2004	**Participant Observation**	**Pupil interviews**	**Staff interviews**	**Y12 narrative interview**
	Set 3 all subjects Tutor time x 3 Assemblies	24 in total: 7 groups + 1 individual 4 on Individual Needs Register	12 teachers of Y9 Set 3 Discussions with key informants: Head Deputy Admissions Secretary Director of Studies Pastoral Head	Individual pupil

Appendix G   First level coding Case Study