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Portraits of school inclusion: a qualitative study of the

experiences of students labelled with severe learning disabilities

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Dedication

To the students: Bob, Bella, Lydya2, Elsa, James, Eminem, Horrid Henry and Thomas the Tank Engine at Special Secondary. I am grateful for all you taught me. I hope this thesis reflects and communicates your experiences effectively. I still think of you often and send my best wishes for the future to you all.

To my life-partner, Mikey: thank you for always believing in me. I doubt I would have applied for a PhD place without your example and moral support. This thesis owes much to your kindness, cooking, foot massages on demand and love.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my late brother, Bruce Vincent Harris, who died unexpectedly before my Viva. His photo has been on my laptop, accompanying me through this process. He too valued academic progress, and would have been very proud of my achievement. I had looked forward to inviting him to my graduation, but this dedication will have to stand in lieu of his attendance.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis explores the educational experiences of eight disabled students in one city in the North of England. It interrogates and updates current research and literature in relation to barriers to inclusion in mainstream schools, deriving from pressures such as the standards agenda (Alexander, 2010) and resulting in disabled students transferring into special educational provision (Tomlinson, 1982; Pijl et al., 1999). These students, labelled with a Severe Learning Disability (SLD), all started their education in mainstream schools but now attend a special school referred to as Special Secondary; they have a unique perspective on barriers having experienced them first-hand. It is one of the first to use a Portrait Methodology approach (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Bottery et al., 2009) with disabled students in England, contributing new participative methods to the methodology's development.

This study, underpinned by a conceptual framework joining the social model of disability with student voice, explores barriers to presence, participation and achievement (Ainscow, 2005:119), finding that special educational teachers and mainstream TAs played a more significant role in the social engagement of disabled students than agency or peers; although mainstream TA support allocation seemed linked to risk rather than educational need. One student had not been assessed for special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream; indicating that other unassessed disabled students might also be present there. It indicates that the low value of disabled students implicit within the normative standards of the English mainstream educational system (Slee, 2019) has evolved into an exclusionary discourse (following Harwood & McMahon, 2014) experienced by disabled students across their mainstream education. Choosing an inclusionary position requires educators to intervene through a commitment to professional love (Page, 2017; 2018) and ethical subversion (Morris, 2021). These findings problematize the mainstreaming of disabled students while normative standards persist.

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Copyright notice

Abbreviations

I have tried to avoid the use of acronyms where possible, but the following can be found in the thesis and are expanded here to aid the reader.

ECH   Education, Care and Health

ECHP   Education, Care and Health Plan

FSM   Free School Meals

LEA   Local Education Authority

PRU   Pupil Referral Unit (providing education for students while excluded from school)

SEBD   Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (no longer in official usage)

SEMH   Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs

SEN   Special Educational Needs

SEND   Special Educational Needs and Disability

SLD   Severe Learning Disability

SMT   Senior Management Team

TA   Teaching Assistant/Classroom Support Assistant

Chapter 1 Introduction

> *"I liked it at [mainstream secondary], but I like it here more. [Friends here have] been like a sister, and … brother"* Bella

> *"My mum said it'd be better and quite a lot of times I just want to leave [but] my mum won't let me"* Thomas the Tank Engine

This research is about the experiences voiced by eight disabled students[1] labelled with a Severe Learning Disability in the North of England; hence I am starting with their voices. These students began their education in different mainstream schools where they encountered barriers to their inclusion in mainstream educational settings. Due to these barriers, and their reactions to them, they all moved to special educational settings and attended the same special school when we met, which I will call Special Secondary. This study is framed by the social model of disability and follows an inclusive education agenda. That is, I hold that inclusive education is a cornerstone of an inclusive society, and seek to understand what barriers to education have been experienced by disabled students, with the aim of improving inclusion for others. However, inclusion is by no means simple, and my perspective on education has become more nuanced as the study has progressed.

1.1   Personal background

I came to this research as a disabled adult (with bipolar disorder), but did not have a diagnostic 'label' in childhood and attended mainstream schools. While considered gifted and musically talented, I had difficulty with social interaction. Although I wanted to fit in, there seemed to be rules I did not understand and could not follow.

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[1] The description 'disabled students' is used here in keeping with the term 'disabled people', which is the preferred description used in the UK by organisations of disabled people. I use the term "students" to reflect the agency of the young people, rather than "pupils", which seems more passive.

My difficulties went without comment by teachers as my grades were very good, but made me stand out (unhappily) from my peer group. I was a target for bullies throughout school, subject to physical and verbal abuse and marginalisation. My family moved to North Lincolnshire when I was 12, where I was an outsider at secondary school not because of my difference but because I was not local. I made friends (particularly with other marginalised peers), but was not always able to tell if I was being manipulated. As an adult I am careful in my choice of friends, but have continued to experience marginalisation and being targeted in voluntary work and group activities. Studying for a MA in Ethnomusicology, I gained an anthropological perspective which helped me better understand interactions. My experiences were (and are) very different from those of young people labelled with SLD, but my own marginalisation and experience of barriers to inclusion (in keeping with the social model) has enabled me to engage with the voices of disabled students who may also have had such experiences.

Prior to this study, I carried out unpublished research with a mental health service user group, a local voluntary sector organisation and a Carer Research Group project before gaining a postgraduate qualification in Disability Studies. This led me to two research projects, working with disabled health professional students (Hargreaves et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2009; Dearnley et al., 2010a) and then with disabled National Health Service (NHS) health professionals (Dearnley et al., 2010b; Hargreaves et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013; Hargreaves & Walker, 2014). These led me to apply for the PhD scholarship which funded this research.

1.2   About this research

The students who took part in this research may share a label of Severe Learning Disability (SLD), but their differences and experiences were not uniform. Some chose to disclose physical and sensory differences, and some had spent time in hospital for surgery. Several students had previously had significant speech differences, which were no longer obvious but had impacted on previous school experiences. One student was labelled with autism, while another was waiting for an autism assessment. I mention these differences here not as a label, but as these factors may have further complicated the students' previous experiences in mainstream education. Access to personal information was limited to their Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) category and any transfer documents from their previous school (if they gave consent); so, there may have been other labels or areas of difference of which I was unaware. In accordance with the social model of disability, I viewed the students as young disabled people who have experienced barriers to education.

The aim of the research was to explore experiences relating to inclusion which were viewed as significant by disabled school students, in order to improve inclusive education for others. The research questions used here were:

1   What barriers to inclusion have been experienced by disabled students in schools?

2   What factors have influenced disabled students' experiences of inclusion?

3   In what ways have disabled students used their 'voice' in school?

1.3   The students

The eight students involved, with their chosen pseudonyms, were as follows.

- **Bob**, a 17-year-old, listed teachers and TAs among his friends. He had not been assessed for special educational needs until local Councillors became involved, due to the bullying he was experiencing at a mainstream secondary.

- **Bella**, a young woman of 17, transferred to the school's sixth form unwillingly. She had been happy at her previous mainstream secondary, but they felt unable to provide the level of support she needed. She missed her friends, but enjoyed school.

- **James**, a 15-year-old, had a best friend at the school but was also being bullied there. He had attended a special primary on a part-time basis from his mainstream primary before moving to Special Secondary full time.

- **Eminem**, a young man of 15, had been bullied at a mainstream secondary where he was part of a nurture group, and had also been in significant trouble there. He chose not to disclose a recent exclusion.

- **Horrid Henry** (Henry) was a 14-year-old young woman who seemed isolated. She had been bullied at mainstream primary to the extent that her family moved house, choosing to attend Special Secondary at the primary/secondary transition.

- **Thomas the Tank Engine** (Thomas) was a young man of 13 who did not yet have a close friend at the school. He had attended three mainstream primary schools before his mother chose Special Secondary, but had wanted to return to mainstream.

- **Elsa** was a 12-year-old who spoke in short sentences but could be direct. She had a few close friends in her class. She had not liked her mainstream primary. Her older brother attended a different special secondary, but she had chosen this school instead.

- **Lydya2** was a young man of 12 who had a significant speech difference at his mainstream primary. He had been excluded for behaviour, to a seclusion unit, and had transferred to a special primary school before this school.

Other students contributed to this research. Five disabled students from a mainstream school took part in a pilot for the research which helped to refine the new methods, and another three students participated in the focus group at Special Secondary. Their contributions assisted in the discussion which formed the groundwork for the interviews; but the personal reflections of these students were not included in the data analysis.

1.4 Outline of chapters

The **Literature Review** will set out the background to the development of this study. The social model of disability is explored, and how this is being used as "an heuristic device" (Barnes, 2003:9). I am defining disabled students as those who have a mind-body difference (Holt, 2004b) or a Special Educational Need including those with unmet educational access requirements which have not yet been formally recognised. The development of mainstream and special education, two separate state-funded educational settings in England for students with a recognised Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) (Department for Education (DfE), 2015) and debate around these will be scrutinised (Appendix A p.333 has a timeline). The contested nature of inclusion in education (Barton, 1997) will be examined. Four discourses within inclusion will be identified – Equality and Rights (UPIAS, 1974); Equal Resources (Dessent, 1987); Holistic Inclusion (Ainscow, 2016); and Protective Realism (Norwich, 2013) - which all have particular implications for disabled students.

The barriers experienced by disabled students will be assessed through dividing these into "presence, participation and achievement" (Ainscow, 2005:119). Barriers to presence have been identified as exclusion (formal and informal), the physical environment, and resources (which also impact on participation). Barriers to participation can be social (including bullying), classroom based and organisational. Barriers to achievement are presented by the curriculum and assessment. These barriers can be ameliorated or worsened through the intervention of factors such as agency; personal intervention; and group intervention.

The issue of student voice will be analysed, using the perspective of "students' voices" (in keeping with Messiou & Jones, 2015) in this thesis to reflect the diversity and individuality of students. The background to voice work will be explored including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 2004), together with how power relationships may constrain voice. Some of the challenges of (Chadderton, 2011; Thomson, 2011), and to (Young, 2000) student voice work are also addressed. There is a brief outline of voice as citizenship, "the prevailing concern" (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006:220) of voice work, but the focus in this thesis will be instead on voice as insight (Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015) and voice as personal and social identity (MacBeath, 2006). This thesis will use a conceptual framework of the social model with student voice; considering behavioural expression within this. The literature on the voices of disabled students will be explored, with a focus on behaviours perceived as challenging (Harwood & McMahon, 2014), as teachers' responses to these may be significant in the experiences of these students. These threads will be drawn together to identify the gap in the literature, and how this led to the research questions used here.

The **Methodology** chapter will first look at the ethical challenges of doing research with disabled young people. Portrait methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) will be explored as a research approach, and the approach chosen here (following Bottery et al., 2008) elaborated, with an outline of methods previously used in portrait methodology studies. The methods used here (introductory focus group, semi-structured sequenced interviews, use of participative tools, classroom observations and some non-classroom observations) will be examined for the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches, along with the use of a multi-method approach to triangulate information and address some of the methods perceived weaknesses. The use of a pilot stage will be looked at, and the lessons learned from this identified. The location of the study will be examined, looking briefly at its population.

Education here will be put into context against regional and national statistics. The school involved in the study will be described, while maintaining anonymity.

The **Data** chapter is the heart of the thesis, representing the data gathered in a written portrait of each student involved. Information in these portraits was gathered from a variety of sources, including a focus group, a sequence of interviews, and classroom observations of each student. These portraits were formulated using the words of the student wherever possible, and the draft portrait read to the student for any corrections, which were incorporated in this final version. Supporting information from a short interview with a Special Secondary teacher or TA nominated by each student and the Annual Review from their previous school follows each Portrait, with any research notes.

The **Analysis** chapter gathers together the data presented in the Student Portraits and supporting data in response to the three research questions, following Ainscow's grouping of "presence, participation and achievement" (Ainscow, 2005:119).

The **Discussion** will reflect on the patterns identified and relate these to the literature, highlighting new information which has emerged from the study. Disabled students not being valued was not just integral to the normative standards forming the mainstream educational system (Slee, 2019) but also formed an exclusionary discourse which pervaded all areas of students' mainstream experiences. The best defence against this discourse was a supportive student/teacher or student/TA relationship.

A final **Conclusions** chapter will consider the strengths and limitations of the current study, what the evidence presented can support and what further work might be suggested to continue looking at these issues. The **Reference list** follows this, and the thesis finishes with the **Appendices**.

Appendix A p.333 presents a timeline of inclusion history, including legislation, significant publications, and changes in focus. **Appendix B** p.336 provides the ethical approval documentation for the project and is followed by **Appendix C** p.350, which presents the research documents for the project – the Focus Group and Interview scripts. **Appendix D** p.358 contains colour materials such as posters used in the Focus Group, examples of participatory activities completed by students and materials relevant to the data analysis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will set out the current knowledge around the issues that will be explored in this thesis, and how these have influenced the choices I have made in this research. This thesis uses as its conceptual framework a blending of student voice with the Social Model of Disability; a joint approach well embedded within the field of disability studies (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007) but appearing less frequently within education (e.g., Connors & Stalker, 2003; 2007) where student voice has been widely used within a range of different philosophical and political perspectives (Fielding, 2011). This approach has been amended slightly by adding a consideration of behavioural voice; which is not usually considered in such studies but is particularly relevant here, with disabled students perceived to express themselves in ways which are seen as challenging. The social model underpins the approach I have taken here; viewing disabled students as a disadvantaged minority group who face barriers to educational inclusion which are the focus of this study. The development of the social model and its use within education will be explored, identifying who fits within the view used here of disabled students and the issue of neurodiversity. I look at the issues of impairment (referred to here as body/mind difference), how disabled peoples' experience varies and the role of agency. The challenges the social model could present for this research are explored, and why, given these problems, it is still worth using as "an heuristic device" (Barnes, 2003).

Unlike non-disabled peers, disabled students in England are educated in mainstream and special education, two separate educational settings, about which there has been considerable debate. Whether a disabled young person attends mainstream or special school can be viewed by their parents as "life or death" for their child (Runswick-Cole, 2008:176). Inclusion has been acknowledged to be a contested issue (Armstrong, 2005; Mowat, 2010; Armstrong et al., 2011; Mowat, 2014) but also a political issue, with the Conservative Party criticising an alleged "bias towards … inclusion" (The Conservative Party, 2010:53), which has been countered as no more

than "policy rhetoric" (Runswick-Cole, 2011). Within inclusion, different discourses emphasise different aspects or highlight different groups of learners; further complicating progress. Despite support for inclusion, various issues can present barriers to inclusion. Barriers to inclusion for disabled students have been explored (Rix & Paige-Smith, 2011; Van Asselt et al., 2015), but often identified by educators rather than by students, such as external pressures on mainstream schools (Glazzard, 2011). Bullying was the most significant barrier reported in the literature by disabled students. Barriers to presence have been experienced through formal or informal exclusion and the built environment. Resource issues present barriers to presence and participation. Social barriers to participation include communication and peer social culture. Barriers to participation and achievement are presented by external regulations and guidance, and experienced through the curriculum and assessment. Some issues can enhance inclusion, labelled as aids (Moriña Diez, 2010) or facilitators (Pivik et al., 2002; Purdue, 2009; Eriks-Brophy et al., 2012) but which I describe as factors; since these do not operate uniformly and might also increase the impact of barriers. Agency acknowledges the ways students themselves influence inclusion. Variations in classroom practice by teachers, teaching assistants and partners can reinstate barriers or improve experience. A positive school culture and a feeling of belonging can have a substantial impact on improving students' experiences of inclusion, as can peer networks.

Since this study focuses on students' experiences, the literature around student voice will be charted, as well as the challenges of voice work. Voice as insight is central to this study as without disabled students sharing their experiential knowledge, we cannot know whether efforts to improve inclusion are meeting this objective. Voice as personal and social identity outlines how students understand themselves and their social context and how disabled students expressed personal and social identity within the school context. Students' behavioural self-expression can prompt educational responses, within which three discourses

have been identified (Harwood & McMahon, 2014) which may lead to the informal or formal

exclusion of students. The chapter will conclude by summarising key issues, identifying gaps in

the literature and setting out how this material has resulted in the research questions asked

here. In order to establish terms of reference, I will move first to the social model of disability.

2.1   The social model of disability

Disabled people have criticised some researchers as "parasite people" (Hunt, 1981),

benefitting from disability research while disabled people's social disadvantage (in terms of

being found to be "socially dead" (Miller & Gwynne, 1972:9) by the researchers concerned)

continued. Due to this, to conduct research about disabled people[2] requires me to examine

the standpoint from which I undertake such research. This research is formulated from the

perspective of the social model of disability, viewing disabled students as a disadvantaged

minority group, "unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation" (UPIAS, 1974:3;

1975:3) within the statutory mainstream educational settings. Wholeheartedly accepting all

aspects of the social model as a philosophical position for this research would be problematic,

so I have chosen to use the social model as "an heuristic device" (Barnes, 2003:9). Having

addressed potential challenges, I will end by outlining why the social model still has utility and

relevance for research.

While the social model is not without its critics, it provides a clear perspective on disability

which allows for a shared understanding. The social model of disability was developed over

two decades, being first expressed by Paul Hunt (Hunt, 1966), formulated as a position by the

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[2] "Disabled people" is the term preferred in the UK by organisations of disabled people, as opposed to
people first language (e.g., "persons with disabilities"), preferred in other parts of the world.

Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (UPIAS, 1974) and finally given a

name by Mike Oliver (Oliver, 1983). The social model was created by disabled people as a way

to challenge the dominant social discourse; a problematic understanding of disability referred

to as the individual or medical model of disability. The individual model identified mind-body

difference as the cause of disability, locating the problem in the individual. This view of

disabled people as less valuable can be adopted by disabled people themselves as

"internalized oppression":

> Once oppression has been internalized, little force is needed to keep us
> submissive. We harbour inside ourselves the pain and the memories, the fears
> and the confusions, the negative self-images and the low expectations, turning
> them into weapons with which to re-injure ourselves, every day of our lives
> (Mason, 1990)

This individual or medical model required disabled people to adapt themselves to normative

standards to access social goods and facilities; for example, using crutches or artificial limbs in

order to be able to use stairs regardless of the length of time this might take or the pain and

tiredness this may cause. Any lack of access to the community is interpreted as a failure of the

individual to adapt. As a disabled person myself, I see the individual model as an instrument

used to justify the social and financial disadvantage faced by disabled people within capitalist

societies. The social model reverses the focus of the situation, viewing society as the problem

and separating difference (impairment) from social exclusion:

> we define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb,
> organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction
> of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little
> account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from
> participation in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a
> particular form of social oppression (UPIAS, 1975:20).

This does not deny that disabled people have differences or that these have an impact on

their/our lives, but seeks to unite people with a range of differences on common issues. While

these early definitions focused on body differences, reflecting the early membership of UPIAS

(Shakespeare, 2006), a wider range of disabled people are accepted as such today. The term

impairment is value-laden: "[f]or many this word symbolises social death, inertia, lack, limitation, deficit and tragedy" (Goodley & Roets, 2008:239). Following Holt and others, I will be using the terms "difference" and/or "mind-body difference" (Holt, 2004b; Holt et al., 2012) instead of "impairment" to reflect this (although the term will appear when quoted).

The social model was an early approach to disability research in England, but is by no means the only approach. Although the social model offers a unique and useful perspective, it has been the subject of criticism. While the social model unifies disabled people, its focus on shared social exclusion acts to minimise sectional experiences, such as discrimination due to race or gender (Morris, 2001). It also made discussion of mind-body difference problematic; for example, even acknowledging that interactional difficulties are "part of the disability as well as a barrier to accessing education" (Kempe & Tissot, 2012) risks (from a social model view) undermining the focus on barriers; even where research is clearly focused on these.

> Impairment is safer not mentioned at all; impairment has become a "dirty word".
> Our silence has introduced a whole range of taboos; a whole new series of
> constraints (Crow, 1992:3).

This became a site of conflict since "the majority of unpoliticised disabled people identify first and foremost via their particular physical impairment" (Shakespeare, 1993:256), a perspective challenged as "returning us to a previously discredited and sterile approach to understanding and changing the world" (Finkelstein, 1996:3). A "second wave" of disability studies (Deal, 2003), sought to re-centre the issue as "an aspect of disabled people's lives that can be theorized as part of a politicized vision of disablement" (Goodley & Rapley, 2002:134) and which cannot be whitewashed from disabled peoples' experiences (Davis & Watson, 2002). The social model lost ground due to its "rigid ideologies" (Shakespeare, 2006) and approaches like Critical Disability Studies (Goodley, 2013; Goodley et al., 2019) developed.

Critical Disability Studies goes beyond the constraints of the social model to acknowledge the full range of experiences of the diverse individuals collectively termed disabled people.

> Critical disability studies is a nascent field of scholarship and activism that explicitly engages with transformative fields of inquiry including queer, postcolonial, indigenous and feminist studies. Theories of affect sit at the intersections of these different spaces of theorisation. (Goodley et al., 2018:10)

Affect does not just incorporate the embodiment of our mind/body differences and associated experiences like pain, tiredness and nausea, but the emotional labour incurred by the impact of the social barriers we call disablism (Goodley et al., 2018). In many ways a critical disability studies approach is more adept at dealing with the subtleties and complexity of disabled peoples' experience; however, this approach lacks the sharp focus on organisational barriers of the social model. Individuals' experience of common barriers may be very different depending on where the individual sits in the network of multiple and/or simultaneous oppression or intersectional identities. Knowing how and in what ways barriers impact on different people is an essential piece of information in the pursuit of equality. The barriers that cause these experiences are less variable, however, which is why for this study focusing on what barriers have been experienced by disabled students, the social model of disability is the best tool. Although social model research has been criticized for ignoring the agency of young disabled people, viewing them as "passive social victims" (Davis & Hogan, 2004) through a focus on barriers; this would not seem to be true of research which features students' voices, demonstrating agency through their own narratives. In summary, genuine social model research does not focus on deficits, but rather seeks to address structural barriers which exclude disabled learners. To paraphrase UPIAS, disability within education is something imposed on top of difference by the way young disabled people are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in educational settings (UPIAS, 1974:3; 1975:3).

Additional layers have been added to the individual model / social model dichotomy to describe developments within education (Rieser, 2011). Originally disabled people were not educated, argued to constitute a "traditional model" (Rieser, 2011). Once all disabled young people had educational rights, the medical/individual model became relevant to education, with two subtypes models identified (Rieser, 2011). In Medical 1, if the student could conform to educational structures they were included, and if not, redirected towards specialist provision (corresponding with the medical model). In Medical 2, education provision was partially adapted, resulting not in inclusion but "integration", with the student:

> at same location but in separate class/units … socially in some activities … [or] in the class with support, but [the structure of] teaching and learning remain the same (Rieser, 2011:159).

Different types of integration could be identified within Medical 2, including:

> locational (on the same campus in different institutions), social (mixing for assemblies, lunch, play), or functional (in the same class with some support, but with the overall approaches to teaching and learning remaining unchanged) (Rieser, 2011:161).

Rieser also identified a social model, consistent with the social model of disability; where "staff, parents and pupils value diversity" and education is reorganised to remove barriers to learning (Rieser, 2012b:166). A social model perspective on schools would encompass different priorities, as Rieser notes.

> If, instead of focusing on differentness within the individual, the focus were on, for example, all children's right to belong and to be valued in their local school, then we would be asking 'what is wrong' with the school and looking at the strengths of the child. (Rieser, 2012b:162).

The current education system has not yet reached this position as barriers are noted to still remain (Alexander, 2010). This focus on value has been noted by Slee, observing that "high stakes testing programmes … [result in] a hierarchy of student value" (Slee, 2019:917).

While social model approaches are present within educational planning, some educational research appears to be firmly situated within a medical model perspective. There is a small but significant vein of education research prescribing interventions for diagnostic categories of disabled students such as autistic students (Banda & Hart, 2010). Such interventions are targeted at a medicalised label and behaviour perceived to be problematic rather than geared to the individual concerns of the student (who might not experience their behaviour as problematic) or looking at their current strategies (e.g., Ökcün & Akçin, 2012). In taking a medical model perspective, the intervention intends for them to conform with perceived normalcy (as argued by Ashby, 2010) rather than arguing for changes to expand school inclusion, as others have (e.g. Beckett, 2009; Beckett & Buckner, 2012; Shah et al., 2015).

The idea of a norm derives from statistics, where a standardised distribution is able to establish an average (or normative) range. The birth of normalcy has been argued to derive from the use of statistics on people (for example, height and weight) to establish parameters of a standardised (normal) person to facilitate mass production of items such as clothes, leading to the exclusion of statistical outliers (like disabled people) (Davis, 1997). Normalcy being inherent in how we understand the world (as the medical model was) it has been observed in schools; with disabled students refusing adaptions as they do not want to be seen as different (Allan, 1999b; 1999a; Ashby, 2010). There is an argument that normalcy is implicit within the concept of mainstream services, and as such the term "mainstream":

> continues to promote the ableist assumption that certain spaces will remain inaccessible to those disabled people who are positioned as not being able to be accommodated within the mainstream (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013:311).

While this thesis will use the term in referring to what are generally known as mainstream schools, this is a valid criticism; and perhaps a new description is needed.

In order to better interrogate this concept theorists started to focus on the characteristics of the normative discourse, using critical race theory to explore the issues of "ableism". Critical race theory has previously been used to evaluate the issue of racism, concluding that it is not atypical but is embedded within social culture; and the same position has been argued for ableism (Campbell, 2008a). An ableist position "constructs bodies as 'impaired' and positions these as 'Other': different, lesser, undesirable, in need of repair or modification and de-humanised" (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013). "Ableism is associated with the broader cultural logics of autonomy, self-sufficiency and independence" (Goodley et al., 2018:13) and has been argued to be intertwined with a neo-liberal agenda where work is prioritised, leading to "poverty and disability … being cast together as inseparable categories" (Goodley et al., 2014:982). There is some divergence between understandings of terminology, however. The term ableism has also been used to describe what was first called "handicapism", or as we would now understand the term, disablism (Connor et al., 2008), with both terms noted to be "used interchangeably" (Campbell, 2008a:152). This understanding would be supported by Barden, further qualifying ableism to be "the belief that non-disabled people are superior to disabled people; … disablism refers to prejudicial actions taken against disabled people" (Barden, 2021). However, from a social model position I would concur with Campbell that "[d]isablism relates to the production of disability and fits well into a social constructionist understanding of disability" (Campbell, 2008a:152); disability being constructed by exclusion. I would take interpret Connor *et al.* and Barden's understandings of disablism to refer to disability discrimination and disability hate crime respectively. While disabled people in England now have access to legal recourse to protect our rights through the Disability Discrimination Acts (and later the Equality Duty), to use them a person first had to demonstrate they were disabled before being able to proceed. This brings us to the thorny issue of who is considered disabled; and who I include within that definition here.

The question of how many disabled young people currently attend schools is a complicated

one, due to different definitions of disability. According to the UK Equality Act 2010:

> a person … has a disability if … [they have] a physical or mental impairment, and …
> the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [their] ability to
> carry out normal day-to-day activities (Equality Act, 2010).

Autistic people are also disabled, but their terminology is slightly different. This community

prefers to work with neurodiversity:

> a biopolitical category concerned with promoting the rights of, and preventing
> discrimination against, people who are neurologically different from the
> "neurotypical" (or the non-autistic) population (Runswick-Cole, 2014:1120).

Neurodiversity can extend to other non-autistic people with mind-body differences (Runswick-

Cole, 2014), but is consistent with the social model of disability, as autistics are both different

from the neurotypical norm and also disabled by society (den Houting, 2018). In keeping with

the preferences of the UK autistic community, I will be using "disability-first" terms here, as:

> language that separates a person's autism from their identity not only
> undermines the positive characteristics of autism but also perpetuates the notion
> that autism is an inherently 'wrong' way of being (Kenny et al., 2015:457).

In line with this, the terms "Autistic Spectrum Disorder/ Condition (ASD/ASC) have … 'medical

model' connotations" (Autism Education Trust, 2018:3) and will therefore not be used here.

In schools however, a second type of difference exists in through the labelling of Special

Educational Needs (SEN). These may be linked to a mind-body difference or be independent of

it, and indeed, some disabled students might not be assessed as having a SEN. Accordingly,

the current Code of Practice adds disabled students to those with SEN using the acronym SEND

(Department for Education (DfE), 2015), since both groups overlap and share a "substantial

and long-term" (Equality Act, 2010) impact. However, I would agree with Goodley that

differences are not fixed but are "a fundamentally social, cultural, political, historical,

discursive and relational phenomenon", with some disabled people having been redefined as non-disabled through the alteration of authorised categories (such as learning disability) (Goodley, 2001:210); and with differences such as dyslexia going unnoticed in a culture with poor literacy (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). This variability of difference has particular relevance for the learning disability label, since "[c]ontrary to popular opinion, IQ can be modified partially by social-emotional influences and therefore, it is amendable by education" (Ullrich et al., 2017:7). This is not always recognised in school planning and teaching due to a shared (but incorrect) assumption of "fixed-ability" which undermines any work to push beyond assumed boundaries (Marks, 2014). As both disabled and SEN-labelled students may be "unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation" (UPIAS, 1974:3; 1975:3) in school, I recognise both groups as disabled.

In addition to these two accepted groups (disabled students and students labelled with SEN), I suggest a third group - peers who have an impairment/difference which has not yet been recognised. It is clear to me from my previous work in Higher Education that school students may have a recognised difference of which they might be unaware. Within health professional education for example, a significant number of adults starting training are discovered to be dyslexic; with some nursing courses offering voluntary screening (Wray et al., 2012) to ensure students gain support promptly. As this is not a difference which is routinely acquired later in life, these students must have had undiagnosed dyslexia at school. Since disability support in school requires a lengthy process of recognition, referral and diagnosis, newly diagnosed adult students would indicate the presence of some disabled students in schools who do not receive extra support. Having established who I mean by disabled students, I return to the challenges presented by the social model for this research.

As noted earlier, some social model advocates have expressed uncompromising views which could have been problematic for this piece of research. A key issue in the school education of disabled young people in England is in the choice between two settings funded by the Local Education Authority (LEA): mainstream schools and special educational schools. When the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) first put into writing what was later termed the social model of disability, they stated the group's ambition "to have all segregated facilities for physically impaired people replaced by arrangements for us to participate fully in society" (UPIAS, 1974:Aims). Segregated facilities included special schools:

> as a group we are still often forced to put up with segregated and inferior
> facilities. We get sent to special schools, colleges or training centres … All these
> segregated forms of help represented progress in years past. But since the means
> for integration now undoubtedly exists, our confinement to segregated facilities is
> increasingly oppressive and dehumanising (UPIAS, 1974: item 2).

While the view of special education as "segregation" might seem controversial, the term was previously used in the verbal introduction to the Education Act 1944 (Lindsay, 2003:4), and other social model work within education has continued to use the term (Connors & Stalker, 2003:9; Rieser, 2008b; Nusbaum, 2013). Yet the work of UPIAS initially concentrated entirely on wheelchair users without sensory or cognitive differences (Shakespeare, 2006; Campbell, 2008b) whose only barriers to school were the physical environment and organisational barriers with UPIAS not calling for adjustments of curriculum or teaching (UPIAS, 1974).

Conversely, the Equality Act now accepts as disabled a wide range of people, including autistics; those with sensory differences; variable or deteriorating differences; learning disabilities and mental health differences (Office for Disability Issues, 2011). The Equality Act does not necessarily cover those labelled with SEN, acknowledging there is "a separate definition of special educational needs" (Office for Disability Issues, 2011:49).

While I had initially accepted a social model perspective uncritically, the term "segregation" holds a negative value judgement of special education. Embracing this term could have made access to special schools challenging, but my main concern was how this "might impose [my] own view of the social model on participants, and so dis-empower them" (Davis & Hogan, 2004), undermining students' narratives. I needed to decentre the concept of segregation, to better engage with students' own views. The answer came from the social model itself. In amongst the debates around the social model, it has been argued to be merely "an heuristic device" (Barnes, 2003:9): a tool used to describe one perspective, rather than a complete social theory of disability. From this view, it could be argued that the social model is not exclusionary of itself, but that the root of any exclusion might lie in how the device is operationalised. This offered a social barrier perspective without an unnecessarily value-laden agenda, and it is this view I will take here.

Having carefully considered these issues before using the social model, it might be asked why I would use it. The key element of the social model, its focus on social barriers to inclusion, is crucial in understanding the challenges inherent in educational systems faced by disabled students. No other theory prioritises the focus on shared barriers faced by disabled people over their experience of difference. The students in my research might be labelled in a variety of ways, but using a social model perspective I view them primarily as disabled students in order to focus more closely on their experience of school. This may allow conclusions to be drawn that could be useful more widely. The social model is also prominent In Britain (Goodley & Roets, 2008) having been developed here (Odell & Disability Rights UK, 2019) and embedded in Government legislation and policy (Department for Education (DfE), 2015) through the involvement of disabled people. Through this and the work of social model educational researchers (Connors & Stalker, 2007; Stalker, 2012; Woods, 2017; Edmondson & Howe, 2019) and writers and activists like Richard Rieser (e.g., Rieser & Mason, 1990; Rieser,

2008a; Rieser, 2012a), the social model has permeated education. Research using the social

model feeds into this existing frame of reference, which may increase its utility. Having

established the reasons for using a social model perspective while avoiding value judgements

of educational settings, I will move to debates around inclusion in England and the implications

of these for disabled students.

2.2   Inclusion and its contested nature

> A serious engagement with the issue of inclusive education soon reveals that
> there are conceptual difficulties and slippage involved in defining what it is
> (Barton, 1997:232).

The term "inclusion derived or evolved from the practices of mainstreaming or integrating

students with disabilities into regular schools" (Graham & Slee, 2008:277), so it is unsurprising

that much inclusion research focuses on disability (Messiou, 2017) given these origins.

Accordingly, many uses of the term reflect adjustments which enable this, from admissions

criteria, simply locating disabled students within mainstream educational settings (noted by

Bishton & Lindsay, 2011), through adapting teaching content and methods (Rieser, 2011) to

finally dismantling structural barriers (Booth, 1996). Inclusion now embraces all students, for

example, "the presence, participation and achievement of all students" (Ainscow, 2005:119).

England was "the last major country in Europe to create a national education system" (Chitty,

1992:1), and the right to compulsory education in England for all disabled students (Clough &

Corbett, 2000; Ainscow, 2007) was granted less than 50 years ago (Education (Handicapped

Children) Act, 1970); 100 years after compulsory primary education for non-disabled students.

The English educational system compasses a multiplicity of educational settings; the two

settings relevant to this study are state funded mainstream and specialist or special education

for disabled students. The education of disabled people is viewed as a civil rights issue (UPIAS,

1974), with other categories of diversity; but only disabled students have a separate setting.

The progress to disabled students gaining access to English mainstream educational settings was lengthy, slow and iterative; with each law built on previous ones (explored in Appendix A p.333). In 1913 disabled children were pronounced to be "ineducable" (Wormald et al., 1914) in England; a value laden term indicating a medical model judgement that they were not able to access normative learning and which continues to be used in other countries (Miles & Singal, 2010). Students labelled with Severe Learning Disability were said to be the last group of disabled students to be admitted to schools (Black & Lawson, 2017), gaining the legal right to be present in special education in 1971 (Education (Handicapped Children) Act, 1970) after lobbying on the issue (Mittler, 2010); although the wording in the legislation could also cover challenging behaviour. With the Warnock Report (HMSO, 1978) students became identified with Special Educational Needs (SEN), indicating they needed help to access learning, but gaining the right to be considered for a mainstream placement subject to certain conditions (HMSO, 1978; Education Act, 1981). Her report engaged students struggling with learning for a variety of reasons (including poverty which she was not permitted to acknowledge) with SEN attempting to include these students (Warnock, 2010b). In the absence of a national curriculum (between 1944 – 1988) teachers had autonomy to adapt lessons to their changing class (Woolley, 2019). The *Education Reform Act* 1988 re-established a National Curriculum for all students. Although there have been others since, the 1988 Act had the largest impact on SEND by re-imposing these structures on schools; making it possible for school progress to be compared across schools and prioritising normative standards which made including disabled students problematic (Alexander, 2010). The National Curriculum resulted in cooperation being displaced for competition (Reay & Wiliam, 1999) as students measured themselves (and each other) against external standards (Marks, 2013). Normative standards devalued students who could not meet targets and their education became deprioritised with such students "dis-applied" and omitted from statistical returns (James & James, 2004). This caused a widening of the attainment gap between high and low achievers (Marks, 2014) and a growth in exclusions

(James & James, 2004). Finally, it was assumed disabled students would be directed towards

mainstream settings (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001).

While the numbers of disabled students in mainstream settings are rising (Broomhead, 2013c),

alongside their "presence" the issues of "participation and achievement" (Ainscow, 2005:119)

should be considered, as: "to include is not necessarily to *be* inclusive. To shift students around

on the educational chessboard is not in or of itself inclusive" (Graham & Slee, 2008:278) as

"overall approaches to teaching and learning" (Rieser, 2011:161) can exclude students.

> [I]nclusion involves two processes: increasing pupils' participation within the
> cultures and curricula of mainstream schools and decreasing exclusionary
> pressures. The latter process requires that schools alter their ethos and practices
> to ensure that all children are included as a right (Booth, 1996:14)

This focus, siting inclusion within school practice, has been echoed by the Government:

> Inclusion is about much more than the type of school that children attend: it is
> about the quality of their experience; how they are helped to learn, achieve and
> participate fully in the life of the school (Department for Education and Skills
> (DfES), 2004:25).

While this might reflect on the daily experience of students, it risks minimising the significance

of exclusionary factors deriving from legislation and guidance (Alexander, 2010), such as the

standards agenda enabled by the National Curriculum (Ainscow et al., 2006). This impacts

particularly on those disabled students who cannot meet normative standards.

> The greater the pressure to raise academic standards, the worse the fate of those
> who could never shine according to such standards (Warnock, 2010b:21).

Since inclusion is complex and multifaceted, it continues to be seen in different ways.

Inclusion writers have evaluated the normative culture we seek to include into (Graham &

Slee, 2008), the peripheral location of support (Niemi & Laaksonen, 2019) and of low-attaining

learners (positioned by hierarchical discourses of success (Benjamin, 2003)) within this

(Alderton & Gifford, 2018). A conflict of interest has been observed between inclusion and the reproduction of social marginalisation inherent within the school system (Slee, 2014), where the expansion of education to all young people "was designed to provide an inferior education, producing different educational opportunities appropriate to one's station in life" (Reay, 2017:30). Mandatory (but not universal) schooling was viewed "as an effective instrument of social control and change through which the dangerous classes might be made less so" (James & James, 2004:121) through social control and "containment" (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015:162), producing the concept of the "schooled" child. This argument continues today, with the educational system asserted to reproduce social class (Sullivan, 2001; Bourdieu, 2003; Ball, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2013; Slee, 2014) and ethnic discrimination (Tomlinson, 1982; Troyna & Carrington, 1989; Tomlinson, 2005; Aldana & Byrd, 2015). Tensions are also apparent between different approaches to inclusion. For example, when the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) moved from their initial focus on "disability or learning difficulty" (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), 2002) to widen their focus on inclusion for all, they noted their original definition was "still crucial on issues of disability equality" (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), 2002). It has been observed that a wider focus can undermine a commitment to disabled students (Dyson, 2001). Different inclusion discourses within the literature seemed to hold conflicting implications for disabled students. I will highlight a few examples here to further explore the tensions and their potential impact on disabled students. To do so, I will first turn to the origins and meaning of the concept of a discourse.

The term discourse was used by Foucault to describe how communication transmits social meaning, not merely describing experiences or situations but with a particular understanding of them implicit within the exchange. These understandings (or discourses) "conceal their own invention" (Foucault, 1974:49) in that this is not made explicit within the exchange but

communicated by way of phrases or concepts which allude to the underlying discourse and

can therefore pass without notice. In this way, experiences are:

> discursively (re)constituted within rationalist and scientific frames of reference,
> within the discourses of modern knowlege [sic], and thereby made accessible for
> administration and control (Best & Kellner, 1991:38).

This last section underpins the key to discourses, in that by their use we can discuss

problematic issues while shifting the responsibility for resolving them. For example, discourse

analysis has notably led to the uncovering of multiple ethical loads behind social exclusion

(Levitas, 1998), a term initially used to contextualise "those who fell through the net of social

protection" in France (Burchardt et al., 2002). This term arrived in the UK:

> in a political climate in which the existence of "poverty" was not recognized by
> Conservative politicians. The … terminology allowed debates about social policy
> to continue at a European level without offending their sensibilities (Burchardt et
> al., 2002:3).

Hence, poverty could be discussed using the term social exclusion, thereby implicitly moving

the responsibility for the situation outside government. Social exclusion continued with a

change of government (refocused to social *inclusion*), and some have argued that educational

inclusion is embedded within this agenda.

> Within the broader goal of "social inclusion" lies the educational inclusion project.
> In the 1990s and early 2000s, the "inclusion discourse" was one of the most
> powerful in education policy … evidenced by its status as one of the [Scottish]
> National Priorities ... This concern with inclusion can be seen partly as a natural
> progression of the principles of the Warnock Committee in relation to the
> expansion of mainstream education to more pupils, and partly as a response to
> the wider social inclusion agenda (Macleod, 2006:125-126).

Others argue that educational inclusion is "allied to, but not quite synonymous" with social

inclusion, and "linked to the wider standards agenda" (Dyson, 2001:27), suggesting that

location loses importance within a social inclusion frame.

> In crude terms, whilst the inclusion agenda focuses on presence and participation,
> social inclusion focuses much more on educational outcomes and, particularly, on
> the re-engagement of marginalised groups with learning, [wherever] ... that
> engagement takes place (Dyson, 2001:27).

This emphasises the importance of understanding what discourse is being followed. The first view of inclusion presented here is that of UPIAS. In aiming for all disabled students to attend mainstream school, it is underpinned by a discourse of equality and rights.

As noted earlier, UPIAS were the first in the UK to argue against a political and social culture of separate services and facilities for disabled citizens, including special schools (UPIAS, 1974). This asserted disabled peoples' right to equal citizenship, rather than competing with other marginalised groups over limited resources:

> whilst each fights for a slice of the cake, we are failing together to fight for the bigger and different-flavoured cake all of us need (Campbell, 2008b:12).

UPIAS initially argued for the funding for disability provision (including special education) to be used to enable the "equal participation" of disabled people within mainstream society.

> While any of these institutions are maintained at a huge cost, it is inconceivable that we will all receive in addition the full resources needed to provide us with a genuine opportunity to live as we choose. … As long as there are vastly expensive special schools … there can be no question of sufficient alternative provision being made to ensure that we all have a real opportunity of equal participation in normal educational, work and leisure activities (UPIAS, 1974: paragraph 11).

The work of UPIAS centred on "physically disabled" people but through the social model this approach has been widened to encompass all disabled people. Although I view this as its first assertion, a more inclusive version of this position is being used. This position fits with the "redistribution – recognition dilemma" (Fraser, 1995:70), explaining "redistribution and recognition as two analytically distinct paradigms of justice" (Fraser, 1995:70) conceptualised as "socioeconomic injustice" (Fraser, 1995:70) and "cultural or symbolic injustice" (Fraser, 1995:71). Socioeconomic injustice includes being marginalised from access to work and/or the financial means to live, demonstrated by 40% of disabled children in the UK living in poverty (The Children's Society, 2011). Action to address socioeconomic injustice would fit with the

redistributive egalitarian discourse (RED) of social inclusion (Levitas, 1998), in which resources should flow towards those excluded:

> the central problem is that the poor lack resources – not just money, but also access to collectively provided services; poverty remains at the core (Levitas, 2006:125).

This is complemented by cultural or symbolic injustice where one culture dominates while others are devalued and subject to "disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions)" (Fraser, 1995:71). Media portrayal of disabled people as scroungers and benefit cheats (Briant et al., 2013) and the rise of hate speech (Burch, 2018a) fit this description. Disabled students' identity is devalued by negative peer judgements (e.g. Griffiths, 2007; Beckett, 2014), social exclusion (e.g. Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013) and bullying (e.g. MENCAP, 2008; Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Margraf & Pinquart, 2016). Fraser's work echoes the concerns of disabled people's organisations and has gained much attention in disability studies, although she has rarely mentioned disability in her own work (Mladenov, 2016). Fraser suggests systems be restructured for recognition and redress, consistent with greater inclusion (Alexander, 2010; Preyde, n.d.) through discouraging what Booth has identified as "exclusionary pressures":

> I now think of integration or inclusion in education as involving two processes; the process of increasing the participation of pupils within the cultures and curricula of mainstream schools and the process of decreasing exclusionary pressures. (Booth, 1996: 35).

This quote effectively sums up the impact on disabled students. The discourse here would be to place disabled students at the heart of the inclusion process, reorganising educational structures and funding around them to facilitate their access. The next discourse also recommends the redistribution of special education funding to enable greater inclusion, but with very different implications.

In his argument for increasing inclusion, Dessent uses a utilitarian approach to argue for special school funding to be diverted to make the educational system accessible (Dessent, 1987). This idea, and his observation that only 2% of the 20% of students with SEN receive additional resources, might initially appear to reflect concern at structural barriers (Alexander, 2010) or supporting diversity (Ainscow, 2005) yet a different discourse is implied.

> It is not possible to argue that children with special needs should only be integrated within ordinary schools if the education of "ordinary" children does not "suffer" … Currently "ordinary" children *are* affected and might be said to "suffer" because of the fact that children *within special schools* receive more of the *overall* level of resources available to the education service (Dessent, 1987:19)[3]

The concern here is not to equalise access to learning but access to resources, as "providing more for [disabled students] necessarily entails less for … 'normal' children/'bright' children" (Dessent, 1987:54). To return to Campbell's cake (Campbell, 2008b), Dessent seems to call for non-disabled students to have the same sized slice as disabled students, differing from a social justice approach where disabled (and other disadvantaged) students need bigger slices to gain equal access (Fraser, 1996). While acknowledging that "resources … specifically earmarked for low status special needs are often diverted and redirected unless "protected" in some way" (Dessent, 1987:15); he seems not to perceive this as the logical outcome of his argument. This emphasis on resources rather than access marks the rationale behind the discourse to be one of redistributing limited resources, arguing that schools should take responsibility for financial decisions, rather than blaming them on SEN (now SEND) assessment:

> [w]hat is at issue here is not the need for more resources (essential as these might be) but the ethical decisions which have to be made about the way in which resources are distributed (Dessent, 1987:19).

Dessent does not seek to address disequilibrium (e.g., poverty or social class), arguing for unqualified school leavers, non-disabled and gifted students. He rejects calls for "smaller

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[3] Italics in original.

classes and the necessary resources" to teach all students, fearing that resources "cannot be

left solely in the hands of headteachers" (Dessent, 1987:58,59). His interest lies with Local

Education Authorities, observing that while Statements were intended for the "protection, as

Warnock intended, of resources for a small minority"[4], they guarded "*LEAs from providing*

additional resources for the larger numbers of children with special needs"[5] (Dessent, 1987:13).

This discourse presents a utilitarian position, focusing on "the utilitarian happiness of the

many" (Lewin, 2014:537), criticised by David Lewin for its use:

> in the face of harsh "economic realities" [and reflecting] a focus on objective
> criteria for determining the best consequences, in contrast to principled or
> ideological commitments (Lewin, 2014:537).

Lewin challenges the use of utilitarianism in education, asserting that conflict between citizens'

rights is artificial since education is social in nature. He uses the example of one Australian

teacher who felt unable to teach both the class and a disabled student (Lewin, 2014),

transferring the disabled student to a special school against their own and parental wishes due

to a utilitarian conjecture that "unjustifiable hardship to the rest of the class and the school

would be the consequence of enforced inclusion" (Lewin, 2014:540). This incident publicly

demonstrates that disabled students are less important (which is also consistent with

Dessent's argument); but we do not know what effects this had on disabled students or their

peers in Australian schools and for the social culture there. In line with Lewin's argument, the

next discourse focuses on school as a shared social experience.

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[4] Funding no longer follows all Statements and/or Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
[5] Italics in original.

Ainscow has written on inclusion extensively, summing up his life's work as focusing on:

> educational difficulties in terms of curriculum limitations, using the term
> curriculum in a broad sense, to include all the planned and, indeed, unplanned
> experiences offered to pupils. Thus in this perspective there is a concern with
> what can be learnt by the difficulties experienced by some children about the
> limitations of provision currently made (Ainscow, 2016:8).

This provides a holistic view of education as not purely focused on classroom learning but including the "hidden curriculum" of social interaction (Rietveld, 2010) and the experiences of students "who do not belong in a predetermined category and as such become marginalised" (Messiou, 2017:147). Ainscow critiques classroom practice of allocating TAs only to disabled students, contrasting examples where "another group of students in the same lesson had no support and spent most of the lesson talking" (Ainscow, 2000:77) with one where:

> the two partners [teacher and TA] had established prior agreements on … a way
> as to offer maximum support to all members of the class (Ainscow, 2000:78).

While such practice could potentially reduce access to learning for disabled students, Ainscow's concern highlights social as well as pedagogical experiences, observing that teaching assistants "can sometimes lead to barriers to the participation of some learners" (Ainscow, 2000:77), by disrupting interactions between teachers and students, and disabled students and their peers (Ainscow, 2000; Webster & Blatchford, 2013). This holistic view on inclusion reflects education as social in nature, where "the good of society and the good of the individual can be complementary" (Lewin, 2014:542), Ainscow arguing that this wider view "must incorporate the views of the learners themselves" (Ainscow, 2005:119). Disabled students face unique educational challenges linked with a "protected characteristic" (Equality Act, 2010). While previous discourses have focused solely on mainstream settings, an exploration of inclusion in special education (e.g. Shaw, 2017) forms part of the next discourse.

While the Warnock Report suggested more systematic mainstreaming of disabled students,

Warnock herself later argued that:

> instead of the simplistic ideal of including all children "under the same roof", we should consider the ideal of including all children in the common educational enterprise of learning, *wherever they can learn best* (Warnock, 2010b:13-14).

This rejection of the idea of universal co-location in favour of an individualised approach (also

hinted at by Davis & Watson, 2002) provoked a critical response (Barton, 2005). Warnock's

concern was in relation to vulnerable students, whose victimisation she saw as inevitable

(Warnock, 2010b). She noted that for disabled students:

> who suffer from feelings of exclusion within mainstream schools … the *feeling of belonging* … appears to be necessary both for successful learning and for more general well-being (Warnock, 2010b:14).

This position has been echoed by special educational settings describing their schools as

"inclusive" (Rix, 2011). Norwich takes a similar position to Warnock on this dilemma between

an idealised inclusive mainstream and the reality experienced by disabled students (Norwich,

2013), using the analogy of a hedgehog view (denoting one single perspective - ideological

purism) as opposed to a fox view (denoting a multi-layered focus – a more applied approach).

> [I]nclusive education … especially in its radical version is a hedgehog position, representing one big value and idea that provides security and purpose. For others, inclusion, or at least the long-standing values underpinning it, is one among many values that can come into conflict and present dilemmas; this is a fox position with which I align the argument in this book (Norwich, 2013:10).

Progress following a hedgehog view follows a pendulum swing from one position to the next,

with one position being validated as progressive and the alternative vilified with any opposing

views greeted with "silence" (Norwich, 2013) or moral outrage (Tomlinson, 2012), using the

social model of disability as an example (as noted earlier (c.f.Shakespeare, 1993; Finkelstein,

1996)). The fox view allows for a protective realism perspective, leading to "less than perfect"

and ethically challenging solutions:

> it is not about either/or, but both/and. … But, because values cannot sometimes
> live together we are "doomed to choose and every choice may entail an
> irreparable loss[6] (Norwich, 2013:10).

This does create challenges for disabled students, acknowledging that no perfect solution

exists but that we must all do the best we can with the situation presented us. The weakness

of this argument is that it does rely on every participant and partner to also do their best for

inclusion. In offering an acceptance of present reality, it might conversely support more

people to start from the level of inclusion they are currently operating, however imperfect.

While I find this discourse personally challenging, my own commitment to prioritise students'

experiences over my own beliefs and/or external values is consistent with Norwich's fox

perspective. Having explored examples of the many different discourses within inclusion, I will

turn next to the barriers experienced by disabled students, keeping in mind that

mainstreaming disabled students without removing barriers to learning does not produce

inclusion but integration (Alexander, 2010; Rieser, 2011).

2.3   Barriers to inclusion for disabled students

Disabled people are "unnecessarily barred from full participation in society", "isolated and

excluded" by elements we define as "barriers" (UPIAS, 1974). These "exclusionary" barriers

(Arthur & Zarb, 1995) are not uniformly experienced: variable in only affecting some disabled

people; or porous, "overcome" using "sufficient resources in the right way" (UPIAS, 1974:1).

Some barriers can be easily identified, for example broken lifts preventing access to school

(Davies & Contact a Family, 2008), while social or attitudinal barriers can have the widest

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[6] No final quotation mark for the quote appears in the text here.

impact (Arthur & Zarb, 1995). I would define educational barriers as challenges which block or limit disabled students' access to education. Different types of barriers have been described:

- "physical and social barriers" DPI 1982 (Oliver, 1996);

- "societal, material or environmental barriers" (Arthur & Zarb, 1995);

- "barriers of attitude, environment and organisation" (Rieser, 2008b); and

- "barriers in environment, communication, curriculum, teaching, socialisation and assessment at all levels" (Inclusion International, 2009).

Identifying types of barriers allows us to explore them, but risks minimizing or excluding others; for example, Inclusion International's list misses organisational barriers, particularly relevant in England (Alexander, 2010). I have chosen an open-ended typology to address barriers: "the presence, participation and achievement of all students" (Ainscow, 2005:119). I will explore specific barriers where relevant within this.

2.3.1   Barriers to presence

In terms of barriers to presence, the literature focuses on barriers in the physical environment students' experiences of exclusion; and competition for resources. In the early fight for inclusion for disabled students in England the physical environment presented the most significant barrier to presence; excluding wheelchair-users from mainstream schools (UPIAS, 1974). Within the UK, the Equality Act (Equality Act, 2010) requires schools to be fully accessible; however inaccessibility returns when lifts break down (Davies & Contact a Family, 2008 (Wales)). Inaccessible doors and corridors are a concern in Canada, with lifts requiring a key held by one specific staff member, and the arrangements for fire drills (when lifts do not work) reported as "extremely frightening" by students (Pivik et al., 2002:101). Access to the built environment is still a barrier for students across the world (Fidzani & Mthombeni, 2009 (Botswana); Almeida et al., 2015 (Ghana); Ackah-Jnr & Danso, 2019 (Brazil)), due to a lack of

resources. While the physical environment has improved, the choices of school available (for example, to Deaf students) are limited (Davis & Hogan, 2004). Opposition by parents of non-disabled students has influenced English primary school decisions not to admit disabled students (Glazzard, 2011), especially relating to behavioural issues (Bottery et al., 2008). Despite guidance advising against excluding students with SEN statements (now ECH Plans), in 2014 these students were "eight times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers", comprising 79% of those in Pupil Referral Units (Ambitious about Autism, 2014:10). The intersection between SEND students and those subject to disciplinary exclusion "is so great that to consider them separately is to misunderstand practice and the policies required to minimise exclusion" (Booth, 1996:27).

In addition to formal exclusion from school, disabled students are also subject to informal and unlawful exclusions by some schools, due to "the school's inability to respond adequately" to their needs (Osler & Osler, 2002:35).

> Schools often present the situation as something that is good for the child – for example, "your child is distressed you need to come and pick him or her up."
> There may be … families who accept the situation and don't complain or ask for advice as they believe the school is allowed to do this (Contact a Family, 2013:6)

Informal exclusions affect 40% of young autistic people (Ambitious about Autism, 2014). A lack of school support has led to parents feeling forced to home educate; but since three quarters of home schooled autistic students have a Statement, such students lose access to (school-based) specialist support (Ambitious about Autism, 2014) alongside peer interaction.

2.3.2   Barriers to participation

The barriers to participation found in the literature appear to be social in nature. These include communication barriers, presenting well-established challenges for Deaf students, students with speech differences and those with literacy challenges, affecting not just their academic engagement but also their perceived social status. Peer social culture, which can prove exclusionary of itself, with disabled students attempting to pass as non-disabled or mask their differences and being at greater risk of social isolation. Finally, disabled students are more likely to be bullied than non-disabled peers.

Communication barriers exist for Deaf students (whose first language is BSL), students with verbal communication differences and those struggling with literacy. External partners, such as speech and language therapists, have been argued to alleviate classroom resource problems (Tollerfield, 2003); although schools in the UK have reported difficulty accessing such support for students (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2001). Deaf students have noted "a lack of opportunities to be included" in school life outside lessons and a corresponding absence of "disability equality awareness, mediation and advocacy" (Davis & Hogan, 2004).

Students with verbal communication differences are noted to be a diverse group; yet specialist communication units have previously only accepted students with this as their primary label, at a level requiring full-time speech support but without a learning disability or significant other difference (Lindsay et al., 2005). This is curious, given their diversity and since communication differences leave students "at risk of associated literacy difficulties … , poor academic attainments … and social-emotional problems" (Lindsay et al., 2005:89); which would seem to indicate a likely overlap of several differences. These linked differences can be

worsened by prioritising functional skills in education, as has been noted for American students with both communication and physical differences:

> [w]hen the life-skill/functional curriculum is adopted as the preferred option, … [e]xpectations for literacy are lowered even further, until eventually there are none (Zascavage & Keefe, 2007:40).

However, since "average and higher IQ may be helpful to compensate for deficits in language competency as well as auditory perception", limiting the curriculum may also actively reduce opportunities for students to gain improvement (Ullrich et al., 2017:7). Curriculum limitation has been ascribed to attitudinal barriers, where education planners "assume there is an equally severe intellectual disability" (Zascavage & Keefe, 2007:37); setting unrealistic goals for independent functioning while deprioritising literacy skills, which hold greater worth both socially and in employment (Zascavage & Keefe, 2007). I would add that merely having a severe intellectual disability, by itself, is not an insurmountable barrier to literacy. Mike Oliver has argued that counter to assumptions about people with learning disabilities, such young people may have skills which might not be valued (or evaluated) in school. On visiting a group home for people with learning disabilities in Holland, he found the roles reversed when his visit was entirely carried out in English; with:

> [a] monolingual senior academic from a University … reliant on six bi-lingual students who are labelled as having learning difficulties for a satisfactory means of communication (Oliver, 2000:9).

Such instances highlight that learning disabilities do not reflect an inability to learn.

Barriers to participation are also presented through teachers' concerns about including students with communication differences in mainstream (Marshall et al., 2002). Students labelled with ADHD were perceived more positively than those with communication differences and worryingly, teachers who had previous experience with these students felt less positive about their inclusion than teachers with no previous experience of them (Bornman & Donohue, 2013). Communication support in England has been mainly delivered via Speech

and Language Therapists in specialist units, and in mainstream schools via "indirect therapeutic work", where the therapist provides a programme and the training necessary for TAs or teachers to carry this out in their absence (Lindsay et al., 2005:92). Although speech therapy is essential for these students, soft skills are also important, highlighting the importance of social interaction:

> critical factors for successful long-term education include a combination of interdependent skills, such as language, cognitive, emotional, psycho-social skills. In particular, IQ … "self-esteem" and "perception of one's environment", as well as "creativity during play" (Ullrich et al., 2017:7).

Written communication poses challenges for students with visual differences (Allan, 1999a) and also students facing literacy challenges. Special educators felt students viewed writing as "a formidable task" for which they lacked motivation, while general educators felt students viewed it as "a burden that should be avoided" which could lead to embarrassment (Troia & Maddox, 2004:25,32); resulting in educators limiting student's curriculum engagement. These limits do not just impact students' engagement with classroom learning, but their place within the wider peer social culture of the school. As observed earlier, learning is a shared social experience (Lewin, 2014), and school based learning includes all "the planned and, indeed, unplanned experiences offered to pupils" (Ainscow, 2016:8). The social world of peers has significance for all aspects of disabled students' experiences.

> When pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are placed in mainstream schools, their encounters with mainstream pupils are arguably more significant than their educational programme or the support that they receive (Allan, 1997:183).

Many disabled students would also be regarded as vulnerable and in need of safeguarding over and above the standard usual for young people. According to Ofsted, safeguarding vulnerable adults includes:

recognising that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances and therefore potential risks to their safety or well-being (Ofsted, 2021).

Such issues further complicate the social interactions of disabled young people and adults. School social culture is governed by "a set of unwritten rules of conduct for themselves and others" (Allan, 1999a:31). Social status is dependent on these social rules or norms, such as displaying the expected reactions in an acceptable way, compliance making students "attractive" to peers (Ytterhus, 2012). It is argued that this amounts to a "hidden social curriculum" (Ytterhus, 2012:210) in schools, presenting barriers for many disabled students, but perceived to be more significant for autistics (Moyse & Porter, 2015) or those labelled with learning difficulties (Rietveld, 2010) due to perceived "reduced social competence" (Cook et al., 2018:303). Within school cultures, "three interactive and competing discourses – medical, charity and rights" (Allan, 1999a:31) have been identified in relation to disabled students.

Allan's "pastoral power" discourse focused on disabled students' wellbeing; subject to students' perceived "similarity/difference" from peers and how "deserving/undeserving" they were considered (Allan, 1999a). This last distinction derives from the UK Poor Law Amendment Act (known as the New Poor Law) 1834 (Golightley & Holloway, 2016), and endures in welfare debates (Solas, 2018; Sims-Schouten et al., 2019). The pedagogic role discourse allows peers to act "as agents of the academic and social development" (Allan, 1999a:35) of disabled students, including permitting them to transgress some social rules. The third, "punitive", discourse "legitimized the exclusion of individuals from social interaction" (Allan, 1999a:39). When non-disabled peers transgressed behavioural limits in actions towards disabled students, those observing did not always step in to correct this or support the (disabled) victim; their response seemed dependent on social hierarchies. While the first two discourses have been described as "largely positive and supportive" (Allan, 1999a:39), the disciplinary aspects seemed to only apply to disabled students. All three discourses relate to

"a desire to normalize pupils with special educational needs or eradicate some of their differences" (Allan, 1999a:31). This is also something attempted by students themselves, through "passing" (Goffman, 1963).

Deriving from social stigma over difference, "passing" is a strategy where someone who possesses "a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated" conceals this to avoid discrimination (Goffman, 1963:5). Those with (allegedly) hidden mind-body differences (the "discreditable") can attempt to "pass", while those with a visible difference are already "discredited". This strategy can be seen in students rejecting external markers of difference such as guide canes and hearing aids (Allan, 1999a; 1999b) or disability technology (Söderström & Ytterhus, 2010), consequently accepting a reduction in their skill level to fit in. Given the social stigma that disabled people attract (Lehane, 2016; Healy, 2020), choosing to "pass" for non-disabled and blend in with peers is not surprising. One study noted the presence of ableist discourses in teaching; prioritising the "illusion of normalcy" in students' actions (Ashby, 2010:350). These teachers' own ableism led to a situation where disabled middle school students were required to "pass" by teachers, not because they wanted to but due to their teachers' inflexibility. These teachers were not willing to accept alternative communication; for example, requiring spoken responses from a student whose preferred communication method was in typing, and only accepting written responses in cursive (rather than printing) from a student who lacked the fine motor skills to achieve this. The students involved were more able than teachers believed, but were not perceived as such nor given opportunities to contribute in ways other than what was usual (normative) (Ashby, 2010).

Autism specifically has been associated with "masking" or "camouflaging"; concealing interactional difference by repressing feelings and/or taking on a different persona (Moyse &

Porter, 2015). This (as is passing) is intensive emotional labour, with those masking gaining

normalcy and peer networks, but resulting in exhaustion (Hull et al., 2017), not being

perceived to need adjustments, and not being able to (take the mask off and) be themselves

(Cook et al., 2018). Autistic students frequently befriend each other or other neurodiverse or

marginalised students, in whose company they can be themselves (Cook et al., 2018). The

expected behaviour of disabled people (as "independent, but able to accept help" (Allan,

1999a:61) is also a role, with guide cane training teaching blind people both to navigate and

also how to interact (Scott, 1981). It is this role; the expected "performance" of disability (c.f.

Butler, 1990 in relation to gender; Holt, 2004b; 2010) that is "transgressed" when teachers

criticise disabled students' choice to "pass" (or to present as less independent) (Allan, 1999a;

1999b). Disabled students who cannot or do not wish to "pass" may choose "stereotypical"

social roles such as "the most withdrawn or worse behaved at school" (Ytterhus, 2012:211).

While some non-disabled students have expressed support for the inclusion of disabled

students, feeling that everyone deserved a chance (Ainscow et al., 1999), they felt rules (and

punishment) were unequally applied: while non-disabled students were punished for breaking

rules of conduct, disabled peers avoided punishment (Ainscow et al., 1999; Broomhead,

2013c). This "necessary differential treatment [of disabled students] which could be

interpreted by others as preferential" (Broomhead, 2013c:5) meant while disabled students

were culturally included they could be socially excluded or marginalised (Broomhead, 2013c).

Parents felt that some differential treatment was not only divisive but counterproductive, with

disabled students excluded from learning activities around social skills due to teachers' fears of

triggering aggression or distress (Broomhead, 2013c). While credited to low behavioural

expectations, the evidence presented seems to indicate a lack of time and knowledge. Such

situations present barriers to friendship for disabled students.

While "friendships can help support participation in a range of school and community activities" (Carter et al., 2013:14), autistic students and those labelled with learning difficulties are noted to have a limited social network:

> nearly half of youth with autism (44.3%) and almost one-sixth (16.4%) of students with intellectual disability reported never spending time together with friends outside of school during the past year (Carter et al., 2013:14).

The quality of friendships reported by disabled students have also been discounted as "superficial" by teachers (Østvik et al., 2018), yet could indicate a "different quality of friendship" (Østvik et al., 2018:342). Where belonging is experienced, friendships extend "to [all] those in the context where she [sic] perceived herself to belong" (Østvik et al., 2018), including teachers and in one case, a doll. This might explain why some students are perceived to be marginalised, yet do not experience this (Messiou, 2003). Young autistic women "prefer to focus less on intimacy and more on companionship" than neurotypical peers (Cook et al., 2018:303). As learning is reinforced by social interaction (Casserly, 2013), social isolation could affect academic achievement. Some students may choose "self-marginalisation" rather than experiencing active social censure (Ytterhus, 2012:209) or bullying.

The definition of bullying is complicated and multifaceted, problematic in practice (Ortega et al., 2012) and the subject of disagreement (Glumbić & Žunić-Pavlović, 2010). It is argued that bullying must include intentionality, repetition and an imbalance of power (Goldweber et al., 2013); but also noted that young people do not see bullying in this way (Vaillancourt et al., 2008). Given this, decisions made following this definition of bullying are problematic, and risk supporting a bullying culture (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). For example, some bullies have disclaimed their behaviour as a joke, leading some to exclude these incidents from research (e.g. Swearer et al., 2012). Some altercations with disabled students are perceived by victims or observers (Cook et al., 2018) as unintentional, a result of mind-body difference, yet this

conflicts with the argument that agency can be and is displayed by disabled students (Davis & Watson, 2002). Frequency and time are also used to trivialise or exclude bullying from research, with some studies only including repeated victimisation during a set time period (Rothon et al., 2011; Chatzitheochari et al., 2016:700). It is suggested that bullying is undertaken to improve social status (Forsberg & Thornberg, 2016), with verbal aggression enhancing levels of belonging (Goldweber et al., 2013) and physical aggression compensating for verbal communication deficits (Harel-Fisch et al., 2011; Rose et al., 2016). Bullies have been perceived to be higher status than victims (Mishna, 2003; Chatzitheochari et al., 2016), but the reverse is sometimes true as aggressors gain more from targeting those with higher status (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). Psychological traits have been identified for bullies and victims, with an overlap of traits for those who take both roles, described as "bully-victims", "provocative victims" (Glumbić & Žunić-Pavlović, 2010:2785) or "reactive-victims" (Rose et al., 2016), with behavioural disorders (Swearer et al., 2012) and hostility (Rose et al., 2016) perceived to be indicative of this group. It has been suggested that bullies are more often male while victims are both male and female (Glumbić & Žunić-Pavlović, 2010) but also that gender can also vary with the type and nature of bullying (Salmon et al., 2018). Disabled young people have been argued to take different roles in different settings, sometimes using "adult ableist discourses against each other … very often … concerning hierarchies of impairment [difference]" (Davis & Watson, 2002:163).

Young disabled people have a greater chance of being bullied than non-disabled peers (also supported by Hoffman & Daigle, 2019), even after adjusting for other demographic factors (Chatzitheochari et al., 2014). Those students at greatest risk of bullying are autistics or those labelled with learning difficulties (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; MENCAP, 2008; Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Humphrey & Hebron, 2015), perceived to be vulnerable to bullying due to difficulties with the social environment (Mishna, 2003). In 2008, 8 out of 10 young people labelled with

learning difficulties had been bullied, making them "twice as likely to be bullied" as other young people (MENCAP, 2008:5). The MENCAP study gathered qualitative workshop data from 507 students labelled with a learning difficulty in England during 2007. Of these, 8 out of 10 had been bullied at school; representing about 65% of the young people with learning difficulties who participated (MENCAP, 2008). This matches the experience of the peripheral students in Allan's research (Allan, 1999a). Allan's main focus is on students with a variety of differences, but her main interest is in how students practice their own agency to subvert their social position. The students labelled with a learning disability in her study were largely perceived not to exert agency, but to be socially peripheral. While one student (Brian) stood out for being socially accepted (and therefore unusual), the other three students with learning disability labels who appear in the study (Sarah, Scott and Graham) were bullied and marginalised. Graham was allegedly tolerated to some extent, but subject to "fairly punitive teasing" (Allan, 1999a:35) and although peers felt bullies had gone too far with Sarah and Scott, they were not always prepared to step in. This tacit support for bullying fits in with MENCAP's findings that the bullying continued for 4 out of 10 students who told teachers about bullying, (MENCAP, 2008), also consistent with the National Autistic Society's findings that no action seemed to be taken in 44% of reported bullying cases (Reid & Batten, 2006). Bullying can also lead to school refusal, with pressure being put on families to force students to attend (viewing their behaviour as individual rather than as a response to their social setting) allowing schools to avoid having to address the bullying (Ambitious about Autism, 2014).

Bullying can be grouped in different ways, such as physical (including threats of violence and the taking of possessions), verbal, relational (social marginalisation or exclusion) and cyberbullying, which can then be combined (e.g. Chatzitheochari et al., 2016) or reconfigured into larger blocks such as direct (including physical and verbal) and indirect (relational) (Glumbić & Žunić-Pavlović, 2010). Subcategories such as homophobic, racist, sibling and sexual bullying (among others) have been identified (Morales-Ramírez & Villalobos-Cordero, 2017),

further complicating cross-study comparison. Qualitative research with disabled students does not generally subdivide these, since all bullying could be described as disablist bullying or discriminatory bullying around SEN (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2019). This leads to circularity, as from a social model perspective: "bullying can be represented as one of the means by which children with mind-body differences become 'disabled' " (Chatzitheochari et al., 2014:4); that is, excluded "from participation in the mainstream of social activities" (UPIAS, 1975:20). Those who bully others are engaged in "creating and enforcing standards of what is acceptable and what is not" (Faris & Felmlee, 2014:230), which are reinforced as socially acceptable when adults tell students to "get used to it" (MENCAP, 2008:10), non-compliance with behavioural expectations resulting in "harassment and ostracism" in their social network (Faris & Felmlee, 2014:231). This exclusion is a social (and socially accepted) mechanism used to make disabled students comply with behavioural norms (Allan, 1999a); which may explain how peers can victimize others without recognising this as bullying (Holt et al., 2017).

Compared with peers in Europe, school students in England appear more likely to be regular victims of direct and internet cyberbullying, and to experience a higher emotional impact from both direct and mobile phone cyberbullying (Ortega et al., 2012). Emotional consequences of victimisation include anxiety, depression (in boys, Rothon et al., 2011), low self-esteem , anger and hostility (Rose et al., 2016). Victimisation is also linked with reduced school attachment (Harel-Fisch et al., 2011), diminished motivation for learning (Morales-Ramírez & Villalobos-Cordero, 2017), and reduced educational outcomes in mathematics and reading (Delprato et al., 2017) and science (Ponzo, 2013). These outcomes can be mitigated by support from friends (and, to some extent, family) (Rothon et al., 2011); but teachers have the most significant impact on student achievement (Mucherah et al., 2018).

2.3.3   Barriers to achievement

Regulatory barriers to achievement are those which are put in place by government guidance and Acts of Parliament, such as the National Curriculum and the standards agenda it promoted; centrally imposed and compulsory for all mainstream schools. For mainstream schools, this includes the allocation of resources (albeit delegated to Local Educational Authorities) which impact on class size and therefore the amount of time each teacher has for students. The issue of gatekeeping is an area which has attracted some attention in education; but is extremely significant since disabled students are only recognised once they have been through the necessary assessment process and attracted a diagnostic label. Teachers' attitudes have been noted to be variable, with some disabled students viewed more favourably than others. Classroom barriers are the final local of barriers to achievement. While it is to be hoped that these barriers are not as significant as the plethora of factors which facilitate inclusion; these issues are necessary to address.

The structures within which education is funded and regulated, including the National Curriculum (Wedell, 2005), have been noted to create barriers which prevent (Malak, 2013) or hinder inclusion (Alexander, 2010; Slee, 2019), referred to here as regulatory barriers. The "standards agenda" in the UK is argued to represent a key barrier to inclusion, undermining inclusive practice and resulting in financial penalties for inclusive teachers, where pay increases have been based on standardised performance outcomes rather than individualised targets (Glazzard, 2011:59). Under regulatory barriers, I would include curriculum barriers (relating to the standards agenda and national curriculum); assessment barriers; and gatekeeping (where access to particular settings or curricula is limited to select students). National guidance and regulation also have resource implications. Class size appears to be significant, since the time available to support each student is reduced as the class size increases (Harfitt, 2012a; 2012b) and smaller class sizes are recognised as a factor in the

success of special schools – although this is not always true in relation to classroom testing (Hart et al., 2011). Teaching methods which allow for a large number of students to be taught by a single teacher might be resource efficient in terms of cost and teacher contact time; but not always qualitatively effective in terms of inclusion, especially with very large classes (Malak, 2013). Class size has been observed to impact on peer relationships and student behaviour; although studies have not asked students' views (Pedder, 2006).

While "the need for the provision of a special or modified curriculum" (HMSO, 1978: section 6.2) for students labelled with SEN was recognised by the Warnock Report, by setting in place a national curriculum for all students the 1988 Education Act prioritised one set of measurable learning objectives over others (Alexander, 2010:129). This resulted in "no agreement about what constituted good progress for pupils with LDD [learning difficulties and disabilities]" (Ofsted, 2006:2) at school, regional and national levels. Within a school environment, students exist as part of a group and their learning revolves around external assessment goals (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). The behaviour of students is also constrained by this focus on targets, as group teaching methods require a large amount of material to be processed by students with varying skills and abilities. TAs dictating answers for students (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008) might be inappropriate for learning; but are consistent with the pace of classroom work required to meet external targets.

Due to the standards agenda implicit within the National Curriculum, alternative achievement targets have been argued for (Imray & Hinchcliffe, 2012). However, GCSE grade outcomes have been linked to Intelligence Quotient (IQ), with the lowest grade above the IQ correlated with learning difficulties: in other words, these have been designed as intentionally exclusionary (Aspis, 1998). Sub-GCSE qualifications which offer achievement recognition

require SEND students to conform with standard responses, while GCSE students are instead expected to evaluate options (and potentially to disagree) (Aspis, 1998). While adjustments can be made for individual students, wider barriers exist in the design of tests (Clausen-May, 2007) and the phrasing and layout of questions by GCSE Examination Boards (Autism Education Trust, 2018); although some "subject content … is intrinsically difficult" for autistic students (Gardiner, 2018). Advance preparation for the situational challenges of examinations is advised, to improve outcomes (Autism Education Trust, 2018). However, creative solutions often have resource implications, to which we turn now.

In the "majority world" (meaning "developing countries, the South, the Third World") (Stone, 1999: online), educators struggle for resources and class sizes are large to maximise cost-effectiveness (e.g. Malak, 2013 in Bangladesh), leading to concern that inclusion is impossible in this context. The same concerns are also expressed by teachers in the better resourced "minority world" (Stone, 1999), for example the USA (e.g. Troia & Maddox, 2004), Australia (Lewin, 2014) and the UK (e.g.Avramidis et al., 2000). In the UK, resources for students with special educational needs are under threat (BBC, 2018; Richardson, 2018), as part of a wider crisis in school funding (Andrews & Lawrence, 2018). The Government asserts that recent resource changes constitute increased funding, although funding has not risen in line with pay rises, and staffing constitutes the majority of school costs (Andrews & Lawrence, 2018). LEAs have asked to "switch … money from the dedicated schools grant to their high needs budget" to cover ECHP/Statement commitments (Richardson, 2018) and Bradford Council had to restructure SEND support after its education budget was halved (BBC, 2018). Primary head teachers wrote to the Education Secretary that schools:

> no longer had the resources to properly look after children with special
> educational needs. … "Mainstream schools are … having to resort to fixed-term
> and permanent exclusion to deal with challenging pupils." … schools were
> struggling to cope with a "perfect storm" of squeezed school budgets, increased
> demand on SEN provision and cuts to children's services (Halliday, 2018).

Excluding challenging students to manage mainstream schools has long been observed (e.g. Tomlinson, 1982), but if "exclusion from school is primarily a birthright of the disadvantaged" (de Pear & Garner, 1996:149), then school exclusion compounds existing social disadvantage. School funding follows standards set for non-disabled or "typically developing" students (Copeland, 1999; Ralli et al., 2011), which "inevitably promotes exclusion for those who do not meet the standard" (Armstrong, 2005:147), this affects the pay and career of teachers.

> Last year the head stopped two members of staff from going through Upper Pay Scale 2 because they did not get high enough levels … their pupils have made progress. It's just that the progress isn't in line with national expectations (Quote from a teacher in Glazzard, 2011:59).

Current resources for education are limited, as acknowledged above (Halliday, 2018), but stretching existing resources puts disabled students at risk of marginalisation and exclusion. Controlling access to such resources lies with gatekeepers.

Disabled people are reliant on the decisions of health and social care professionals for access to resources, referred to as "gatekeepers" (Tosone, 2016); and subject to gatekeeping structures (Swartz, 2009). For young disabled people, referral to an educational psychologist is necessary to gain additional support for the student (Pijl et al., 1999) as resources are dependent on diagnosis and assessment (Harwood, 2010); but such a diagnosis is complex. Diagnosis of special educational needs is not unproblematic, with culture and background playing a substantial part in a process which might be presented as value-neutral (Tomlinson, 1982). In addition to over-representation of minority groups, concern has been raised over the over-diagnosis of some students with the previously labelled Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) (Thomas & Glenny, 2000; Broomhead, 2013a; Allan & Harwood, 2014), now redefined as Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) (Norwich & Eaton, 2015).

Such labels are asserted to derive from a medicalized view of young people, a process

described as psychopathology (Harwood, 2010):

> Existence of psychopathologisation is evident in the diagnosis (or suspicion) of a
> mental disorder and via being subject to the array of practices tied to or invoking
> questions of psychopathology (for instance: medication, exclusion from school,
> school assessments, attendance at psychiatric or psychological clinics, child
> welfare, police, juvenile justice) (Harwood, 2010:438).

In additional to medical gatekeepers, young disabled people also have academic gatekeepers

(Swartz, 2009) who may have contact with their care systems via EHC plans, with Further

Education tutors increasingly engaged in social welfare (Cornish, 2019). Teaching and

assessment processes may enable gatekeeping within lessons, with "students … given un-equal

possibilities to learn and engage" (Boistrup, 2017:225) in line with "personal characteristics

that match teachers' … culture-based expectations" (Swartz, 2009:1059). This is particularly

true for disabled people, with certain behaviour valorised by gatekeepers; for example, blind

people found deferential attitudes were expected of them during white stick training (Scott,

1981). Allan's student Raschida, who "lost" her guide cane (marking her rejection of the

"blind" role expected of her), echoed this, with teachers frustrated by her refusal to conform

(Allan, 1999b). Gatekeeping also extends to examinations, with access to crucial "gateway"

qualifications in Further Education "heavily regulated and controlled"(Cornish, 2017:14).

Another key gatekeeper is, of course, the teacher.

Teachers and support staff have personal attitudes to disabled students and to inclusion which

might not match policy or school guidelines (Cook & Cameron, 2010; Mackenzie, 2011).

Special school teachers have asserted that students with behavioural differences are

unwanted at mainstream school; although the overwhelming majority of these students (92%)

are being educated within mainstream settings (Broomhead, 2013c). Despite this apparent

contradiction, it is possible that special school teachers view accurately reflect some

mainstream teachers' attitudes since a "hierarchy of impairment [difference]" (Davis & Watson, 2002) has been observed, with some disabled people seen as more "genuine" (Deal, 2003) or more "deserving" (Golightley & Holloway, 2016; Solas, 2018). Those with mental health (Robinson et al., 2007) or behavioural differences are seen as the least deserving, viewed as below the threshold for support and/or "beyond help" (Sims-Schouten et al., 2019:10). While teachers have expressed more "concern" for disabled students than non-disabled students, students with behavioural differences were strongly rejected "bordering on dislike" (Cook & Cameron, 2010) and helpful adjustments for students not always put in place "due to negative attitudes and environmental factors" (Gal et al., 2010:97). Teachers reported that they were unable to discuss students' barriers to learning with some colleagues, as "they don't even believe these kids really exist" (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). Parents are also subject to associative stigma, with their parenting judged negatively on the basis of their child's label (Broomhead, 2013b). Although reflective practice can reduce barriers to inclusion (Rix & Paige-Smith, 2011), the professional networks necessary to support such practice may be absent (Worell, 2008), making inclusive provision uneven, even within a school. This includes teaching practice.

Teaching practices have been seen as barriers to inclusion in some cases, as "some practitioners are unwilling to change their approaches … in order to meet the needs of individual children" (Glazzard, 2011:58). The impact teachers have on barriers can be seen through variations in the provision of loosely worded (but frequently used) adjustments for students by different teachers (Byrnes, 2008). Teaching practice has been acknowledged to vary from national standards, leaving barriers in place which have been addressed at a policy level (Nelson et al., 2002; Kraft, 2004). Even when procedures are in place, teachers have sometimes been unaware of a student's mind-body difference (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Differentiation does not always resolve barriers to learning. When students are nominated to

speak during planned whole-class differentiation "the pace of the lesson is likely to be faster for pupils with special educational needs" (Eke & Lee, 2004:230), subverting the intention. The practice of differentiation can also reduce the content of learning through "a restricted range of learning outcomes and of assisted performance" (Eke & Lee, 2004:229); but conversely might undermine students' potential for learning, with disabled students' outcomes around giving set answers rather than evaluating information (Aspis, 1998).

Although the potential positive impact of teachers is acknowledged, Teaching Assistants have been viewed less positively (Saddler, 2014). The role of Teaching Assistants (TAs) (also referred to as Classroom or Learning Support Assistants) in inclusion has been subject to extensive criticism. It has been argued that TAs can impact on participation, limiting disabled students' opportunities to socialise with their peer group; reinforcing perceptions of disabled students' difference (Webster & Blatchford, 2015) and negating disabled students' gender identity in school (Giangreco et al., 1997). In terms of achievement, TA support is acknowledged as the key mechanism for disabled students to access the curriculum, and whose hands the practical application of differentiation is left (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2019). This can create "islands" of support within the classroom, with a disabled student and TA sharing a desk doing different work from peers, isolated from peer and teacher interaction (Giangreco, 2013; Butt, 2016). Mainstream TA support is also subject to resource limitations, one language unit commenting that "if a child … needed support at lunch times, then they would be in a special school" (Lindsay et al., 2005:92); although admissions to language units are reportedly influenced by "parental pressure" (Lindsay et al., 2005:91). Most worryingly, the wrong type of TA support can also limit learning and achievement (Webster et al., 2010), being used as a substitute for teacher/pupil contact (Broer et al., 2005; Blatchford et al., 2009; Cameron, 2014). This is perceived as lower skilled staff supporting students with the greatest learning needs (Giangreco et al., 2005; Giangreco, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2019).

Further training, leading to Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status, was put in place in England to address this; but a change of government meant intended outcomes were disrupted (Graves & Williams, 2017). Conversely, Teaching Assistants have been perceived as valuable team members by teachers (Glazzard, 2011) having a "strong positive effect" on teachers' experiences (Webster et al., 2010:321). They are able to support student-peer interaction (Giangreco et al., 1997; Dolva et al., 2011), considered a key (and under researched) part of inclusion (Saddler, 2014). A position between these extremes has been set out, arguing that TAs are not responsible for negative outcomes, but rather how schools train and use them (Webster & Blatchford, n.d.). That is, that TAs are:

> typically used in a less structured way … as an alternative to teacher input, not additional to it … TAs were very often under-prepared for their role – going in 'blind', as they put it – and they had received little guidance, induction or training (Webster & Blatchford, n.d.:52).

This explanation does not account for external pressures on schools which result in certain kinds of TA work being prioritised by the standards agenda.

Barriers represent a significant aspect of disabled students' experiences of education, affecting their access to learning, yet students' experiences of such barriers are not uniform, mediated by factors which can reduce or increase barriers. The next section looks at these factors.

2.4   Factors influencing experiences of barriers to inclusion

In addition to the barriers experienced by students, positive factors which support inclusion have been analysed as "supports"(Buysse et al., 1998) and "facilitators" (Gibb et al., 2007) by educators. In developing this study, however, I was aware that some factors might vary in their positive influence or even potentially enhance existing barriers, hence using the more neutral term factors. Facilitators identified by disabled students have been collected by categories of

difference, for example students with mobility differences and their parents (Pivik et al., 2002).
While autistic students' views have been included alongside those of teachers, support staff
and parents (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008), few facilitators have been identified from students'
accounts. The literature seems to indicate that students with similar mind-body difference
labels (and at the same school) have varying degrees of inclusion (Allan, 1997; Ytterhus, 2012).
Ytterhus and Allan both observed one student labelled with Down Syndrome (Elin and Brian
respectively) being socially included, with Brian being described as "a lot of fun" (Allan,
1999a:32); while other peers with learning disabilities were viewed as "undeserving" or too
different (Allan, 1999a) with both Trine (Ytterhus, 2012:208) and Graham (Allan, 1999a:35)
criticized for being too loud. Academic ability has been indicated as a socially inclusive factor
by teachers (Gibb et al., 2007). While external supports and facilitators are important,
personal social competence (or agency) seemed more influential (Gibb et al., 2007),
highlighting "the huge variation that exists among children's strategies and negotiation
capacities" (Ytterhus, 2012:209).

Some disabled students have used their own agency to alter their social position in different
ways. Allan's students who were able to "pass" improved their social standing but left
themselves without classroom adaptions; while the greatest successes (like Raschida) had the
support of peers, who colluded with their "passing" and also helped them access classroom
learning (by reading from the board) (Allan, 1999a). Allan notes these peers condemned
attempts to treat these students differently, as "they understood the challenge they
represented" to their "passing" (Allan, 1999a:63). Those who were not able to "pass" but
were perceived sympathetically (like Susan and, to some extent, Peter) chose a more
dependent role, which gave them a protected social position (subject to peer acceptance),
allowing them to use adaptions. Both passing and dependent roles were rejected by teachers,
who sought to undermine these. It was only in the case of Phillip, struggling to push past the

limits of an increasing mind-body difference, where teachers were sympathetic to his situation and able to go along with the pretence (Allan, 1999a). This highlights the importance of one-to-one intervention by adults such as teachers and TAs.

Teachers are noted to have the most significant capacity to influence access to learning. The literature on including disabled students is replete with interventions which may enhance inclusion, but mostly in isolation; and many falling within the medical model as specialist interventions to "normalise" behaviour which will not be explored here. Other interventions include strategies for behavioural improvement, rather than labelling and exclusion (Grosche & Volpe, 2013); ways to use information technology for differentiation (Poel, 2007) or to make languages more accessible (Meiring & Norman, 2005); and how to use differentiation to incorporate different levels of reading material for diverse learners (Fenty & Barnett, 2013). Strands of research can be seen, for example subject-specific work on inclusion during Physical Education classes (Coates & Vickerman, 2008; Vickerman & Coates, 2009; Vickerman, 2012); which build on previous work and have the potential to influence teacher training and practice.

Regular teaching practices such as differentiation, supporting learning at different levels within one class, are already in place specifically to enhance inclusion (Nel et al., 2011), however teacher attitudes may result in variation in classroom practice, leaving barriers in place which policy and guidance had previously removed. Teachers with more positive attitudes feel they lack the skills or training for inclusive education (Bussing et al., 2002; Ntuli & Traore, 2013; Nel et al., 2014), expressing less confidence in their ability to include disabled students than other marginalised groups (Peček et al., 2008). Pre-service training on learning needs has varied in its impact, sometimes not significantly increasing confidence (Bussing et al., 2002) but encouraging positive attitudes to inclusion (Angelides, 2008). Professional knowledge has

been supplemented by self-motivated, targeted reading in response to experiences (Bussing et al., 2002). In the case of pre-school provision, disability training seems linked to positive attitudes towards disability for caregivers but not as much for service providers, failing to result in widening admissions (Mulvihill et al., 2002). Some teachers have reported difficulties working collaboratively, preferring to refer a student on for specialist intervention by someone else (Nel et al., 2014). Increased teacher confidence seems to derive rather from classroom experience with disabled students (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014), and from positive relationships with students themselves:

> developing a relationship with students empowers them [teachers] to see past the labels, the control discourse, and the impossibility of learning … [to] truly support and learn with students' differences to achieve their potentials in inclusive classrooms (Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013:521-522).

Autistic students and their allies felt that confusion or distress relating to communication, sensory overload and stressful situations had been ameliorated by the intervention of teaching assistants, who were aware of actual and potential problems that teachers were not (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Given their greater familiarity with individual students, parental intervention can be powerful, although contentious.

Parents can influence social inclusion from outside and within the classroom, with actions such as driving to a park supporting preschool social participation if families have the resources to do so (Rosenberg et al., 2012). Partnerships with the local community, including students' families, can provide extra classroom support for students (Mara et al., 2011) as well as playing an instrumental role in the development of an inclusive culture appropriate to the students within the educational setting (Bradley & Kibera, 2006). Parents, in particular mothers, "develop a whole range of skills as they mediate and negotiate the world on behalf of their children" (Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008:204). The role played by parents of disabled children is subject to tension, including a conflict between the social model and feminism and the

subsequent disavowal of the embodiment of difference, and the argument positioning "(non-disabled) mothers of disabled children as complicit in their children's oppression" (Runswick-Cole & Ryan, 2019:4). Despite philosophical conflict, mothers do act as allies of and advocates for their children across health and social care settings as well as education. One area of overlap between teaching and parenting is that of professional love (Page, 2017; 2018) as practiced by early years educators.

In early childhood settings, attention has been given to the impact of effective teacher/student relationships, starting off from Bowlby's theories of attachment, developing through Nodding's ethics of care, and currently discussed under what has been termed "professional love" (Page, 2018). The attachment studies of Bowlby provided the original foundation for this.

> Bowlby claimed that the child flourished best when he or she was in the company of a primary caregiver – with whom the child had formed a sensitive relationship – with the ability to provide the child with comfort and security in times of distress (Page, 2018:127)

The converse is also true as "[i]nsecure attachments … can develop if early interactions are more negative, more inconsistent, more insensitive, unresponsive, inappropriate and/or unpredictable" (Parker et al., 2016:464).

> If a child cannot rely on an adult to respond to their needs in times of stress, they are unable to learn how to soothe themselves, manage their emotions and engage in reciprocal relationships. … [Successful attachment] provides the experiences and skills to help them cope with frustrations, develop self-confidence and pro-social relations – all qualities necessary to promote positive engagement with learning (Parker et al., 2016:465).

The attachment relationship has also been described as a "holding" environment, enabling it to be duplicated in other settings (such as therapy), with the acknowledgement that "holding" does not have to be perfect but can be "good-enough" (Winnicott, 1965:18). These concepts were incorporated into education by Nel Noddings in her examination of care ethics, a form of moral philosophy prioritising women's perspectives. Noddings' focus is on the interactive

relationship between teacher and student, which "contrasts with the view of caring as a subject-object act" (Page, 2018). She identifies a series of conflicts in caring relationships such as between responding to "assumed needs" about learning (authorised by the setting) and expressed needs which may relate to non-subject issues; such challenges problematising the issue of care and how best for teachers to express it (Noddings, 2012). The dilemma between embedding social cooperation skills and the focus on competition in school education is also noted. While acknowledging the time to build "a climate of care" is sometimes perceived by teachers to compete with other duties, Noddings argues:

> establishing such a climate is not 'on top' of other things, it is underneath all we do as teachers. When that climate is established and maintained, everything else goes better (Noddings, 2012:777)

These issues were taken forward by Jools Page in her argument for "professional love" in early childhood education, noting that the idea of love has been complicated by the fear of being perceived to overstep boundaries, given "an unease surrounding the possibility of false accusations of child abuse, which has begun to infiltrate the early years workforce" (Page, 2017:389). Due to such concerns and an absence of guidance on appropriate care, Page warns of a "widespread but largely unacknowledged *crisis of care*"[7] (Page, 2017:389) as the attachment needs of young people are consequently not met. This has inherent dangers for child development, as "if an adult ignores or dismisses an infant's demand for attention, then, for the child, this behaviour represents rejection" (Page, 2017:390). The actions of early years practitioners in stepping beyond boundaries formed through fear have been argued to represent acts of ethical subversion.

> Ethical subversion is born from both reason and emotion: these are acts of loving disobedience by experienced practitioners who possess a deep understanding of risk and the critical implications of their rule-bending (Morris, 2021:124)

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[7] Italics in original text

This approach might also describe the actions of disability studies educators, teachers who work with disabled students but choose "the rejection of the medical model of disability and the advocacy of full inclusion of disabled people in all aspects of society" (Connor et al., 2008). These teachers:

> engage in myriad acts of resistance on a daily basis, as they live and interact within … structures that are grounded in medicalised, objectivist, often deficit-driven conceptualisations of disability, knowledge and experience (Broderick et al., 2012).

While individual actions can be significant in the experience of disabled students in school, school culture and community are also important. It is to these we move next.

The school culture is an aspect of a school's inclusion practices, marked in policies, procedures and practices. It has been argued that two class cultures might be present within the school environment, official school culture created by middle-class teaching and management staff (members of a professional class with a graduate career) (Ball, 2006) while support staff and students might be working class (Coldrey, 2001). Some schools have been argued to offer a site of relative safety for students at risk of identity-related violence in the local community (Bhatti, 2011), with educators advised to challenge their own preconceptions in order to include students whose identity and culture they may find challenging (Ellsworth, 1989). Cultures may have different perspectives on inclusion, potentially undermining it by sending mixed messages, highlighting the experience of diverse students who might be marginalised within the school due to culture, faith and/or language (Giampapa, 2010; Bhatti, 2011). A sense of "belonging" to the community of the school and the school culture has been suggested to be "crucial" to students; both "improving the quality of the school experience" and also enabling them "to engage more in learning" (Hope, 2012:742). This can also be enhanced by social interventions in schools. One such intervention for SEMH labelled students (previously SEBD) (Mowat, 2010; 2014) involved a support group, which not only improved

students' social skills but consequently reduced the amount of time they were excluded for.

Students' relationships with peers improved, but some of their teachers were unwilling to

respond to the change and continued treating them the same way. Two students felt the key

outcome had been to increase their commitment to learning (Mowat, 2014). The intervention

does not fit with a social model approach, targeted at behavioural correction of labelled

students which some found stigmatising (Mowat, 2014); but does demonstrate the impact of

the social environment on learning. While school leaders must comply with government

legislation and guidance; the views and actions of other students cannot be similarly regulated.

Students have responded to disabled peers in both positive and negative ways. There has

been concern expressed about how non-disabled students view disabled peers (Hodkinson,

2007; 2012); however, positive attitudes, such as "asymmetrical communal relationships"

(Frederickson & Simmonds, 2008), with SEND peers perceived more positively than

acquaintances by non-disabled peers, have also been noted. Peers can also exert Foucauldian

governmentality within school; policing (or allowing) the behaviour of disabled peers which

may transgress rules (Allan, 1999a). Noting that this "could reflect a desire to normalize pupils

with special needs or eradicate some of their differences" (Allan, 1999a:31), this discourse

would seem to support the concept of the "schooled child" asserted to be implicit within

school regulatory structures (James & James, 2004). Students sometimes intervene to defend

disabled peers from bullying, but only where this does not threaten their own status. Yet the

"punitive authority" (Allan, 1999a:39) they exercise, "legitimizing the exclusion of some pupils

from social interaction" (Allan, 1999a:32) would seem to mirror bullying in the deliberate

exclusion or marginalisation of pupils. This leads us to the next section, on student voice and

how it is used by disabled students and their peers.

2.5 Student voice

I am using the term student voice here, since most of the research describes its focus in this way (Fielding, 2007; 2011), although "students' voices" is more accurate, reflecting "the plurality of views amongst students" (Messiou & Jones, 2015:257). This perspective, which I share, acknowledges that students have multiple and mutually conflicting experiences and there is no singular voice from a cohort of students (or even from one student's experience) (Messiou, 2012). The term "voice" itself is argued to derive from the civil rights movement which came to prominence in the 1960s, where marginalised groups campaigned for equal citizenship and involvement in decision-making (Thomson, 2011). Consequently, there is a strong discourse which flows through student voice work of equality, rights and participation. The disability rights movement gathered momentum as part of this wider interest in social justice, although "[w]ithout one highly visible leader, the disability movement has gone largely unnoticed by nondisabled people" (Shapiro, 1994:11). Nonetheless, the civil rights background of voice work gives added meaning to its use with disabled students.

One of the reasons why student voice can be significant for disabled students is that, as with other groups whose status is "protected" by the Equality Act 2010, disabled students can be considered "hidden voices" (Ainscow et al., 1999). If culture is the "web of significance" woven by social groups (Geertz, 1993), then the school system designed by the majority culture can act to exclude students (Razer et al., 2013). Even having a different first language can lead students to feel their existing skills and identity are not valued (Giampapa, 2010). This focus on "hidden" voices arose from a drive for equal recognition for marginalised communities, but might privilege particular perspectives (Chadderton, 2011), with voice opportunities limited (or increased) by the existing cultural narrative (Arnot & Reay, 2007).

The requirement to consult students came relatively late to education, in which – unlike in law or health: "it was [still] assumed that they were not in a position to give accurate information, or make judgements" (Messiou, 2006:306). On 15 January 1992 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) came into force, giving young people around the world a shared set of rights. Article 12 of the Convention asserts that signatory states:

> shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right
> to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child (UN, 2004:6).

It protects young peoples' right to influence decision makers, but stops short of giving young people the right to participate in decision making. Article 12 has been described as:

> radical and far reaching … and also as one of the provisions most widely violated
> and disregarded in almost every sphere of children's lives (Shier, 2001:108).

It has also been argued to present young disabled people as one uniform group, acting to "mask differences both between and within groups [and] overlook the fluid and diverse nature of children's lives" (Davis & Watson, 2002:160). Further UK legislation and policies (such as *The Children Act* 2004 (Children Act, 2004) and *Working Together: Listening to the voices of children and young people* (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008)) followed the Convention, supporting this rights agenda (Wisby, 2011). The guidance *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25* continued and enhanced this commitment.

> Local authorities **must** ensure that children, young people and parents are
> provided with the information, advice and support necessary to enable them to
> participate in discussions and decisions about their support. This should include
> information on their rights and entitlements in accessible formats and time to
> prepare for discussions and meetings (Department for Education (DfE), 2015:21).

This guidance requires Local Authorities to consult with young people about not just their personal provision but in "planning, commissioning and reviewing [local] services" (Department for Education (DfE), 2015:22), known as the Local Offer.

Despite this seeming continuity of student voice, successive (and politically opposing) UK

governments have supported its use to support opposing political agendas (Wisby, 2011). This

has led to student voice being argued to be a site of controversy (Streeting, 2011), an umbrella

term which "hides a diverse and complex alliance of reform agendas" (Arnot & Reay,

2007:311). At its worst, student voice has been argued to signify a "toxic makeover" (Gunter &

Thomson, 2007), presenting an outward façade of involvement while:

> students remain objects of elite adult plans, not least through how they must
> provide the evidence of excellent performance in the delivery of national
> standards (Gunter & Thomson, 2007:181).

This makes it difficult to establish a unified definition of student voice. In some ways, the term

student voice misdirects attention; as the decision to recognise students' input is central to the

process, but takes place elsewhere. This may already be happening in the classroom under the

heading of "teaching", with some feeling aggrieved that this goes unnoticed (Bragg, 2007).

Even within authorised means of self-expression, voice is not always accurately heard.

Students can express themselves in ways that are not listened to, and some forms of self-

expression are perceived as challenging and therefore disregarded (Thomson, 2011). Teaching

staff might add their own layer of interpretation to the project, and mishear or reinterpret

voice (Ellsworth, 1989). The teacher may have their own concerns around student voice work,

sometimes over-simplistically viewed as "a conservative reluctance to give up their own

power" (Bragg, 2007:506), but which might signify a professional identity crisis.

> Teachers may feel that their existing practice is being criticised and redefined as
> "lacking", with no clear "new" identity yet apparent (Bragg, 2007:510).

It is argued that teacher voice needs to be put in place, to ensure the teachers are able to

express their own concerns and have peer support during this transition (Bragg, 2007).

Voice work can be undermined by the context in which it occurs, in that "[t]oo much contemporary student voice work invites failure and disillusion … [sometimes] methodologies and contextual circumstances reinforce subjugation" (Fielding, 2004:296) or "perpetuate relations of domination" (Ellsworth, 1989:298), where those involved nurture and support students' development and also control the process. The issue of power presents particular challenges for student voice work; yet genuine partnership is possible. Fielding gives the example of a special school, Epping House School, where aside from "a small number of key decisions, usually to do with matters of safety or health" (Fielding, 2011:7) decisions were made by students and staff. Despite this long history for some schools and teachers, even now students do not always experience being consulted. One study noted that:

> not having a say in the decisions made about them was the single most important issue to children in Northern Ireland. … children's views were not sought or listened to or, worse, … they were afforded only minimalist, tokenistic opportunities to participate and engage with adults (Lundy, 2007:929).

In addition to limited access to decision making, school experience is influenced by structural and administrative factors (such as the National Curriculum and external standards (Copeland, 1999; Alexander, 2010)) over which schools have no influence. If power remains elsewhere in the process and students' ability to influence decisions is limited, student voice can be undermined (Lundy, 2007; Fielding, 2011). This can also be true in the classroom, as noted by Marks in a study of primary students working towards the National Curriculum Key Stage 2 assessments (known informally as SATs (Reay & Wiliam, 1999)). Her participants felt that "teachers did not care about them being happy", and were aware that their different treatment was "related to the Levels they may attain in the mathematics national tests at the end of primary school" (Marks, 2014:48). Although her study makes no reference to disability or special educational needs, one participant had been disapplied; a process which permits schools to remove students unable to meet SAT standards from the official school return, due to inflexibility of the standards agenda (Greenstein, 2014) (which would indicate they were disabled). At its most ambitious, student voice research can follow the path of what has been

described in disability studies as emancipatory research (Oliver, 1997; Barnes, 2003), where research aims to change the situation of those taking part. This type of student voice work has been pursued by teachers within the school with access to the school's Senior Management Team (SMT) (Martin, 2011; O'Riordan & Williams, 2011) or in collaboration with the SMT, with the focus of the research being suggested by them (Sellman, 2009). In these cases, it is possible to aim for a change in school procedures or processes as a possible outcome; but even such a close collaboration does not always guarantee a change. Despite having the "full support" of the SMT to involve their students in staff recruitment, teaching staff were unable to support this (O'Riordan & Williams, 2011:137).

Thomson identifies "problematic issues" with student voice as singularity (there can be many conflicting voices); purpose (what is expressed might be produced by the situation); embodiment and language (how things are said can restrict or alter the message); and authenticity (the notion that a single truth, constant and consistent across time, can exist) (Thomson, 2011:24). This could be true of any interpersonal relationship (or research interview), but young people are engaged in a process of identity formation (MacBeath, 2006). Proponents of "the new sociology of childhood" (Davis et al., 2000:203), however, assert that this view undermines the validity of young people as "social actors and informants in their own right" (Hendrick, 2000:38). Chadderton also cautions against viewing what is voiced as the truth, arguing that voice is performing identity (c.f. Butler, 1990); mediated through levels of social and cultural identity (e.g. class culture, disability, and others), and that anything voiced should be viewed as located within one or more discourses (discursively defined), and particular to that individual, reflecting a particular identity that they value or aspire to (i.e. obedient pupil, rebel, supportive friend and so on) at a particular time (Chadderton, 2011). This is, however, also true of adult respondents. Following the sociology of childhood, while I appreciate that communication is about more than words, young disabled people are

members of a community I am not part of. I must rely on their perspectives and take them at

their word (as I would any research participant); unless they give me reason to question this.

Choosing to tell their stories (or not to) can also be seen as an expression of personal agency.

While agency is the ability to affect change, and it can be argued that "there can be no agency

without power" (Ling & Dale, 2014:1), young people's lives are regulated by adults, who

restrict their access to power. Choosing not to express themselves can be an assertion of

disabled young people's agency (Lewis, 2004). There have also been criticisms of voice work as

seeking and valuing the opinions of an ever reducing number of people, and in consequence,

potentially ignoring what works well for the majority (Young, 2000). I would counter that

education is a social activity, and trivialising those excluded diminishes us all (Lewin, 2014).

The main discourse within student voice work, noted to be "the prevailing concern" (Rudduck

& Fielding, 2006:220) is the use of voice to feed into school development. As noted earlier,

much of the student voice literature focuses on school decision making, whether described as

"institutional gains" (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006:219) or "having a say" (MacBeath, 2006:195).

Some definitions start with student involvement but hint at a broader meaning:

> [w]e understand this term to mean students as subjects actively involved in their
> own and others' education – classroom learning, participation in school
> governance and active citizenship in the school and community (Gunter &
> Thomson, 2007).

While this definition puts student voice within a frame of school educational involvement,

citizenship transcends the boundaries of the school premises. A spectrum of participation can

be seen in the three meanings of voice identified by Thomson: "an opportunity to express

opinions"; "access to events and people to influence decisions"; and "active participation in

deliberation about decisions and events" (Thomson, 2011:21).

The next form of student voice explored here is that of voice as "a source of insight which has often been overlooked" (Harfitt, 2012b:299). At its most simple, student voice begins with:

> students' ability to express their ideas, opinions, perspectives and needs, as well as to have a say in the methods and direction of their learning (Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015).

It has been argued that such voice is not just self-expression, but "can also be a potent source of personal empowerment for students" (Rector-Aranda & Raider-Roth, 2015). Some research uses voice as a way to evaluate pedagogic interventions (Nickels, 2010; Houghton, 2014; Tovli, 2014) or particular curriculum subjects (for example, physical education (PE) Coates & Vickerman, 2008; Kokotsaki, 2016), which may influence future change. Feedback on teaching practice may change practice in the short term, which is then re-experienced by the same students (Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Flutter, 2007). This is valuable information; but the focus of the research is limited to a narrow focus on one aspect of students' experiences. Literature giving voice to current disabled students has been described as "rare" (Byrnes, 2011:52) and such voices "noticeably absent from traditional scholarship" (Connor, 2006:154). For students with hearing differences "most collected views are those of individuals other than the students themselves" (Byrnes, 2011:49):

> while the views of past-consumers, adults with a hearing loss, have sometimes been sought …, it is rare for the view- points of current consumers, that is, students with hearing loss, to be sought (Byrnes, 2011:52).

This can lead to details being lost with the passage of time, with research attempting to diminish this by working with people who have recently left school, for example college students (Connor, 2006) and former school students (Dembouski, 2010).

Some student voice research focuses on developmental gains for the student. Rudduck and Fielding separate these into two processes: "confidence, a view point and the shaping of identity" (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006:219) and "cooperative agency", where students learn to

work together, building social skills through this interaction (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006:223-224). While clearly influenced by, and following on from, the development of personal identity, it is indicated as a separate concept within the same process. MacBeath explores the transformation of students' identities and sense of self, and their renegotiation of social roles by reference to the reflective diaries kept by the participants of an international exchange programme (MacBeath, 2006).

> If there is a single theme running through their accounts it is the rediscovery of self, young people's accounts returning persistently to evolving individual and social identities (MacBeath, 2006:199).

These students' identities are "reformed and redefined" by the "impact of these new and unfamiliar contexts" (MacBeath, 2006:198), of family settings and schools of different cultures, a transformation which is contributed to but also supported by a third context; their place within a group of their peers from the programme. MacBeath's students moved across countries, absorbing new cultures and perspectives, and renegotiating their personal identity and their place within their peer group. He describes their diaries as revealing:

> a process of self-realization and the emergence of new voices as these young people reflect on who they are and who they are becoming (MacBeath, 2006:197).

This focus on the development of group identity is also shared by Lodge (2005). She notes the usefulness of an approach focused on dialogue, identifying this as:

> more than conversation, it is the building of shared narrative. Dialogue is about engagement with others through talk to arrive at a point one would not get to alone (Lodge, 2005:134).

While Lodge asserts that this "process thereby also enhances the capacity of the school to develop as a learning community" (Lodge, 2005:135). I would suggest this development of a shared narrative is itself a school culture in development.

> The young people … have shared with the teachers a process that results in the members of the community developing together more enriched understandings about the central purpose of the school: the learning of its members (Lodge, 2005:144).

In order to look more specifically at the experiences of disabled students, studies engaging explicitly with them are now explored next. Two areas of interest are students' decisions to express their own personal and social identity, and behaviour perceived as challenging.

As with the studies above, a similar focus on development of social identity is shared by Ytterhus in her longitudinal study around inclusion in Norway (Ytterhus, 2012). She observed disabled students' experiences within schools, focusing on their social involvement or marginalisation; her exclusive focus on disabled students clarifying differences in how these students enacted their social identity. Some students (for example, a wheelchair user with no cognitive difference) were isolated during their early school career due to peer social focus on physical activities, but began to be socially included later. Thinking creatively about their social role, they used their knowledge of socially important topics such as football to compensate for barriers to playing football with their peers, allowing them to negotiate a new social identity and gain inclusion within the group. This contrasts with another study, where a student who attempted this strategy was subject to ridicule (Allan, 1999a). Others (for example, some children with learning difficulties) were socially accepted early on, but became increasingly marginalised as peer interests moved on (Ytterhus, 2012). In both Allan and Ytterhus' studies, students with the same mind-body difference did not meet uniform exclusion or inclusion, suggesting the influence of an intervening personal variable. Ytterhus suggests that group marginalisation or exclusion is triggered in response to social rules being broken, and that these social rules were not fixed, but changed as students developed.

Disabled students also had different inclusion experiences at the same school (Allan, 1999a). The re-definition of self-identity Allan's four young people are engaged in seems more geared towards successful adult social inclusion in terms of situating themselves within a wider social

network than their expected behaviours; which also brought them into conflict with teachers. Allan's students were unhappy with their social position; saw better social identities, and adopted them successfully, altering their position in the school community. Some chose a non-disabled identity, rejecting both the label assigned and the associated stigma, which also rejected the adult support offered in school. Others selected for themselves identities perceived to need greater support; altering their own social environment and creating a support network among their peers. Both approaches were instrumental in creating conflict with school staff, as in order to carry out their responsibilities, their actions clashed with the students' new roles. While choosing non-disabled identities caused school staff to worry about students, where students took roles perceived to require more support, staff seemed to be less sympathetic, intervening to instruct their peers not to help them. This leads us on to a discussion of student behaviour and how teachers respond to it; a key problem for disabled students who are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from school activities and culture.

A focus on "behaviour" (rather than any specific description of the type of behaviour) has been noted as more useful in moving from the behaviour towards the type of response it provokes; described as "conduct … which elicits concern, actions and intervention by teachers" (Armstrong, 2021:977). Such approaches are few in the literature, which tends to focus more on behaviour perceived as "challenging" or "disruptive".

> Literature shows that serious misconduct …, behaviour problems …, aggressive behaviour …, misbehaviour, or challenging behaviours, for example, are all terms regularly used in schools to describe students that do not comply with the rules, or do not follow the norm expected for their behaviour. None of the terms above refer to a specific disability category; however, they are consistently used to describe students with disabilities in US schools (Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013:509).

Challenging behaviour has been argued to be "a means of communicating goals and needs … in the absence of the linguistic capacity to articulate their … intentions and feelings" (Sellman,

2009:35) and "a manifestation of [a] child's response to a threatening environment" (Jull, 2008:15); with indications that stricter environments may result in increased challenging behaviour (Way, 2011; Nash et al., 2016). This may mean the form of self-expression receives attention, while the message itself is lost (Thomson, 2011).

> [S]ocial movements have … spoken up and out in ways that are confronting and challenging to those in charge. … It is often easier to dismiss ("the frustrated outburst") … rather than allowing for the possibility that something is being said that deserves attention (Thomson, 2011:24).

Such "outbursts" might be better explained by discrimination or bullying, but can lead to medicalization (Harwood & McMahon, 2014), highlighting the danger of labels (Tomlinson, 2005; Connor, 2006).

> Medicalization in school settings can mean that medical authority takes precedence over other viewpoints or interpretations, one of which… is the perceived need to be reflective about teaching practices (Harwood & McMahon, 2014:915).

Behaviour is no longer identified in the SEND Code of Practice 2015, with the category of SEBD reclassified as SEMH as noted earlier. While renaming seeks to refocus attention, it does not mark a structural change (Aspis, 1998), with behaviour still identified as a key challenge of SEMH students (Norwich & Eaton, 2015). Teachers labelling students (informally) according to their behaviour could lead them to miss an opportunity to address the student's educational needs (which may be in other areas). For example:

> students routinely refered [sic] to as presenting challenging behaviour do not necesssarily [sic] have the label of emotional and behavioural disturbance ... Teachers, principals, and related service providers use such descriptors routinely, but rarely examine their use. Other groups of students labelled as having a disability are commonly believed to present challenging behaviours as well: children with autism, and children with intellectual disabilities, for example. (Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013:509).

Self-expression is viewed through the lens of this label and seen as symptomatic of the ascribed mind-body difference; leading to the message being overlooked or dismissed (Thomson, 2011). Such students consequently face additional barriers to being heard – even

within a special school. One such example was a student voice research project in a special school for SEMH labelled students (previously SEBD), where despite the desire of the senior management team (SMT) to involve students in staff recruitment and the committed engagement of those students, the SMT were unable to counter staff concerns that "students have no place on a staff selection panel" (O'Riordan & Williams, 2011:140).

> The main reason cited was the potential for students to exploit their new position of power. This view was unanimous. They did not believe that the students were capable of taking the appointment of staff sufficiently seriously to be given control over the careers of adults (O'Riordan & Williams, 2011:140).

This perspective was not evidenced in the researchers' experiences, arguing that staff underestimated students' abilities (O'Riordan & Williams, 2011). If these students, at a specialist school focused on their needs, could not rely on their teachers to support them then the challenge for disabled students in mainstream schools where teachers might not have specialist training and experience must be even greater.

Despite the evidence of unmet needs and the noted lack of evidence to support behavioural control policies, school systems around the world have nonetheless focused on behaviour control, with "moral panics" about school behaviour in English and Australian schools resulting in Government policies which require that schools address this issue (Armstrong, 2021). Armstrong grieves that effective and evidenced behaviour programmes (which focus on avoiding behaviour by amending problems in school organisation and teaching practice) are unpopular with teachers, schools and governments as they conflict with prevailing "intellectually confused thinking" and public opinion, resulting in the popularity of (unsuccessful) "manage and discipline" schemes (Armstrong, 2021:977, 979). These carry the assumption that student behaviour is "a threat to the orderly classroom" (Armstrong, 2021), in line with the utilitarian logic noted earlier to be inappropriate for the social enterprise of group education (Lewin, 2014). The use of such schemes result in not only an escalation in

behaviours and a growth in exclusion but also police involvement in place of school resolution, with such factors conflicting with international commitments towards inclusion and the treatment of disabled people (Armstrong, 2021). Ultimately, from a psychological perspective Armstrong asserts that behaviour (and development) are produced through interaction and "behaviour only occurs within the context of relationships" (Armstrong, 2021:984); echoing our earlier discussion of the importance of attachment and "professional love" within teaching. Armstrong makes a powerful and persuasive argument for the necessity for a transformation of teacher attitudes and understandings of student behaviour. However, to address student experience in schools, it is necessary to look at some of these poorly evidenced but popular "manage and discipline" schemes currently being practiced.

Schools in England have been required to consult parents and students in the development of clear behaviour policies (Payne, 2015) although evidence suggests not all schools have consulted all students (Shreeve et al., 2002). Such policies have led to the imposition of rewards and sanctions, about which experiences vary. Shreeve *et al.* looked at a group of schools including a (single-sex) special school, bringing some interesting responses from students and teachers although results from mainstream disabled students were absent as a category for comparative analysis. Special education students in the study saw receiving praise and/or certificates as more effective than mainstream students (Shreeve et al., 2002). They found that rewards were seen by students and teachers as inappropriate for behaviour, resulting in a punitive approach, producing a situation where "policies that are intended to improve learning environments can become conduits for criticism of pupils' behaviour" (Payne, 2015:499). Inconsistent use of rewards and sanctions were felt by students to be "unfair and ineffective" (Shreeve et al., 2002:254). The student/teacher relationship was key to students' perceptions of reward schemes, with it being confirmed by students that good teachers did not need to use a reward system, as:

behaviour was managed by the establishment of a positive relationship between the teacher and individual students, good lesson planning and management of class, group and individual work. … developing in students an intrinsic desire to learn and … seen to work with disaffected students (Shreeve et al., 2002:254)

Contacting parents with positive feedback on work and behaviour has been observed to positively affect mainstream secondary students and also improve student/teacher relationships; while behavioural sanctions do not result in these students working harder (Payne, 2015). Positive evaluations of teachers in one large scale American study were linked with both better student behaviour (as evaluated by administrators) and also a student perception that sanctions were being applied fairly (Way, 2011). Special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in England noted the importance of a positive student/TA relationship, arguing that "teachers need to make the extra effort" with students exhibiting challenging behaviour (but that this does not always happen) (Nye et al., 2016). Teachers in England do not have a unified understanding of the cause of behaviour (Armstrong & Hallett, 2012), which "especially in the most troubled pupils … often masks underlying processing and learning difficulties", leading to students being punished for behaviour they could not control and "fuelling an escalation of behavioural difficulties" by the student (Nash et al., 2016:170). Three different discourses of challenging behaviour have been identified in Australian teacher training literature (Harwood & McMahon, 2014) as seen in Figure 1 p.75 (reproduced here with permission see Appendix D, item 29 p.372).

Figure 1: Three discourses of challenging behaviour (Harwood & McMahon 2014:922)

Three discourses of challenging behaviour

	Biomedical	Biopsychosocial	Ecosocio
'Types' of child	The in-actively challenging child	the pro-actively challenging child	the re-actively challenging child
Who is speaking? (by discipline)	Medicine Psychiatry Neuropsychology	Clinical psychology Developmental psychology Educational psychology	Sociology Ecological psychology Critical psychology
Education texts	Special education needs (SEN) Behaviour management		Inclusive education Reflective practice Sociology of education Aboriginal education
Possible teacher subjectivity continuums	Non-expert	Manager	Supporter

As can be seen from Figure 1 (p.75), how challenging behaviour is understood by teachers changes across this diagram. At the most restrictive end is the biomedical discourse (consistent with the medical model), where a student is considered unable to act in any other way and therefore such behaviour must be contained externally (Harwood & McMahon, 2014:919). In the middle is a biopsychosocial discourse, where challenging behaviour is considered to be a way of asserting agency, but which must be "managed". The ecosocio discourse (consistent with a social model approach) is the only discourse they view as consistent with inclusion, appreciating that:

behaviour is socially located and it is the social structures, physical environment, artefacts and relationships surrounding an individual that most significantly shape and prompt their behaviour (Harwood & McMahon, 2014:921).

As they note, "one of the problems with a medicalizing thesis of behaviour is the impact on the teacher" (Harwood & McMahon, 2014:926). The medicalization discourse dictates not only how the student exhibiting the behaviour is viewed; but also, the position the teacher takes, how teachers see their role with the student and consequently how they respond to them. If the teacher is not aware of the discourses within which they are working, they may alter their approach without being aware of this:

> confusion can occur when a teacher using a biopsychosocial discourse draws on biological interpretation of behaviour and consequently oscillates between biological and psychological explanations. This leads to switching understandings and responses between for example the child can't change or the child can. … the biopsychosocial discourse … positions the teacher as expert in educational interventions to teach and modify behaviour. Yet this very positioning as expert can be the prompt for undefined medicalization to occur (Harwood & McMahon, 2014:926).

Harwood and McMahon do not expand on the impact of "switching understandings and responses" on the student, but if a teacher varies how they see their student and what they believe the student is able to do, this must have a consequent impact on their relationship with the student which, as noted earlier, is at the root of student behaviour (Armstrong, 2021). Armstrong and Hallett analysed the behavioural understandings of 150 teachers in England undertaking further study in relation to behaviour, finding four different understandings present within the cohort (Armstrong & Hallett, 2012). Given that these teachers were embedded in further training, it might have been anticipated that they had a more unified understanding, relating to the perspectives they were studying, but this was not evidenced. Their fourth category, "disabled by educational policy and practice" (Armstrong & Hallett, 2012) fits with the social model and Harwood and McMahon's ecosocio model, supporting the evidence for this approach. They observed that while some empathy for learners was evident,

not all teachers expressed concern and some did not consider causes (Armstrong & Hallett, 2012), reflecting the "manage and discipline" approach mentioned earlier (Armstrong, 2021). These could reflect Harwood and McMahon's pro-actively challenging child discourse. Other narratives were less clear, with teachers concerned about supporting normalisation and concerned with a lack of consistency from colleagues (supported by the mix of perspectives identified) and focusing on within-child issues and barriers to education within the home environment.

2.6   Summary and Research Questions

My research explores young disabled people's school experiences using the social model of disability (Hunt, 1966; UPIAS, 1974; Oliver, 1983). Although a more rigid formulation of the social model has viewed special educational settings as segregated and exclusionary (UPIAS, 1974), by using it as an heuristic device (Barnes, 2003) I decentred this loaded perspective to prioritise students' own views and agency (Davis & Hogan, 2004). In line with the current SEND Code of Practice, I view both young disabled people (Equality Act, 2010) and those labelled with Special Educational Needs (Department for Education (DfE), 2015) as disabled; including neurodiverse and autistic students (Runswick-Cole, 2014) which is consistent with the social model (den Houting, 2018). To these recognised categories, I add a further group: students who have a difference which could result in a disability and/or SEN label, but who do not yet have such a label. Their presence is indicated by the identification of authorised differences such as dyslexia in previously undiagnosed adults (Wray et al., 2012). Acknowledging that labels and diagnoses are culturally defined and subject to redefinition (Goodley, 2001); if such students may be barred from learning by educational structures and practices, then they are also disabled.   Much of the education literature on inclusion focuses on specific categories of mind-body difference, for example, autistic students (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015); misleadingly criticised as medical model due to this focus (Messiou, 2017).

Social model studies explore the social and educational disadvantage experienced by disabled students (Connors & Stalker, 2003), with the "second wave" of disability studies (Deal, 2003) starting to address the experience of impairment (Crow, 1992) described here as difference (following Holt, 2004b). Despite challenges, the social model is still relevant in England (Goodley & Roets, 2008), presenting continued utility for this approach.

Education in England is multi-layered with several different types of settings, but statutory education for disabled students often involves a tense choice between mainstream and special educational settings (Runswick-Cole, 2008). Aspects of current provision derive from previous legislation (Borsay, 2011; Reay, 2017), with the system criticised for the reproduction of class (Ball, 2006; Slee, 2014) and racial discrimination (Troyna & Carrington, 1989; Tomlinson, 2005). The last group of young disabled people only gained the right to education in 1970 having previously been described as "ineducable" (Ainscow, 2007; Rieser, 2011), including those labelled with severe learning difficulties (Black & Lawson, 2017) and/or challenging behaviour (Education Act, 1944). The standards agenda enabled by the re-institution of a National Curriculum had a substantial negative impact on disabled students (Alexander, 2010), introducing greater pressure and competition into the classroom (Reay & Wiliam, 1999) and between schools, with league tables leading to a growth in student exclusion (James & James, 2004); conflicting with pressure for inclusion through international agreements (UNESCO, 1994) and rights legislation (Equality Act, 2010). Special schools have repositioned themselves through personalisation as disability specialists (Rix, 2011); coming to serve a more complex and/or specific target group. The current SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education (DfE), 2015) also follows this approach, analysed as both espousing a normalising discourse (Burch, 2018b) and underpinned by a marketisation discourse; viewing "education policy as almost a private tender document" (Lehane, 2017:63).

Inclusion has been used to mean many different things (Barton, 1997), but is here defined as "the presence, participation and achievement of all students" (Ainscow, 2005:119). I identified four different examples of discourses (Foucault, 1974) from within the inclusion literature (Equality and Rights (UPIAS, 1974; Fraser, 1995); Equal Resources (Utilitarianism) (Dessent, 1987); Holistic Inclusion (Ainscow, 2016) and Protective Realism (Norwich, 2013)) which each hold different implications for disabled students.

Students labelled with severe learning disabilities and/or challenging behaviour were among the last to gain access to education (Education Act, 1944; Black & Lawson, 2017), and these categories are noted to present barriers to inclusion. In addition, existing research suggests that autistic students (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015) and students labelled with learning disabilities (MENCAP, 2008) are most likely to experience social exclusion or marginalisation at school through bullying. It would therefore seem most appropriate to work with students with these labels/experiences. Although the opinions of non-verbal students can be assessed by observing body language, physical responses (Davis & Watson, 2002) and using pressure pads to facilitate participant responses (Bishton & Lindsay, 2011), the type of qualitative feedback I was hoping for would be difficult for me to obtain reliably. Research with non-verbal students tends to have been undertaken by researchers who already work with the individuals concerned, and have strong familiarity with their preferred communication methods (for example, Bishton & Lindsay, 2011), and I do not have this background. Accordingly, I decided to work only with respondents who were willing and able to communicate verbally with me. Noting how the behaviour of disabled school students has been responded to, I would need to pay particular attention to alternative ways students might voice their experiences.

In line with the new sociology of childhood, I acknowledge young disabled people to have social agency (Christensen & James, 2000). In line with this, I seek primarily to understand their social world through their own narratives and responses; complemented by other sources where these are appropriate. Instead of seeking specific barriers or factors, respecting this agency I explore any factors that students bring up and exploring their significance. To facilitate this, I chose open research questions which will allow students to express their own voice in their own ways, without pre-judging the content or method of delivery.

The following research questions were put forward:

1   What barriers to inclusion have been experienced by disabled students in schools?

2   What factors have influenced disabled students' experiences of inclusion?

3   In what ways have disabled students used their 'voice' in school?

In the next chapter, I will discuss how these questions and the methodology literature were used to frame the collection of data, and what actions were taken to safeguard students.

Chapter 3 Methodology

A philosophical divide between quantitative and qualitative methodologies has previously been acknowledged as the "traditional dichotomy" (Plowright, 2011:2) between these two paradigms; referred to as the paradigm wars. While mainly of historic interest (Tashakkori, 2010), it retained importance in education as the "educational psychologists who dominated the field of educational research for most of this century" (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998:4) favoured quantitative approaches. I feel that all approaches are valid, but as this is a study "in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1993), asking how individuals interpret their own experiences, it requires a qualitative methodology which has been used here.

This chapter explores the challenges presented by emancipatory research (Oliver, 1992; 1997; Barnes, 2005; Barnes & Sheldon, 2007) and to what extent I have followed this approach here. I examine the choice of school for this study and why this was an appropriate location for the research. The ethical issues faced in research with young disabled people are assessed, and how these were addressed by this study. I set out the ethical challenges of gaining access to potential research participants who are young disabled people, exploring the issue of informed consent, and to what extent the "social relations of research production" (Oliver, 1992) were made more equal, to facilitate engagement. I discuss what impact power differentials may have on informed consent and look at how consent has been problematized for young disabled people, exploring the new sociology of childhood (James et al., 1998; James & James, 2004) and other disability research which counters this (Davis et al., 2000; Goodley, 2001). Portrait Methodology is explored and its use in education and with disabled students specifically. Previous research using this methodology is outlined and how and why the methodology differs from other approaches.

The methods used and the rationale for their choice is discussed. The student focused

methods used here included an introductory focus group; sequenced semi-structured

interviews; participative techniques which were designed for this research and classroom

observation. These were supplemented by teacher interviews and access to the students'

Annual Review documents from previous schools to access data which were sometimes

invisible to the students. The strengths and weaknesses of these methods, and how they

were used together to address some of the weaknesses is identified. The pilot stage, and

alteration of methods which resulted from this, is explored and the analysis discussed.

3.1   Emancipatory challenges

While much research has focused on communities which have been social marginalised,

"research has been seen as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution" (Oliver,

1992:105). One early piece of research notably left disabled people "socially dead" (Miller &

Gwynne, 1972:9) while improving the careers of the researchers involved (Hunt, 1981). The

outrage felt by one of Miller and Gwynne's research participants, Paul Hunt, prompted Hunt's

letter to the Guardian (Hunt, 1972) acknowledged as the birth of the Union of the Physically

Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (Shakespeare, 2006), or even of the disability rights

movement in the UK (Beresford, 2015). It would be difficult for me to distance myself from

this debate, since I am seeking a qualification through this research which my participants will

not share (Garbutt & Seymour, 1998).

Continuing marginalisation of disabled people has led to calls for an emancipatory research

paradigm consistent with the social model (Oliver, 1992; 1997; Barnes, 2003) to subvert the

"social relations" of research.

> The social relations of research production … are built upon a firm distinction between the researcher and the researched; upon the belief that it is the researchers who have specialist knowledge and skills; and that it is they who should decide what topics should be researched and be in control of the whole process of research production (Oliver, 1992).

Emancipatory research presents ethical challenges for PhD research, where academic standards requiring researcher ownership have priority (Garbutt & Seymour, 1998). Alongside concerns that academic standards could be deprioritised, Shakespeare has viewed claims to research producing social change as "over-optimistic" and "grandiose" (Shakespeare, 1996:118). As a PhD student who is not a practicing teacher, I cannot improve anyone's educational experience, but even those who start research from a position of institutional influence do not find achieving change simple (Martin, 2011; O'Riordan & Williams, 2011). To be genuinely emancipatory would have meant being open to participants' own priorities for research; which might not have matched with my area of study but might (for instance) have been related to disability benefits (Carpenter, 2018), cuts to statutory and voluntary sector support (Ryan, 2019) or disability hate crime (Roulstone et al., 2011; Healy, 2020). Due to these challenges, I concurred with Garbutt and Seymour's position; that genuine emancipatory research was not feasible for me. Having taken on some elements of the social model without embracing all of its positions; I felt it might be possible to take on some concerns of emancipatory research without adopting the whole paradigm.

Barnes and Sheldon identify "six core principles" within emancipatory research (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007), of which I have met five. The first is the use of the social model, used here to identify the barriers faced by those labelled with SEN, viewing their educational needs as unmet rather than "special": "they are children like any others, but their needs are not currently met by our education system" (Barnes & Sheldon, 2007:8). I feel this also addresses "problem of objectivity" (that is, work claiming to be objective but in actuality medical model), by openly taking the side of disabled students, and also the principle of experience; seeking

students' own experiences of barriers to education, rather than viewing these as individual challenges. To meet the principle of accountability a reference group of disabled students is advised, but I did not feel it would be appropriate to ask young disabled people to invest time in a project they would not own. Instead, I stand with Shakespeare's commitment.

> I aim to represent fairly the experiences of my interviewees. I explain exactly what the research is about; I give them the opportunity to revise what they have said and I offer them the opportunity to ask me questions, either about the research or about myself (Shakespeare, 1996:116).

The requirement for qualitative methods has been met, giving participants more freedom over their responses and the research process (Shakespeare, 1996; Barnes & Sheldon, 2007) and allowing a person-centred perspective (Mertens & McLaughlin, 1995). I have incorporated participative techniques to enable students to interact in different ways, an approach which has previously been used with disabled students (Connors & Stalker, 2003). Some of these activities allow students to communicate in familiar ways, like drawing, rather than relying on the unfamiliar structures of formal research interviews (James et al., 1998).

3.2   Choosing Special Secondary

In order to safeguard participants in case the circumstances which led to their transfer to special education had been traumatic, I sought a special school with a good or excellent OFSTED rating, where the student might have a positive school experience. It would have been interesting to include "looked after" students but I did not feel I had enough experience to facilitate this; it was more important to ensure no harm was done. Details of the special secondary schools in the locality were gathered first via the Local Education Authority. The LEA had recently completed an overhaul of special education, with a reduction in places. As part of an investment into school facilities, some the special schools had been relocated, so at the time, the Council website was (for some schools) the only correct source of information. Following this, the schools' own websites were explored. Not all the special schools seemed to

have websites, which was unexpected, and seemed unusual given the size and diversity of local mainstream schools' websites. The decision-making process was complicated in that each school catered to a particular difference group; and I had hoped to reach a wider range of students than one group. Once the available websites had been explored, further information was gained via Ofsted reports and information.

I was particularly interested in the experiences of students who had transferred from mainstream to special education, with a focus on telling their story in their own words. I hoped to recruit students of different ages; with a range of differences and/or Special Educational Needs, as these factors may impact on school experiences. After perusing the most recent inspection reports, one school stood out. The Ofsted report specifically commented on the number of students that arrived at the school at non-typical joining points[8]. This fitted with the target group I aimed to recruit; who might experience significant barriers to attending mainstream schools and may transfer at short notice. I emailed the Head Teacher to confirm this; who added that such students could be found in every class. The school did have non-verbal students; however, those students (some labelled with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities) tended to go directly to special education rather than attending mainstream settings and would not have had experience of mainstream education. The school website celebrated the work of their Student Council, noting the Student Council members' participation in location-wide School Council activities. While this structure suggested that other schools had similar activities, none of the other special schools highlighted this on their websites (and few of the mainstream schools did so either). This seemed to complement the student voice aspect of the research, since students would already

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[8] This comment will not be referenced, to protect the anonymity of the school.

be familiar with the idea, contrasting with concerns that young disabled people may simply not be used to people asking them questions or listening to them (Monteith, 2004) and that time might be needed for them to participate.

The initial approach to the school was made via email, with a brief outline of the research. On receipt of a positive response, a phone call to the head was made to follow this up. I felt it would be beneficial to visit the school prior to the beginning of the study, to get a sense of the culture of the school as well as familiarise myself with the layout. By chance, I had rung a week prior to a public engagement event (July 2014) and I was invited to attend. This provided a helpful insight into the culture of the school. In the entry hallway was a display of student art work with several hand drawn posters about Children's Rights, supporting the school's stated ethos for student voice work. All over the central atrium of the school were extensive displays of students' work for a project which had led to the public event. The school was proud to share that the idea had come from a student's suggestion and accordingly, felt it was symbolic of student voice. The event was broken up into small sections of different activities, with songs, poems and readings carried out by students. While the school was technically geared to one specific difference group, there was a diverse range of students. There were some non-verbal wheelchair users accompanied by teaching assistants (TAs). Other students (with hidden differences) were engaged in groups of two or three, speaking with visitors, with one young man inviting visitors to contribute to the school's minibus fund. There appeared to be a few autistic students (judging from movements such as flapping and twirling), and the choir had been signing (in British Sign Language or Makaton) alongside singing, suggesting students with hearing differences might also attend.

3.3   Ethics

Attention must be given to the "degree to which ... funded research projects are controlled by the sponsor" (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994:56), as this could affect the ethics of the research. My sponsor was the University of Hull, which produced the original research call in relation to disabled student voice, but aside from this has not sought to influence the research agenda or publication. All research interventions were approved by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee (Appendix B p.336). This first round of approval covered interviews with and classroom observations of students; both student-focused. During my first visits to the school, teachers sometimes shared anecdotal information about how the students' behaviour, affect and engagement with learning had changed over their time at Special Secondary. I did not feel I could record this, not having gained consent or ethical approval, but hoped the students would volunteer these experiences. When speaking to the students, however, most were not aware of having changed, with only one of the students able to describe this part of their educational journey (James p.154). Students' behaviour seemed to have been instrumental in their transfer from mainstream to special education for several students, so I was keen to ensure these data were collected. After getting advice from my supervisors and the Head Teacher, I requested additional ethical approval for two supplementary data sources to capture this. The first area to be explored was teacher interviews, to formalise capture of the volunteered information with the appropriate approval from both the University and also the individual students. In order to ensure primacy of students' own data, I asked the students to nominate teaching staff they felt knew them best for me to speak to. I formulated a short semi-structured interview (Appendix B item 12 p.347) for teachers and TAs on what ways the students had changed. Excerpts from these interviews are presented in Chapter 4 after each Portrait. Since students' previous behaviour seemed to have played a part in several of the students' transfer to Special Secondary, I asked the Head Teacher what data source might best reflect this. They suggested the Annual Review, usually provided by the students' previous mainstream school to support the student's transfer. It was hoped that this would reflect the

behaviour, interactions and engagement with learning of the student prior to their time at Special Secondary. Since these supplementary sources sought to add depth to students' own perspectives, as with the teacher interviews, I accessed this data subject to the students' own permission. Additional ethical permission was granted (Appendix B p.336). I asked each student separately about each of these two data sources, made clear that they were under no pressure to agree, and complied with their decisions. In the event, only one student (Elsa) did not give consent to view her previous Annual Review due to her feelings about her previous school. Quotes from students' Annual Reviews can be found in Chapter 4.

The lives of young people are subject to parental gatekeeping, as young people's agency "remains in general rooted in the involvement of their parents/carers" (Harris & Davidge, 2019:2). Rather than once-removed from consent, young people experience different types of gatekeepers (James et al., 1998), "subject to multiple and hierarchical layers of consent in the form of [both] school-based institutional gatekeepers and parental/guardian permissions" (Maguire et al., 2018:90) reminiscent of multiple/simultaneous oppression (Vernon, 1998). For disabled people of all ages, access to health and social care support and disability benefits must be negotiated (Ryan, 2019) through professional and administrative gatekeepers in order to attain the personal independence non-disabled people might take for granted. Gatekeepers may then present a challenge to informed consent as participants may consent (or dissent) "through the fear of sanction" (James et al., 1998:187). Accordingly, young disabled people experience an additional gatekeeping load as, in common with non-disabled young people, their access to decision making is limited by adult gatekeepers' assessments of their competence (Maguire et al., 2018).

My access to the school and students was also subject to gatekeeping (Raffe et al., 1989). On my first formal research visit to the school, after discussing the target group, I was invited by the Head Teacher to meet some students. This could be seen as gatekeeping "access to sampling frames and/or sample members", but is appropriate in regard to their role in protecting students (Raffe et al., 1989:17). We visited classes from almost every year group, introducing me (and the research) to the class, and to some specific students who had come from mainstream school. I had the opportunity to ask whether students would be interested in working with me, and to answer any questions. Being introduced by a figure of authority (or gatekeeper) could have resulted in students feeling pressure to participate; however, several of the students approached were not interested, and said no to the offer immediately. I found this indicative of what has been termed informed dissent; "the capacity and opportunity to 'say or express no'" (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014:152). Other students asked questions about what it would involve before they confirmed their interest, reflecting an evaluation necessary for the informed nature of consent (Cohen et al., 2011). I felt these responses also demonstrated students' confidence and personal agency, which boded well for student voice work. In order to counter any pressure that may have been experienced, these initial discussions were was taken as an indication of interest and followed up by two additional steps, asking for consent from parental gatekeepers (Appendix B, pp.340-341), and a second discussion to confirm participant consent (Appendix B, pp.344-345). Students were given a further chance to express any concerns and/or to withdraw their involvement at the start of the first interview. As was also the case with the pilot school, Special Secondary forwarded the forms about the research and the request for consent of parents and/or guardians to them directly, due to confidentiality of student information. For one particular student, the Head Teacher noted that they would telephone the parents to gain consent verbally, since this was their preferred communication route. The school confirmed they had the consent of a parent or guardian for the students involved before the research started.

A research power imbalance between researcher and participant exists which can be reduced, but which might not be feasible (or advisable) to remove completely (Cohen et al., 2011). Interviews with disadvantaged groups are argued to be problematic due to the power differential between researcher and participants; described as the "social relations of research production" (Oliver, 1992:106), although research with participants of equal or higher social status also presents challenges (Riddell, 1989). From an intersectionality perspective (Crenshaw, 1989; Connor, 2006) power is influenced by layers of difference such as race (Ilochi, 2014) and social class (Ball, 2006; Holt et al., 2019) so researcher status is not uniform. Female researchers have had a more difficult time being taken seriously in male-dominated cultures (Riddell, 1989), but Special Secondary had a female-dominated culture. While I am disabled, I have a hidden difference which is not always perceived by others.

As I was seeking access to students' experiences, I tried to equalise the relationship by being open with students and viewing them in turn with unconditional positive regard (discussed in 3.5). Group interviews are noted to be helpful with young people, putting them at ease (Cohen et al., 2011:433) but present challenges to confidentiality and sharing of students' personal experiences. Due to this, I used a focus group/group interview at the start of the research, so students would feel more comfortable. Most of the students seemed confident talking to me during the research, able to correct me when I had misunderstood or offer follow-up information; and all asserted their agency in some way. Verbal and written material (presented in Appendix B p.336) was accessible and as simple and clear as possible (Mallett et al., 2007). Forms were printed in 14-point Comic Sans font, to assist students experiencing literacy or comprehension barriers. To reduce such barriers, I read out material to the students during the research; which proved essential as two students had poor literacy. Consent forms were discussed in detail and questions invited before they were signed.

While I have particular views and experiences of learning in school, I approached this study afresh. Having studied for an MA in Ethnomusicology, I have some training in anthropological methods, and wholeheartedly embrace the concept that we all weave our own narratives, which may differ even from others who share our experiences. Coming from the mad community, I am fortunate to have known many people who experience psychosis and experience different realities, each of which is true for that individual. I believe that there is no such thing as a singular reality, but that people can experience the same event in radically different ways (depending on, for example, previous life experience) and that the narrative they assign to the experience is true for that person, even if others do not agree with them.

Outside of the ontological framework I hold, on a personal note I did not feel I could anticipate students' life experiences before meeting them. I have never felt I could predict what may be going on in someone's head, due to the social barriers I experience. I may have read around the literature, but these students could have had radically different experiences, not having been involved in such studies previously. There was no basis to compare their experiences with my own as I was not considered to be a disabled student in school; I do not have a learning disability label; and much has changed in schools since I left secondary school in 1987. I hoped that my own experiences as a disabled adult might allow me some commonality with these students, but I came to this research as a mature student, and therefore aware that I have more layers of difference (in particular, my age; personal autonomy; life experience; and previous education) from them than similarities. I approached the students as if they were a separate tribe with their own cultural understandings and experiences which I do not share, to learn from their experiences.

In interviews, I listened to the students, and listened again. Where I was not sure about what they meant, I asked them. When they were finding it difficult to express concepts or feelings, I suggested two possible options (for example: "did that make you happy or unhappy?"), in order to assist them but not lead them in one direction. If I was uncertain about what they were trying to say, I tried to communicate this with facial expressions and gestures, looking puzzled and putting my head to one side, pausing to encourage students to suggest their own word. Lastly, if it was still unclear, occasionally I might offer a possible response by phrasing it as a question (for example: "so that made you feel (rising pitch) happy? (tilting head to one side and frowning)") or giving an example (often from an earlier conversation with that student) and asking whether it was like that. I tried to express these in such a way that either a positive or negative answer would seem acceptable. Students often went on from this to refine their own specific answer which did not reflect the options I had offered, which suggested to me that students felt able to disagree through this process. If a student had chosen a word I had mentioned, I resolved to withhold these particular answers from the data coding, in order to avoid my own voice coming through.

Participant consent is necessary for almost all research (save covert research, about which there is still discussion about "whether researchers are ever justified in deceiving subjects" (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994:57)). Consent is generally described as informed consent, since the participant must be informed about both "the possible consequences and dangers" of involvement, to weigh up whether to participate or not, and of their right to withdraw from the research at any time (Cohen et al., 2011:77). The British Educational Research Association specifies "voluntary informed consent", as consent cannot be forced; highlighting the challenge of power imbalances and gatekeeper influence (British Educational Research Association, 2011). The issue of informed consent is viewed as problematic for whole groups of people, including "adults, the disabled, those who cannot speak, see or hear, those in hospital, those in care, those suffering [sic] from autism" (Cohen et al., 2011:80).

Disappointingly, while defining vulnerability, the above authors refer to Oliver and Crow (Cohen et al., 2011:80), but not the disability authors Liz Crow and Mike Oliver, who would have been better placed to discuss these issues. The reason for these concerns is around "mental capacity": the ability of a person to fully understand and give informed consent to involvement in research, and to be aware of the implications of their consent. Problems with capacity are particularly linked with cognitive differences such as learning difficulties or mental health problems, but issues can also arise from participants having limited awareness or experience of research. I needed to choose a methodology which respected the voice of the student, gave this higher emphasis than the voices of teachers or parents, was a pleasurable experience which gave the student some time and attention, and if possible, gave something back to the student for their participation. Due to this, I was drawn to Portrait methodology.

3.4   Portrait methodology

Portrait methodology is an approach initially devised by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot in her work The Good High School (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) as a means of describing the complex interplay of social meanings and values within the cultural world of a school. It presents the data as a personal narrative, or "portrait", of the subject; in this first instance, portraits of six different schools. Lawrence-Lightfoot sought to replicate in a research process her own experience of being drawn by an artist:

> what I remember most clearly was the wonderful, glowing sensation I got from being attended to so fully. There were no distractions. I was the only one in her gaze. My image filled her eyes, and the sound of the chalk stroking the paper was palpable. The audible senses translated to tactile ones. After the warmth of this human encounter, the artistic product was almost forgettable (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983:5).

The quality of attention described here is acknowledged as a benefit of using this approach by

other researchers using this approach:

> interviewees remarked that activities … were normally focused on issues of
> performance, and only tangentially focused on themselves as individuals. Indeed,
> none of the individuals interviewed could think of professional provision for them
> which precisely focused on them in the way this approach did (Bottery et al.,
> 2009:90).

Portrait methodology has been used with students (Juola-Rushton, 2007; Grimm, 2009) and

educators (Bottery, 2007; Waterhouse, 2007; Bottery et al., 2008; Bottery et al., 2013); as well

as school cultures (Carnes, 2009; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017). While sharing common

features with ethnography, the portrait creator listens *for* a story, rather than *to* a story

(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997):

> the portraitist searches for the authentic central story as perceived by the actors
> within the setting, choosing to expose and describe the story from a framework of
> strength rather than from deficiency (Hackmann, 2002:54).

This has led to criticism for seeming to claim access to truth (English, 2000), which has been

countered, since "portraiture can be acknowledged … as an interpretive exercise, which does

not … penetrate to some objective reality" (Bottery et al., 2009:83), acknowledging the many

stories which can and do exist simultaneously (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The

approach described by Hackmann (2002) and as used by Bottery (2009) would seem to fit with

unconditional positive regard:

> to feel unconditional positive regard toward another is to "prize" him ... to value
> the person, irrespective of the differential values which one might place on his
> specific behaviors (Rogers, 1959:208)

> [encompassing]… the experiences of which the client is frightened or ashamed, as
> well as … the experiences with which the client is pleased or satisfied (Rogers
> 1959: 208).

Following a strategy of unconditional positive regard offered me the opportunity to validate

the voice expressed; the feelings and perspectives of young people, gained (for example)

through experiences of marginalisation (Messiou, 2006; Messiou, 2012; 2019) or social and

cultural exclusion (Davis & Watson, 2001; Razer et al., 2013) within schools. The key focus of

the portrait methodology approach is the development of a written portrait; a summary of the

research findings.   Viewing such portraits has been noted to have a positive impact on

participants (Bottery et al., 2009). This offered something reciprocal to the respondent in

exchange for their time, and was an additional benefit of this method.

Portrait methodology has primarily been used in education although there have been isolated

studies using this approach in other fields (e.g. Fisher, 2008). Other portrait methodology

studies have explored the views of disabled students (Connor, 2006; Grimm, 2009), which

marks the effectiveness of this approach with both the subject matter here and the target

group. Two portrait methodology studies noted lived experiences of disabled participants

(students labelled with dyslexia in the studies quoted here) were underrepresented in the

literature, with challenges being analysed without reference to participants:

> I feel that the actual students are still largely absent as people—living, thinking,
> knowing, being (Connor, 2006:154)

> the voices of the students were missing, or if the student was visible in the
> research at all, it was from the adult perspective (Hill, 2013:8)

These researchers used portrait methodology as a way to make these experiences known to a

larger audience. Stories in research have significant impact as "narratives are powerful,

human and integrated" (Cohen et al., 2011:554) and "allow personal insights into social

worlds" (Goodley, 2001:216). Portrait methodology can be seen as a narrative methodology

approach, argued to be particularly useful in relation to disability.

> [N]arrative inquiry … seeks to practice a deep fidelity to the possibilities of societal
> and individual transformation, resistance and living life differently. For example,
> narratives can be useful as counter-narratives …, i.e. certain narratives, such as
> the affirmative model of disability … can provide alternative maps and different
> emplotments regarding disability and impairment that refuse and displace the
> tragedy story, that challenge and resist social oppression and that allow different
> body-self relationships to emerge (Smith & Sparkes, 2008:19)

In a world where people labelled with learning disability are subject to a deficit model, seen as syndromes and less than human (Goodley, 2001), narratives actively challenge this; affirming "the integrity of people rather than fragmenting bits of them" (Cohen et al., 2011:553-4).

While this method offers benefits, however, there are risks. Portraits (whether drawn or written) reflect only selected aspects of the subject:

> they seemed to capture my essence - qualities of character and history some of which I was unaware of, some of which I resisted mightily, some of which felt deeply familiar (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997:4).

There could be a risk that participants of this study (who could be considered vulnerable) might perceive a portrait of themselves negatively, resisting aspects of it in the same way as recounted above. Portrait methodology has been criticised for allowing the researcher to "impose a centralized narrative" (English, 2000:23), running the risk of objectifying participants and diminishing their agency; but this is true of any research which views individuals as data to be analysed. Further, while there are many stories that could be told (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), the participant plays an active role in choosing the material to volunteer (Scott, 2000). Portrait researchers have been cautioned against misinterpreting their experiences by viewing them through the lens of a different culture (Böck, 2013); underlining the importance of participant input in not missing out or misinterpreting information. It was important for my ethical priorities to have a route for participant feedback to be incorporated into the portrait, especially since this research focuses on student voice. Lawrence-Lightfoot saw the portrait as a creative work in itself, so her approach took ownership of the creative outcome, with the final say on the portrait being the researcher's own as her perspective on the situation, school or character involved (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Due to this, she felt that participants' views need not lead to the portrait being altered (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Her first portraits were institutional portraits, without a singular participant who could confirm their accuracy. Other portraitists have taken different approaches,

prioritising the voice of the person sharing their experience by co-authoring the portrait with them (Connor, 2006), or trying to stay as close to the participant's own perspectives as possible by using their own words (Bottery et al., 2008). I chose to follow Bottery's focus on and repetition of the words used by participants (Bottery et al., 2008; Bottery et al., 2009; Bottery et al., 2013). This presented a less creative portrait than that of Lawrence-Lightfoot; but framing portraits around participants own words could reduce potential for misunderstanding and consequent harm to participants, as well as addressing concerns about the risk of inauthenticity through the prioritising of the researcher voice (English, 2000). Direct quotes were also included in each portrait to reinforce this. A draft of the portrait was read back to each participant with the opportunity to add their own comments or make corrections. With the addition of several opportunities for participants to correct any misconceptions, portrait methodology seemed to offer greater participant benefits than other methodologies. Portrait methodology studies are in-depth but small in scope; with the smallest focusing on one key personal portrait (Connor, 2006). Most studies have slightly more participants:

- three students (Goldberg, 2008)

- four students (Grimm, 2009)/four classrooms (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017)

- six high schools (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983)/six teachers (Durrant, 2013)

- ten students (Dembouski, 2010)

- twelve students (Juola-Rushton, 2007)/twelve head teachers (Bottery, 2007).

In keeping with this scale of study, my research explores the experiences of eight students. Data from other students in group activities are included in other studies, for example, 39 "supporting" participants (Juola-Rushton, 2007) and around 100 classroom peers (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017). While three supporting students had participated in the Focus Group, their data have not been included here as these had not been confirmed with the students.

3.5 Methods

Portrait methodology studies have typically used multiple methods to collect a range of data, which have been woven together into the final portrait. Some such studies have explored an extensive range of research interventions, which could be hard to achieve for someone like myself who is not a former teacher/colleague (Goldberg, 2008) or an invited researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). For this study, the primary data came from the students themselves, in keeping with the student voice approach. These were produced from an initial focus group/group interview; a sequence of student interviews; participatory exercises (within the interviews) and classroom observations of each student. In keeping with Bottery's approach, two supplementary data sources were added to give "background context" (Bottery et al., 2009:84) rather than being of equal status with student voice. These were interviews with members of staff nominated by the students, and the Annual Review from their previous school. The research also made use of a pilot stage, during which the methods, including new participatory exercises, were tried out at a mainstream secondary school, and adapted.

Several portrait methodology studies have asked participants for creative work, including written reflections (Juola-Rushton, 2007; Goldberg, 2008) and artwork (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Juola-Rushton, 2007; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017). In some cases the artwork itself has been evaluated (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997); but I felt unqualified to make such judgements. I used participatory methods to encourage different ways of thinking and prompt discussion, without evaluating the end product. While they would seem appropriate for a portrait methodology approach, participative methods do not appear to have been used with portrait methodology previously. Since I was working with students who were verbal but might have difficulty articulating their thoughts (Booth & Booth, 1996), I sought techniques that would assist this process. I found a variety of participative methods which fitted with my approach. I selected (and adapted) several different participative activities as a way of reducing formality and the emphasis on verbal interaction.

3.5.1 Focus group/Group interview

I wanted to make sure students had a chance to get to know me first, to facilitate developing a relationship before working with me on a one-to-one basis. I was concerned that they might not want to share their feelings about potentially negative experiences with a stranger. I used a focus group prior to the interviews as they are noted to have benefits for "people, such as adolescents, who may be more reluctant to talk freely when alone with the researcher" (Davies, 1999:105). It was hoped that holding the focus group first would also facilitate "negotiated compromises that allow communication between the different conceptual outlooks of children and young people …and researchers" (Fraser et al., 2004:25), highlighting key experiences and allowing some the students' frames of reference to be communicated, to assist the preparation for one to one interviews. Due to confidentiality, I aimed for general questions which might encourage discussion while avoiding personal details. In the event, the experience was somewhere between a focus group and a group interview. Robson notes that the terms "group interview" and "focus group" have "tended recently to be used interchangeably … even though [the latter] has specific characteristics" (Robson, 2002:283), which Punch demonstrates by identifying them as a unified concept (Punch, 2009). The differences have been identified as: the content of discussion (narrow but detailed in a focus group; broad in a group interview); resources (group interviews have been used to produce multiple responses in the time and effort of a single interview); and analysis of group interaction (key for focus groups; not in group interviews) (Bryman, 2004). Talking about ethnography, Davies notes that one-to-one interviews "not uncommonly" developed into group events when family members or friends became involved (Davies, 1999:104).

While interviews (one to one or group) are seen as "a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality" (Punch, 2009:144), in a focus group "it is from the *interaction* of the group that the data emerge", producing "a collective rather than an individual view" (Cohen et al., 2011:436). This key

element is referred to as "group think" (Cohen et al., 2011:432), which carries the risk of the expression of particular views being encouraged or discouraged. Instead of producing group interaction however, in both the Pilot and Special Secondary the experience was more of a group of individuals who preferred to tell their story to the interviewer rather than interact with other students. This was unexpected; but perhaps reflected students' difficulties with social functioning and/or group work. Individual students such as Bella supported discussion, asking others for their opinions, but most of the group interacted with only one or two peers, sometimes in a more competitive rather than collaborative way.

3.5.2 Interviewing

For prioritising the voices of students, interviewing is an important method. It has been argued that simply the process of interviewing presents participants with a positive experience; the opportunity to talk about themselves to an interested and attentive listener (Finch, 1984), which fitted with my desire for the research to be beneficial for participants. Finch also notes "loneliness was common to women in both my studies" (Finch, 1984:74); which may also be relevant with disabled students, who experience marginalisation (Messiou, 2006; Messiou, 2012) and structural social and cultural exclusion (Davis & Watson, 2001). Interviews are noted to be one of the most common data collection methods (Robson, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011), and due to this their complexity is often overlooked. Interviews were the most common method found in portrait methodology research, including the work that created this methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). During interviews "the researcher defines and controls the situation" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:3), deciding what to talk about (and what not to), and steering the participant if they get off-track. As with adults, young people "are also adept at controlling what they reveal" (Scott, 2000:102). Due to the social model focus on external stigma and the sensitive nature of the topic, no direct questions about difference were asked, but follow-up questions were asked if the student brought up the subject. Interviews were digitally recorded for transcription.

In order to gather the material needed to produce portraits, a variety of methods were considered. One-to-one interviews seemed the best way to ensure student confidentiality. It was thought that a sequence of short interviews would be more useful than one long interview in working with students who may have problems with concentration. This also had the advantage of allowing for a period of reflection (for interviewer and interviewee) between interviews. Once this had been decided, an exploration of other portrait methodology studies (Juola-Rushton, 2007; Goldberg, 2008; Grimm, 2009) revealed a shared approach: a sequence of three semi-structured interviews which could be used.

The root of this particular sequence of interviews comes from a format for "phenomenological interviewing" used by David Schuman. While this was the basis for the interviews that formed his book (Schuman, 1982), he does not discuss this method there. The approach is presented instead by his colleague Irving Seidman in his own book on interviewing (Seidman, 2013); with whose approach Lawrence-Lightfoot notes commonalities (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:192). It consists of three discrete interviews; each building from the previous but separate in its focus. These three researchers approached Schuman's phenomenological interview structure with some adaptions to the structure. As with Schuman's design, laid out by Seidman, Grimm's first interview is a "life history" of the research participant, covering significant events, key people, and focusing on pivotal events or interactions which may have influenced the participant's experience of the research topic. The second interview focuses on their present experiences in relation to the research topic. The third interview encourages the participant to reflect on their current and previous experience, but "allows the participant to make their own connections" (Grimm, 2009:56). Goldberg's first interview covered the move to students' current school; her second interview focused on the perspectives the students have on the particular subject area, while the final session was intended to prompt reflexivity from the participants in relation to their previous written responses (Goldberg, 2008). While Juola-Rushton's three

interviews are not formally credited to any particular research method or author, the content of the interview questions follows a very similar structure (Juola-Rushton, 2007). Interview two, in common with Schumann's design, focuses on students' current experiences while in interview three, students look back on their experience. Interview one, though, is different. Since the focus of her research is students' concurrent experiences of a series of examinations, a timeline or history of these experiences would have been impossible. Instead, her first interview offers a contextual background of the student's experience of this year of school, their self-awareness as a learner and their understanding of these tests.

Following Schuman's structure, my first interview focused on a timeline exercise. This attempted to elicit a life-history of the students' school education, with details of any significant events or experiences. The second interview focused on the current experiences of participants. Given that the students targeted in this research were at this point attending special educational provision, the current experiences of these students were of this setting. The research did not aim to directly compare mainstream and special educational settings; however, by reflecting on the experiences of these students in a variety of different educational stages (nursery, primary and secondary) and also mainstream and special educational settings it was hoped this might reveal previously unconsidered aspects of inclusivity, regardless of the educational provision those experiences took place in. The third interview supported and encouraged students to reflect on past and present experiences, students being reminded of experiences they had shared previously where it seemed relevant.

Participative activities were formulated to help students access the research process, with both group activities (for the Focus Group) and solo activities (for the individual interviews). These will be discussed in the next section.

3.5.3 Participatory methods

During the Focus Group, two participative activities were used to engage the students with the research and generate discussion. Thinking about research approaches which focused on movement (unusual in a research setting but consistent with the activities of young people (Clark, 2004)), I considered ways of gathering initial information from students which would incorporate physical activity, serving as a warm-up for the group. I took inspiration from "Moody Corners" (Burton et al., 2010:68-69), an activity where emotion posters are displayed around the room, and young people walk around and model those feelings when they reach the poster. I adapted the process by developing a series of questions which would allow young people to make a non-verbal response by standing by the appropriate poster, resulting in **Activity A: Moody Responses**. This allowed one of the pilot study students (described as electively non-verbal) to participate. The pictures used were from Microsoft Word™ Clip Art (found under the Insert tab, under Illustrations), which are partly free from copyright. I chose seven emotions, four from those suggested (Burton et al., 2010): Happy, Sad, Angry, and Bored; adding Excited, Worried and Proud to increase the range of options. These emotion pictures were labelled in large print, made into A4 landscape posters and displayed around the room. The posters can be found in Appendix D, p.358, and the questions used during this exercise in Appendix C, p.351. The first two questions were intended to give the participants the chance to try out the method and settle into the activity. Questions 3 – 5 explored how participants were feeling, and how they were feeling about the focus group. Questions 6 – 11 were designed to start participants thinking about their experience of school, with some of these focusing on their sense of belonging to their current school community (Hope, 2012). The final question, while an over-simplified perspective on home schooling, was intended to separate learning and social experiences to identify if one presented more barriers than the other.

Following on from the Moody Responses exercise, **Activity B: School Experience Weighing Scales** continued this exploration of participants' school experiences. The exercise was initially inspired by the Bridge model (Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2004).

> The Bridge is a tool for visioning and planning, helping people to identify where they are, where they want to be, and how to bridge the gap between the two (Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2004:70).

The two posts of the bridge seemed appropriate for looking at the gap between positive and negative experiences of inclusion. The exercise's focus on the span between these posts was interesting, but I felt that asking these young disabled people to conceptualise the steps to be travelled between the two might be too challenging, more work than fun (and retaining an element of fun was important) and might also be too much to achieve in a short session. A later exercise in the same book, Forcefield analysis (Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2004), used a set of scales "to examine forces that help or restrain organisations and communities" (Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2004:96) which seemed to allow for a focus on positive and negative experiences. Recommending the use of actual weighing scales, it also allowed for these to be drawn instead, represented by Figure 2 below (p.104).

Figure 2: Focus Group Activity B School Experience Weighing Scales (diagram)

Feeling part of school activities

Feeling left out of school activities
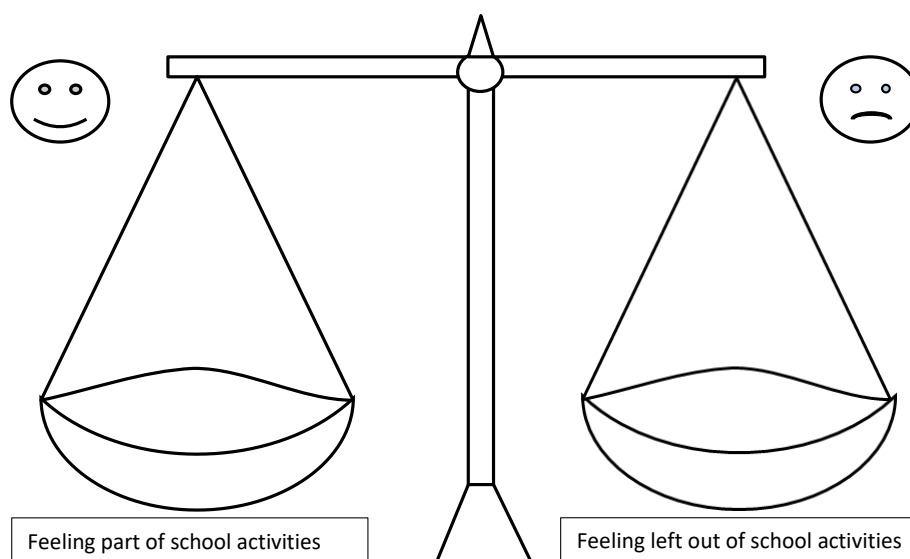
Prior to the session, I drew the weighing scales on flipchart paper (a picture of the blank scales can be seen in Appendix D, p.362) so that they were large enough to students to write on, and the text spoken can be found in Appendix C, p.351. I suggested that everyone need not agree on every item to ensure participants could share their own experiences without feeling these would be judged. A picture of the populated flipchart sheet produced during this research can be seen (anonymised) in Appendix D, p.362. These and other Focus Group data were reviewed before interviews took place, in order to follow up on issues raised by each student during interviews. The activities carried out during these interviews can be seen in Figure 3 (p.105).

Figure 3: Table of research activities

Interaction	Activity number	Activity name
Focus Group	Activity A	Moody Responses
	Activity B	School Experience Weighing Scales
Interview 1	Activity 1	School Timeline
	Activity 2	School Experience Weighing Scales revisited
Interview 2	Activity 3	Classroom Cartoons
	Activity 4	Education in Context map
Interview 3	Activity 5	School Meal activity
	Activity 6	Extra time question

The origins of **Activity 1: School Timeline** came from a Timeline activity designed for groups (Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2004:162), adapted for solo use to find out schools the participants had attended and talk about their experiences at each. I kept the idea of writing each school on a different sheet of paper and putting these on the floor, so that students could choose to move around while they talked (if they wished to). One example can be seen in Appendix D, p.364. In **Activity 2: School Experience Weighing Scales revisited**, I followed up with students on their observations during the Focus group, bringing the flipchart with me to interviews as an additional sensory prompt so students could see their own comments.

The idea for **Activity 3: Classroom Cartoons** came from Picture Stories, with stock pictures used as "illustrations of problems and solutions that can be prioritised or put in sequence to tell a story" but that "participation is increased when people can … create new drawings of their own"(Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2004:132). I adapted the idea for individual use by using the format to focus on classroom experiences, asking them to draw a cartoon of these using speech bubbles to communicate what people were saying and thinking. As artistic talent and hand control are unique, and some participants might not have felt comfortable sharing their drawings, this exercise was offered but could be omitted as needed. In the event, several students did choose to engage with this (all examples are in Appendix D, p.366).

Activity 4: Education in Context map developed from community mapping, used to investigate participants' understanding of their geographical location and the meanings they hold for places. This can be used "to find out what people know, and how they see their own territory and situation. This allows insight into local perceptions" (Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), 2004:120). I considered it a useful way for participants to reflect on their social situation and evaluate in what ways school (and education) might be important. Feeling that a spider diagram or mind map might be familiar to students, I drew an example (Figure 4 p.106 below).

Figure 4: Interview Activity 4 Education in Context map example
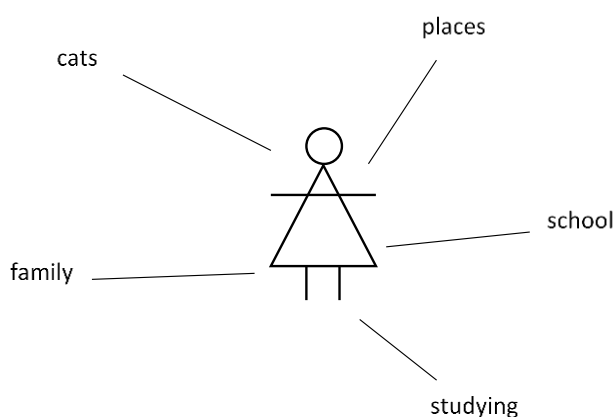
The final participative activity was **Activity 5: School Meal**, where school experiences could be explored through the medium of a burger meal. The original idea came from a social work book, where one of the authors recounted a technique they had used with a young person who had been grieving for a pet (Tait & Wosu, 2013). The young person had asked to have a Happy Meal™, but was disappointed to find they were not happy afterwards. The author (the young person's social worker) used the empty containers to identify what things would make her happy, including such contents as spending time with a grandparent. I adapted this method to use the meal to represent the participants' experience of school, to enable different elements of their experience to be identified and evaluated and discussed in what I hoped would be a fun and accessible way. I prepared a variety of coloured shapes to represent burger ingredients and French fries, from which the respondents could pick elements for their preferred meal. Pictures of one School Meal can be seen in Appendix D p.368. While not an activity, I asked students for any further information they would like to share at the end of Interview 3; coding the data from this as **Activity 6: Extra Time question** for evaluation. One further activity, a Self-portrait drawn by the student, was present in the pilot study but did not generate sufficient data and was discontinued. Having explored the origins and focus of the participative methods, next we move to classroom observation and how this was used.

3.5.4   Observation

Rather than a particular set method with its own framework, observation has been used by many different methodologies in very different ways. First, I will look at observation as used in ethnography. An ethnographic study would present a range of difficulties to a PhD researcher, explored later, and is difficult to achieve in a school. However observations can be made which are ethnographically influenced (in search of meanings (Geertz, 1993)); such as the observations of meetings, classes and events made in *The Good High School* (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) and Goldberg's mathematics class observations (Goldberg, 2008). Clifford

Geertz, one of the key proponents, noted that the ethnographic approach is "an interpretive one, in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1993:5); trying to reach an understanding of an event from the point of view of those involved and "figuring out what all that rigamarole [sic] with the sheep is about" (Geertz, 1993:18). In this type of observation, the sounds and smells of the environment, facial expressions and tone of voice are collected along with other data as they could potentially reveal more about the meaning of the encounter than the words spoken, known as "thick description" (Geertz, 1993). Ethnographic observation can involve a researcher becoming part of a group or community, and staying part of their lives "over an extended period of time" (Davies, 1999:5) in order to gain an understanding of not just their actions but the meanings of these actions within the community. As the purpose of ethnography is to understand the meaning of an event to the people involved, the knowledge gained is also specific to that community, hence generalizability is problematic (Cohen et al., 2011:246). Ethnography is a particularly challenging method, as time must be spent assimilating into the community, developing relationships and trust. Unless a person is already a current member of that community (for example, a teacher), it would take a substantial amount of time to achieve. This would be difficult for a PhD student to accomplish due to the length of time and attendance in the community required (Brockmann, 2011) (although studies such as Hill, 2013 demonstrate that this is possible). It relies entirely on the ability of the researcher as a skilled social participant, and as with any research, the ethnographer's own impact on their environment needs to be kept in mind (Davies, 1999). Their impact on participants is also an issue, to avoid the Hawthorne effect (people changing their behaviour because they are aware they are observed) (Cohen et al., 2011). Even for "native anthropologists," those who research their own communities, factors such as social class may be "more significant" than similarities (Davies 1999: 181); and age would be an issue in integrating with a group of school students.

Observation has immediacy with field notes taken contemporaneously and a lower "level of mediation" between the researcher and events taking place (Plowright, 2011:50). As has been argued, "[a] major advantage of observation … is its directness. You … watch what they [participants] do and listen to what they say" (Robson, 2002:310). Young people can "edit" their responses to present a particular picture or hide aspects they do not wish to share (Scott, 2000) (as adults do), so observation could offer the possibility of verifying information. While I also needed to capture students' experiences in previous schools, it was important to gather data in their current setting. I felt that some short, ethnographic-influenced observations could feed into the interviews because while I, as a researcher, might be able to observe interactions I would view as inclusive; without asking I cannot know how the students experienced them. To facilitate this, classroom observations were carried out after (or immediately before) each interview, with observations made in the classroom allowing insights to be discussed during interviews. In order to try and achieve a range of observations, an observational structure to was adapted from a previous study (Messiou et al., 2014), framed around three types of student interaction around learning. As this project focused on student experience, rather than student learning, these categories were redefined accordingly to "student alone," "student/teacher interaction" and "student/peer interaction" (Appendix C pp. 356 - 357). This captured a variety of student activity without one area being missed. The flow of the lesson was difficult to capture from this, so a section was added allowing the movement of students around the classroom and changes of activity to be noted. Together, this allowed for classroom activities to be collated and viewed in either way to get a sense of the classroom at different points. These observations were used to inform the portrait of each student. In addition to the classroom observations of each participant, ethnographically-influenced notes were made at whole community events at Special Secondary, to provide a context for students' experiences. I took field notes during other activities, including one break time and two assemblies, about the setting and participants' interactions with peers and staff.

3.5.5 Supplementary data sources

While I had not initially plan to collect data from sources other than student voice, it emerged that most students were unaware of ways in which they had changed. In order not to miss potentially important data, I chose to add supplementary sources; requiring additional ethical approval (p.87) and additional participant consent. These data came from interviews with teaching staff and access to the Annual Report from their previous mainstream school.

Interviews with teachers have been used to complement student interviews in portrait methodology studies, including (shorter) interviews with current and previous teachers where available (Goldberg, 2008), teachers' informal comments (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017), and interviews with a variety of stakeholders (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). My starting point was slightly different, as rather than as a primary method I chose this to capture data mentioned by teachers which seemed not to be evident to the students (as described on p.87). I spoke to each student individually to nominate who they would like me to speak with, making clear that this had not been part of their initial consent and they had the right to decline the request without having to withdraw from the research. In the event, all participants agreed to this interview, with some students nominating more than one person. The student consent form and teacher interview questions can be found on pp.345 - 347.

Other portrait studies have made use of school data. Lawrence-Lightfoot viewed a range of school documents including internal reports on sensitive issues such as ethnic diversity, carrying out documentary analysis on these (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) to access school culture. Other portrait methodology studies looked at students' school records (Goldberg, 2008) and attendance records (Grimm, 2009). While helpful in understanding the context of the individual student these also reflect the perspective of those writing the records, so I had

originally chosen not to access these. Once it had become clear I was in danger of missing some data on student development, I asked the Head Teacher's advice on supplementary data which might confirm this change. She suggested using the Annual Review from the last mainstream school which the student had attended prior to moving to Special Secondary. I again offered each student a choice whether to consent; with one student choosing not to. The form I used to gather these data for the seven students who consented can be found in Appendix B, p.349. While I was concerned these could also present external perspectives, I decided that how these students were perceived by their previous schools could shed light on a topic I would not otherwise have access to. As these would be used to support the students' own narratives, in order to avoid inadvertently absorbing other perspectives these reports were only accessed after all interviews were completed.

3.6   Pilot study

As part of the research process, I needed to assess the effectiveness of the new methods in generating data. I approached a mainstream school to run a pilot study with disabled students. They suggested an alternative curriculum option attended by students with a range of differences. One student at the pilot site was selectively mute, which confirmed the utility of Activity A: Moody Responses in allowing students to respond by walking around the room. I attended two sessions of the alternative curriculum option first, to get to know the students and for them to get to know me. These included a variety of activities, working in the school's vegetable garden; taking part in whole group games; small group exercises where students had a notional budget and had to choose items to buy and justify their choice. Some members of this group also met at lunch and break times, where staff cooked them a free of cost meal using vegetables from the school garden.

The school forwarded consent letters to students' parents or guardians for permission to take part, and confirmed when they had received them back. All students were informed about the process a couple of weeks in advance of the Focus Group, and it was explained to them that they did not need to participate if they did not want to. After this, I arranged to attend at one further session to run the focus group, at the beginning of which I read through the consent form with the group of students and was available to answer any questions they might have before giving consent. In total, five of the students participated, four male and one female. One student ("Tom") volunteered to be interviewed. I did not have access to school data so was unable to assess how far he matched my target group, but felt his engagement with the project was more significant. I met with him three times in a room at the school.

As this was a pilot stage, the data gathered was analysed as a trial of the process, but was not included in the results due to any problems which might emerge from the pilot version of the research. This pilot stage produced a transcript from a focus group; and transcripts from audio recording of three short interviews of 30 to 45 minutes each. In order to assess the usefulness of the new methods, how much relevant data had been generated was explored. I first coded the interview transcripts, broadly linking these individual nodes with data categories. Two clear barriers were experienced by the pilot student – bullying and being off sick. Factors which influenced his experiences were coded as phrased by the student ("in vivo" codes); reflecting the issues as raised by the student in his own narrative. The coding was chosen in order to assess the utility of the participatory methods in producing data rather than as a template for later coding, since the student interviewed was not from my target group. In terms of voice, I chose to focus at this stage on how the student expressed themselves during interviews: that is, whether they engaged with the activity or went off topic; felt able to ask questions (coded as checking) and make choices with the activities; minimised some issues while explaining others in more depth; criticised their treatment by others and so on. In the

interviews I had not quite understood the context of some specific comments, following these up to try and clarify. The student saw that I was not following him; carefully paused and politely explained the issue to me in a way I understood. This seemed to reflect the experience where young people "help adult researchers to set more appropriate levels of talk" (Alderson, 2000:244) showing agency and interpersonal skill. I was sensitive to the fact that some participants might find this challenging, and wanted a way to acknowledge this. The following paragraph of optional text was added to the interview schedule, to be used if needed.

> I appreciate that being interviewed can be quite hard work. I am asking you to think hard about your experiences, and to remember things that happened years ago. It's also difficult because what you experience is obvious to you, and it's quite hard to explain things that are obvious to someone who doesn't understand. I have never been to this school before, and so the things you do, and the people you know, are new to me, and I might have to ask you to repeat words or explain things when I don't understand. I would like to thank you for being patient with me.

One activity (a Self-portrait) produced very little data and was removed from the research schedule after data evaluation. While Activity A: Moody Responses had originally been intended as a warm up, it produced more data than anticipated, prompting group discussion. Due to this, this activity was expanded with additional questions. With these revisions to methods, the research plan was carried forward.

Financial incentives for research participation have been used with young people (Scott, 2000), viewed in disability involvement as necessary but in other research as problematic (British Educational Research Association, 2011), I spoke with my interviewee about an appropriate small gift to mark his participation. Although BERA advises against sweets for health reasons, I was guided by his preferences and agreed to bring a small bag of sweets for the interview. While this equalised the relationship, I felt it also complicated it and did not continue this.

3.7 The research process

I attended Special Secondary two or three times a week during the research period. The focus group was held first with eight students, in order to give them a chance to meet me and talk about the subject first in a group environment where they might be more relaxed, prior to the interviews. After this, I worked with one student per week, attending the school for three half-days according to the student's timetable. On the first visit, the first classroom observation took place followed by the first interview, enabling me to refer to events and check how the student had experienced these. The second and third days followed the same plan, allowing me to say goodbye to students at the end of the third interview.

After the transcripts were complete and during the coding process, an individual portrait was put together for each student, reflecting their educational journey. As noted previously, this aimed to mirror Bottery's approach (Bottery et al., 2009) in prioritising students' own words and perspectives; so although coding was not complete at the time of their formulation, the portraits are consistent with the students' own perspective. The structure of the portraits sought to reflect the student's narrative, following their progress through mainstream and special schools as described in their interviews, to support students' stories to be retold as closely as possible. Additional qualitative reflections on present experiences (interview 2) and past experiences at different schools (interview 3) were added to the relevant sections. A section on classroom experiences was included within the Special Secondary narrative for each student. This comprised data from the classroom observations (discussed with students at the interview following each observation for their perspective); from the Classroom Cartoons (for those students who had chosen to engage with this exercise) and from the introductory Focus Group. While the portraits follow the same basic pattern, I adjusted the structure where needed and individualised headings to support each student's story, outlined in Figure 5 p.115.

Figure 5: Portrait structure aligned with contributing research interventions

Portrait Headings	Topic	Research interventions
Nursery Primary school(s) Secondary school Transfer to Special Secondary	Educational History	Interview 1 School Timeline activity Relevant material from Interview 3 and Focus Group
Special Secondary (adjusted to reflect student narrative)	Current experiences	Interview 2
Classroom Experiences	Current experiences	Interview 2 Classroom Observations Classroom Cartoons Focus Group (where relevant)
(Optional heading to reflect issues emerging)	Overview/reflections	Education in Context map Interview 3
The future	Overview/reflections	Interview 3

3.8 Data gathered

In total, data collected were as follows:

- One focus group, audio recorded and transcribed, with two participative exercises;

- Twenty-four interviews (three interviews each for eight students), audio recorded and transcribed, including three/four participative exercises per student;

- Twenty-four handwritten classroom observations (three each for eight students);

- Eight interviews with teaching staff about students, audio recorded and transcribed, seven with teachers and one with a teaching assistant; and

- Seven sets of handwritten notes with some verbatim quotes on the Annual Review documentation sent by students' previous schools to Special Secondary (Elsa chose not to consent).

The overview of these data is presented in Figure 6 (p.116).

Figure 6: Data gathered during the research

Students (by age, descending)	Bob (week 1)	Bella (week 2)	James (week 5)	Eminem (week 6)	HH (week 7)	TTTE (week 8)	Elsa (week 3)	Lydya2 (week 4)
Focus group	57m 16s							
Interview 1	24m 30s	40m 11s	22m 09s	25m 59s	24m 08s	38m 21s	26m 53s	35m 15s
Activity 1: School Timeline	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Interview 2	26m 11s	32m 45s	35m 55s	26m 45s	38m 18s	28m 45s	29m 18s	25m 28s
Activity 3: Classroom Cartoons	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Activity 4: Education in Context map	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Interview 3	17m 58s	23m 04s	36m 12s	14m 33s	27m 52s	27m 29s	11m 35s	23m 29s
Activity 5: School Meal activity	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Classroom observations	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Supplementary data (teacher interviews /Annual Review notes)	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/Y	Y/N	Y/Y
Visit with draft portrait for feedback (recorded but not transcribed or coded)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Total individual audio material	**68m 39s**	**96m 0s**	**94m16s**	**67m 17s**	**90m 18s**	**94m 35s**	**67m 46s**	**84m 12s**

It has been recommended that students have the opportunity to read any partial transcripts and have the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings (Lewis & Kellett, 2004). Since my research culminated in portraits of the students, this provided an opportunity to ask students for feedback at this stage, allowing their input into the data collected but also on this summary of their data. By asking for feedback at this stage, the amount of work involved for the student was also minimised, since the completed portraits synthesised all the research data gathered by the various methods used. In following this path, it was hoped that students would have more ability to input into the research outcomes than if they had viewed complete transcripts. I visited the school to meet with the students that had taken part in the research later in the school year to do this. I took a printed copy of each portrait, and arranged to speak to each student individually. Some students preferred to read their portraits themselves (e.g., Horrid Henry), while others preferred that I read the portrait to them (e.g., Bob). I read each of the portraits unless the student started reading them out loud themselves, stopping after every section to ask for their feedback. Elsa, who had not fully engaged with the interviews, volunteered extra information to include. Thomas the Tank Engine had concerns relating to a section on his social interactions. He had expressed puzzlement and unhappiness about interactions with friends and peers repeatedly during interviews; but seeing this written down challenged his view of himself as a confident social actor. I removed these from his portrait. He had found one section of his portrait confusing so I rewrote this to make it clearer.

Once these corrections had been made, I assembled a personalised folder for each participant, using their real name on the cover. This contained information about the project, blank copies of the consent forms that they and their parents had signed, certificates acknowledging their participation in the focus group and interviews, and my contact details, with both postal and email addresses. In a back pocket of this folder were two copies of their portrait (found in chapter 4) for the student (the only item which held their chosen pseudonym), and an

invitation to get in touch if there was anything they were unhappy with in this last draft. I did

not share the final portraits with the school, leaving it to the individual students whether they

chose to do so or not (hence one reason for providing two copies); and explained this to the

Head Teacher. I let the Head Teacher know about the invitation to contact me in case students

needed help with this. I had observed them having regular time on the school computers, so I

was confident they would have the opportunity to contact me if they wanted to. I submitted

drafts of the Supporting information for each student to each teacher/teaching assistant

concerned, asking to be notified of any corrections that needed to be made. I received one

response, confirming that this teacher felt the information was an accurate reflection.

3.9 On my intentions for analysis

The process of portrait methodology research "produces a written description of an individual

dealing with the challenges that surround them" (Bottery et al., 2009:83). This might not

reflect their entire story but focus on what these personal experiences can tell us about more

widely shared experiences. Portrait methodology research has drawn elements of

respondents' stories out which reflect school culture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Carnes, 2009)

or leadership/leadership development (Waterhouse, 2007; Bottery et al., 2008; Bottery et al.,

2013; Durrant, 2013). Others have used these narratives to highlight intersectional

disadvantage experienced by students (Chapman, 2007) including special education students

(Connor, 2006; Dembouski, 2010).

Analysing narratives is not a straightforward task. Lawrence-Lightfoot (among others) has been

accused of rejecting the process of coding "as an abhorrent act incompatible with interpretivist

qualitative research methodologies" (Saldaña, 2016:70), but this seems inaccurate. Lawrence-

Lightfoot described narrative coding as "the analytic work of identifying emerging themes" in

common with "qualitative researchers of all varieties" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:188). She

indicated various areas of "tension" in research including "the tension between developing discrete codes and searching for meaning", noting "the portraitist does not try to resolve this tension by choosing one side over the other"; embracing sides and tensions as "interwoven parts" of a holistic representation (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:192). Lawrence-Lightfoot instructs the portrait writer to "never stop listening *for* … the deviant voice" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:193) to help contextualise perceived cultural norms by their effect on those outside them. Discussing how emerging themes are identified in her work (focusing on institutional culture), Lawrence-Lightfoot sets out a route map. "First, we listen for repetitive refrains that are spoken (or appear) frequently and persistently, forming a collective expression of commonly held views" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:193). In its expression by a number of people (and its criticism "through irony and innuendo" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:194)), a group philosophy can be identified. Next, "we listen for resonant metaphors, poetic and symbolic expressions" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:193) by which participants communicate their experience to themselves and others. These metaphors "embody values and perspectives *and* they give them shape and meaning" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:198). The third step is to identify "themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals that seem to be important to organizational continuity and coherence" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:193). These rituals are not just activities, but:

> opportunities for building community, for celebrating roots and traditions, for underscoring continuity and coherence … visible signs and reflections of the organization's purpose and coherence … expressions of community life (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:201).

Once emerging themes have been noted, the next step is to triangulate them "to weave together the threads of data converging from a variety of sources" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:193). This includes different people's views; institutional/quantitative data; and classroom observations where "we see the action" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:204). The fifth and final stage is to "construct themes and reveal patterns among perspectives that are often experienced as contrasting and dissonant by the actors" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:193).

> In quantitative research, the scattered data points would mean [there is] no story to tell. In qualitative research … the divergent and dissonant views are themselves a story. … Is there a coherence underneath this seeming chaos … a logic, a reasonable explanation for why these perspectives seem divergent? … We see the portraitist's hand as she constructs a theme that will explain the dissonance, that will bring order to the chaos (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997:209).

Comparisons are drawn between Glaser and Strauss' iterative cycles of analysis and research interventions and "the dialectical world of the portraitist" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:189). The present study did not use an iterative approach, due to the timescale – the research intervention was to take place over a few months, which meant there would not be time to code all the data and identify themes in depth before seeing the students again.

After the student interviews had been transcribed, these were imported into NVivo and used as the primary location from which for codes to develop. Visual data created by students, for example in classroom cartoons and the school meal exercise, were not subject to direct coding but verbal discussion of these, together with further explanation or clarification, were present within interview transcripts. Classroom observation forms were scanned into NVivo and coded, as presenting a record of student activity and therefore voice in the classroom. Any significant occurrences during these observations had been discussed in the interview following the observation, to gain the student's own perspective on events. While some elements of the supplementary data (Teacher/TA interviews and data from the Annual Review from the students' previous mainstream school) contributed to the portraits, these data were not coded as they did not present student voice. I took an open approach to coding data, being guided by the data. Once the possible codes in the transcripts (and following this, from the classroom observations) had been exhausted, I grouped these codes in various ways to see what patterns emerged. When no additional meanings and code groupings arose, the codes and groupings were considered complete and explored in depth to generate theory.

3.10 Group themes, triangulation and data

Once transcripts and classroom observation records had been imported into NVivo, I started exploring these data using "(f)irst cycle coding methods"; described as "fairly direct" (Saldaña, 2016:69) and supporting greater researcher familiarity with the data. A simultaneous coding approach was used, applying "two or more different codes to a single qualitative datum" to ensure data could be fully explored for "manifest (apparent) and latent (underlying) meanings" (Saldaña, 2016:94). While this can be taken to indicate a lack of research focus (Saldaña, 2016), I chose this approach deliberately. I felt a simultaneous approach was crucial for student voice; to be sensitive to students' experience within their own social "web of significance" (Geertz, 1993) (of which I was not part) where meanings might be contextually embedded, and also to account for any communication differences. I coded the interview sequence chronologically for each student, as later interviews often referred to earlier discussion; synchronising the audio files with transcripts in NVivo so I could listen whilst coding and better appreciate the context and any nuances within the conversation. Each line and paragraph was explored and evaluated for context and allusions to other issues which might be present. I coded using what NVivo terms nodes, initially using elemental coding methods as "basic but focused filters for reviewing the corpus and … build a foundation for future coding cycles" (Saldaña, 2016:97). The first nodes I used represented descriptive codes, "assigning basic labels … to provide an inventory of … topics" (Saldaña, 2016:97). As coding progressed, each new data point was examined to see whether the content was consistent with the original node or reflected something qualitatively different. The coding was regularly revisited through this method and subject to slight change. When a new node emerged, I checked to confirm its difference from existing nodes and rechecked previous interviews for similar content to ensure no data had been missed. Some new codes reflected a different import to existing topics; producing similarly named nodes in different areas of the coding structure.

Some individual nodes were generated from the text using the student's own words (coding these *in vivo*) but this was not often possible. Students discussed what appeared to be the same type of experience (for example, isolation) using different words and phrases which undermined an *in vivo* approach, and struggled for words to communicate their experiences. Due to these challenges, I labelled some nodes with my own words. Two NVivo extracts, with coding indications, are included in Appendix D (p.370). Each early interview added to the list of codes, but by the last interviews saturation seemed to have occurred and new codes were rare. Once all interviews had been coded, I followed the same process with the classroom observation sheets. In terms of student voice, the classroom observations were invaluable, allowing me to observe students' interaction with peers and educators and on their own. While nodes on student voice did emerge from the interviews, including the student's own reflections on classroom events as the interviews followed on from the observations, many of the nodes under this heading derived from classroom observation. I explored other strategies (for example, coding for emotional expression) which generated a handful of nodes. Nodes were grouped in different ways in order not to restrict cross-cutting themes which might not fit within the structure of the research questions, but this did not yield any significant insights. During interviews, school memories most often focused on other people, such as friends, peer group or bullies. Students mentioned teachers and teaching assistants as well as peers; but individuals who were not present at school such as parents, siblings and wider family members also had an impact on school experiences. Due to the prevalence of this topic, I considered these as participant-generated codes (following Oliver, 2014:168), or a "repetitive refrain" being "persistently articulated by the actors in the setting" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997:193). This node structure is presented in Figure 7, p.123.

Figure 7: People nodes emerging from interviews
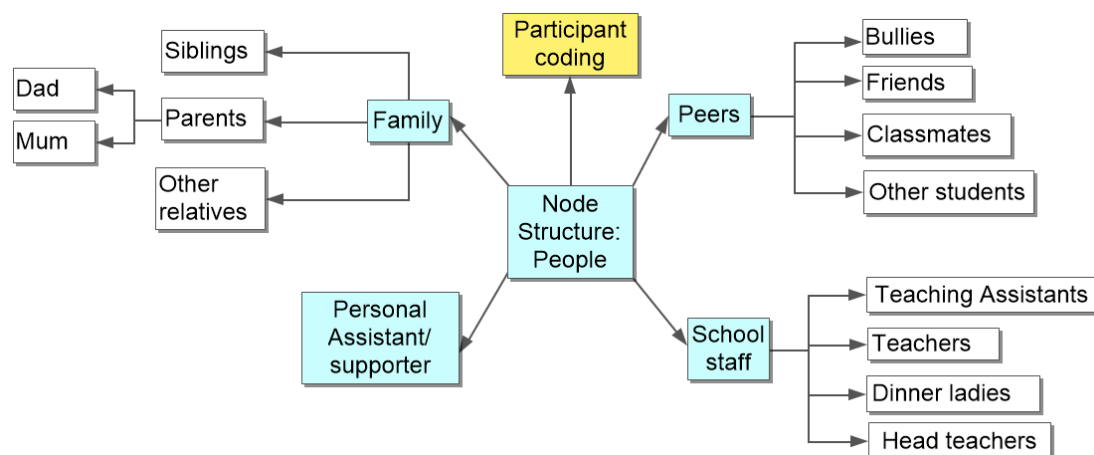
In isolation, the data in each **People** node confirmed other research, but when they were cross

referenced and/or the information triangulated more depth and new information emerged.

Despite the prevalence of school anecdotes involving people, outside of school these students

seemed socially isolated, spending most of their time alone or with family. Bella and Thomas

talked about previous mainstream school friends but had spent little or no time with them

outside school – even when they lived close to each other. Some students benefitted from

siblings' friendship networks, playing football, going shopping or to the cinema with older

siblings (e.g., James p.157, Eminem p.162) and playing computer games with younger siblings

(Interviews: Lydya2 and Thomas). Those with no siblings at home (e.g., Horrid Henry, Bob) or

with younger disabled siblings (e.g., Bella) spent time alone, reporting they rarely left the

house other than to attend school. If we reframe the People node data within this context of

social isolation, the school experiences of these students increase in their significance;

representing the only social interaction some of these students have outside their immediate

family. In this context, bullying at school becomes not an isolated incident that can be pushed

aside to focus on a lesson (as academically able young Muslim men do Bhatti, 2011) but an

overwhelming part of the lives of these students, reinforcing and reinforced by bullying in their

local community (e.g. Bob p.142 and Horrid Henry p.165).

Another first cycle code was the **location** of experiences. This indicated educational stages (nursery, primary and secondary schools) and settings (playgroups, mainstream and special education and an exclusion unit). Students' references to home provided a context for the students' educational experiences; since their social context had been so significant in their school experiences. In the same way, discussions of the transfer process were gathered under one node for analysis. These locational nodes were used to triangulate experiences. Figure 8 (p.124) shows the students' transfer points.

Figure 8: Coding diagram - Locational nodes and transfer to special education
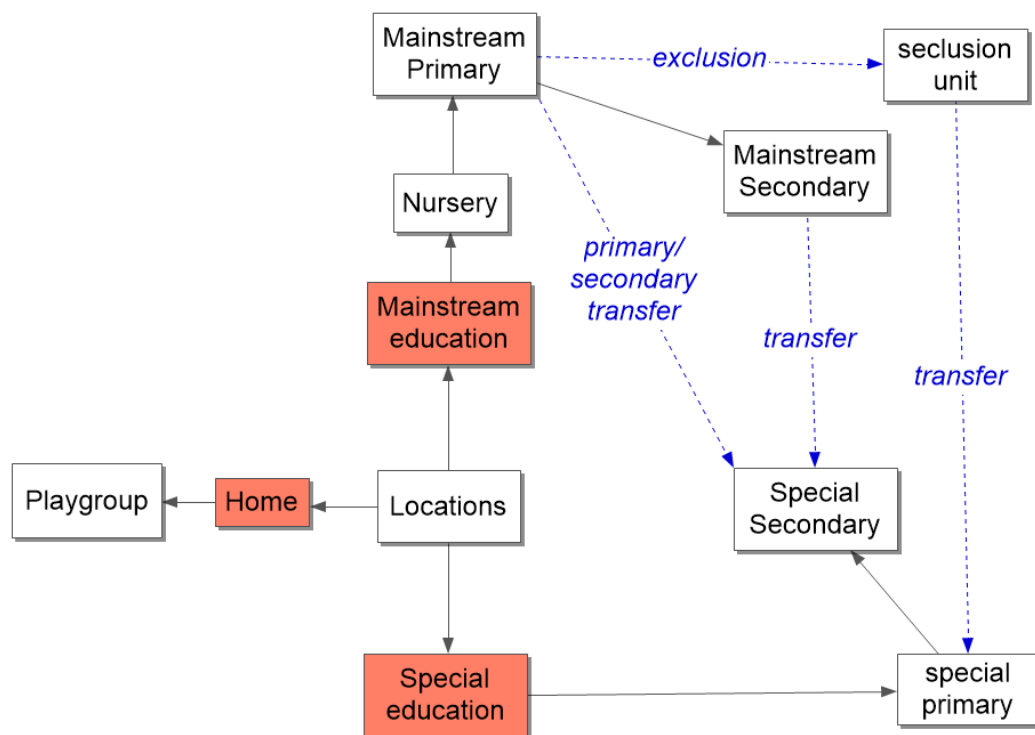
To support evaluation of the participative methods, all the interview data were coded by the **interview structure** as in Figure 9 (p.125). This was mainly to align content with the activity that had generated it and assess the utility of the new methods, but a few new nodes were added, to ensure other issues could be checked back on later.

Figure 9: Coding map - Interview structure nodes
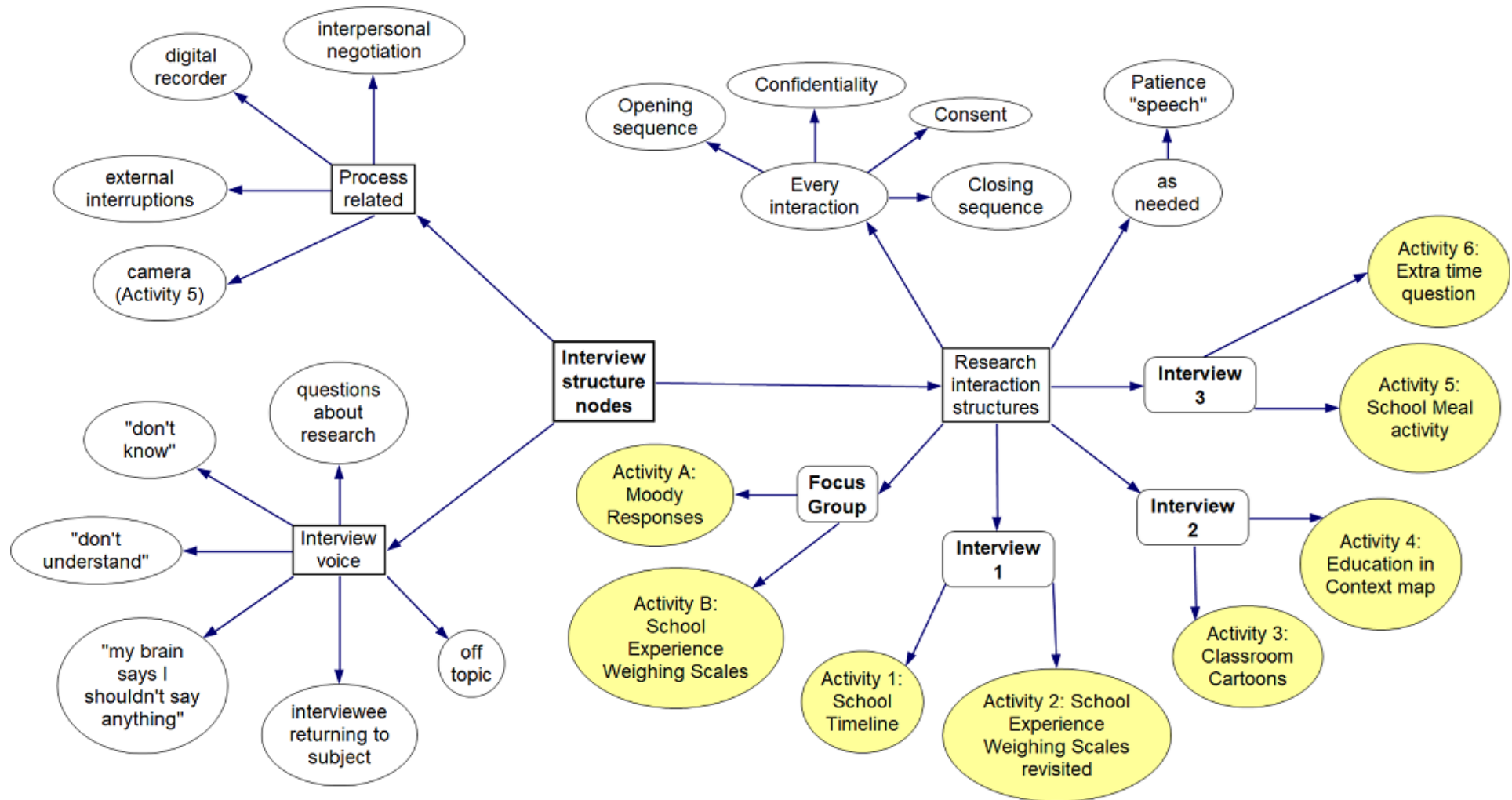
I was particularly interested in how participants might demonstrate voice in their interactions with me. While I did follow up responses of "don't know" or "don't understand," I felt it was important to keep track of these in order to contribute to the evaluation (of myself as well as the new methods), in order to improve on my practice. The troubling "my brain says I shouldn't say anything" appeared qualitatively different from these, and generated a new node to reflect this; discussed further in the next section. In addition to external interruptions (which allowed me to observe staff/student interactions), the students proved very interested in the whole process, asking me about the interview and in particular, the digital recorder I was using. The camera node relates to Activity 5: School Meal (an example can be seen in Appendix D, p.369); I did not take photographs of the respondents due to confidentiality. As patterns started to become clear, each student's transcript was explored again along with the supplementary data to try and find material which disputed or corrected these. The patterns were adjusted slightly as necessary, and the transcripts and supplementary data rechecked to see if they supported the findings.   Once these were confirmed and had been double checked without further adjustment being necessary, this was then recorded as a possible finding. Other findings also followed the same pattern, with deep reading of the transcripts to explore any hidden meanings, consulting the supplementary data and refining the findings as needed.

3.11 Authenticity

As a qualitative study, this research is subject to different criteria: those relating to authenticity (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) rather than validity. The portraits have included as much text from the individual student as possible in order to enhance this (Bottery et al., 2009). Early portrait drafts benefitted from the input of my supervisors while I adjusted to this new approach, for which I am most grateful. The students were read their portrait line by line and asked for corrections (all of which were incorporated into the final version).

At the end of the day, the authenticity of the portrait does rely on the honesty and confidence of the students in their interviews and in their feedback to the final portrait. I felt that open communication had been established, as students were able to question words (where they were unfamiliar with them) and to discuss areas they were not sure about, which I took as a positive indication. The portraits could have potentially been made more accurate by the involvement of students in their writing (Connor, 2006); but I was aware that my research was intervening on students' school time, and I tried to reduce the impact of this where possible.

This authenticity did have unforeseen impact on the portrait, however. As noted (Bottery et al., 2009), portraits are not always recognised by the participant. For example, my initial portrait draft reflected the social uncertainty Thomas the Tank Engine had voiced in his interviews, but this challenged his sense of social confidence. My commitment to standing with participants overweighed my commitment to consistency with the interviews, and so this was amended to support Thomas' own perspective. This meant that confusions over interactions were not reflected in his Portrait; but have been discussed in the thesis.

With two students, I had concerns about the accuracy of two isolated details. One student started explaining an incident and then backtracked, saying he would not have said that and taking the story elsewhere. Another student told me a friend had died before an interview, and then revisited the information, saying she was ill instead. I did not feel either student was intentionally misleading me; as if they had intended to, they would not need to change their minds and tell me so. I treated what they said as their own truth, expressing some element of their self; regardless of the words used. Where I was unsure of details, I did not include them.

3.12 Evaluating the participative research methods

As noted earlier, for this research I used several novel research methods, adapted from ideas found elsewhere to make them more appropriate for the students approached for this study. While students here were labelled with a severe learning disability, they had a range of mind/body differences and, as might be expected from any group of individuals, demonstrated different levels of ability and confidence in communicating verbally and in writing. These novel methods included communicating by moving around the room (Focus Group Activity A), drawing (Interview Activity 3: Classroom Cartoon) and using foam shapes to represent their school experiences in the form of a burger meal (Interview Activity 5: School Meal). One additional method, a student self-portrait, had been evaluated at the Pilot stage but discarded as it proved less effective in producing useful data.

The participative interview activities were spread across the three interviews. The first interview included making a School Timeline (Activity 1) and revisiting the School Experience Weighing Scales from the Focus Group (Activity 2). In the second interview, half of the students chose to draw Classroom Cartoons (Activity 3) (the others preferred not to draw), and all students drew an Education in Context map (Activity 4). In the final interview, students made a School Meal and then assigned the ingredients meaning, representing parts of their school experience (Activity 5). In addition, I included a verbal Extra Time question for students, asking for anything else they would like to share, which I categorised as Activity 6 to compare the amount and spread of data nodes generated against those produced by participative methods. I used NVivo's Matrix Coding Query facility to count how many individual codes were present in those areas of the transcripts covering each interview method and represent this as a bar chart in Figure 10 p.129. As this is a qualitative study, the coding references indicate only the different patterns of data elicited by each research method; for which purpose a bar chart was helpful.

Figure 10: Bar chart of data nodes generated by topic area by interview activities
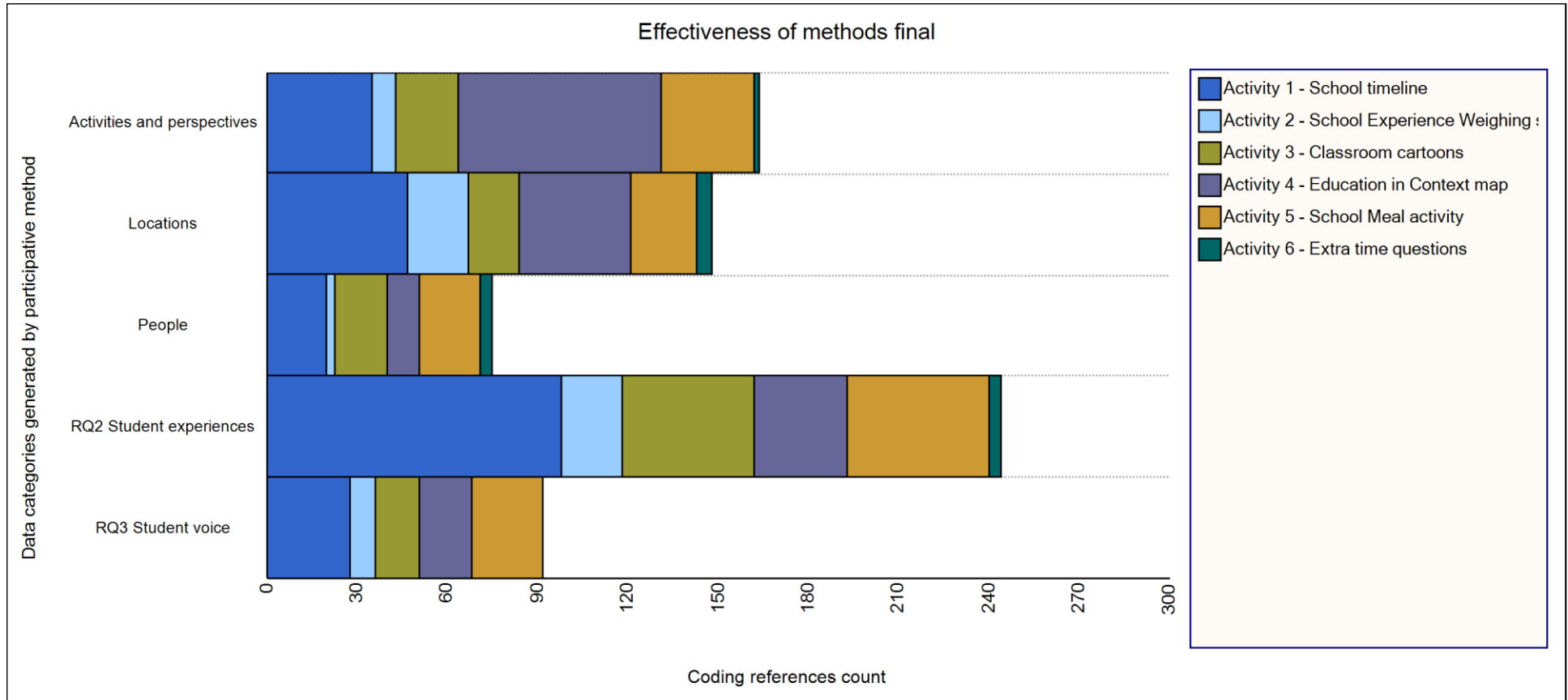
As can be seen, the methods produced a varying amount of data across different areas.

Activity 1: School Timeline was the most effective of the new methods, producing stories of student experiences (both good and bad) as they looked back on their educational history.

Activity 3: Classroom Cartoons produced stories of current student experiences, highlighting social interactions in the classroom from the students' perspective. While Activity 4: Education in Context map generated discussion about the lives of the students outside of school which might appear less relevant to educational research, it allowed them to situate their educational experiences within a wider, more holistic context. The stories this prompted unearthed a pattern of wider social isolation, boredom and victimisation outside school for many of the students; allowing me to better appreciate the depth of impact of their in-school experiences in a way I could not have done otherwise. Their current educational setting (Special Secondary) promoted student voice and student wellbeing and included one-to-one emotional literacy sessions with some students; giving teachers time to get to know students, but I wondered if teachers at the students' previous schools had been aware of this isolation.

Activity 5: School Meal also seemed to help some students to view their experiences across time within a wider context; although it was not uniformly successful. While some students (for example Bella and Horrid Henry) understood the premise easily and made thought-provoking analogies, others found it challenging (Eminem) or impossible (Elsa) to conceptualise one thing as representing another, even with prompting and encouragement; Elsa choosing not to engage with this activity. The interviews for Elsa were the most difficult for me. When she did not understand I tried rephrasing questions, but this appeared to compound the situation. At one point, as noted in the previous section, she said: "*my brain says I shouldn't say anything*;" which I found troubling. Later I discovered a similar quote online from a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), noting young autistic people are sometimes wrongly perceived to hear voices, because they:

may express their own thoughts in an unusual or concrete way, or can struggle to give them context … (e.g. they may say "my brain told me to do it") (CAMHS North Derbyshire, 2018).

I was painfully aware of her disengagement and at each interview I checked in with her before, during and after the interviews about whether she still wanted to continue with the process, but she stated she did. Although I was concerned, I felt that in choosing not to answer and/or expressing this verbally as above she was demonstrating her agency; and that if she decided to continue (even if only to answer some selected questions), that I should respect her decision to do so. Nonetheless, I found these interviews challenging. On my return to read the draft Portraits to students she appeared enthusiastic and pleased to see me, listening with interest, and suggesting new information to add.   I mentioned her previous difficulty answering questions, which she nodded to acknowledge but did not discuss.

While Activity 2: School Experience Weighing Scales revisited seems less effective than other methods, it allowed a return to probe the focus group comments in more detail, which was productive for several students and seemed to help students talk at the start of the interview sequence. It generated more data than the Extra Time question (included in Figure 10 p.129 and labelled as Activity 6 for the purpose of comparison).

3.13 Summary

While not following an emancipatory research agenda completely, I tried to address its principles and sought to equalise the power imbalance. A portrait methodology approach was taken, aimed at generating qualitative data with participants in a positive way, supportive of students' identity and valuing their experiences. A focus group started off the process, introducing me to the students in a safe environment with peers before spending one to one time with me. A sequence of three semi-structured interviews was chosen (as used in other Portrait methodology studies) to generate data in a way which was experienced positively by students. Participative methods, not previously associated with portrait methodology, were used to complement these, allowing students to contribute to the interviews in ways they may have felt more comfortable with; drawing or playing a game. Classroom observations were made alongside the interview process, so observations could be discussed at the interviews. Ethical approval for these initial methods was gained prior to the Pilot, held with a group of disabled students at a mainstream school in the same geographical area as Special Secondary. The participatory methods were evaluated for their success after the pilot. The adapted participative methods generated interesting and useful insights with most students, but were difficult to conceptualise by some.

Special Secondary was chosen as students came to this location "at non-typical joining points," which could indicate barriers to mainstream education being experienced. Due to changes in the student's self-expression and social interaction not emerging from the interviews, a second approval process was requested during the research at Special Secondary; to speak to teachers and access Annual Reviews from the students' previous schools; subject to participant consent. Students were invited to give feedback on their own portraits, and any amendments requested were incorporated into the drafts. These portraits appear in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Data: Individual data and Portraits

Presented together in the next two chapters are the data produced during this study. In this chapter are the Portraits of the eight students who participated in this project. Each Portrait offers a view of the student across several learning environments, including current experiences and their recollections of previous schools. Each Portrait is followed by two pieces of supporting data from the perspective of teachers: an interview with a Special Secondary teacher nominated by the student, and an extract from the Annual Review sent to Special Secondary from the student's previous school on their transfer. These offer indications on how the students may have presented at previous schools and how they have changed during their time at Special Secondary. As the Annual Review formed part of the evidence for the school transfer, these should be read with some caution as they were focused on negative aspects of their participation.

While portrait methodology was originally designed to present a researcher view of the subject (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983), these portraits followed Bottery's model; being written to align more closely with the students' views and using their words (Bottery et al., 2008). These young disabled people are subject to two layers of protective framework (as both young people and vulnerable people), but such protection does not always support students' voice expression. It was therefore important to closely reflect participants' own perspectives in their Portraits. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the structure of each Portrait reflects the sequence of interviews, with information about the student's classroom strategies (emerging from the classroom observations) and the student's social context included where most appropriate. I wrote the portraits in clear language, to be accessible to a wider audience (including the students themselves). These portraits are partial in two senses; in supporting the students' own perspectives, and (correspondingly) also being incomplete through excluding data which the student did not accept. Bottery had included challenging

perspectives in his portraits with adults; but working with vulnerable young people, I could not be certain they would all have the confidence or skills to disagree. A draft portrait was read out to each student, checking for understanding and with words explained as needed. At the end of each section, the student was invited to discuss it. One student, Thomas the Tank Engine, found his own words to be problematic. During the interviews, Thomas was often puzzled by the behaviour of his friends, stating "I don't know why" after describing some of their (unfriendly) actions. I reflected this uncertainty in the original Portrait draft, but this challenged his own view of himself as a confident social actor. In accordance with my research approach and recognising the worth of his own insight into the web of social knowledge in which he existed, I prioritised Thomas' concern and removed the problematic sentences. While omitted, these data were still present in the transcripts, subjected to coding and analysis, and are considered in the group themes later. Two other Portraits were altered to acknowledge nuances; where the student accepted an observation on their classroom behaviour as valid, but did not feel this represented their usual behaviour (Portraits: Bob and Elsa). Three students offered additional information and perspectives which they gave permission to include.

The students taking part in the research had been suggested by their Head Teacher due to the diversity of their previous school experiences. In a couple of cases, when introducing me to their class before the research, class teachers had noted how much the behaviour of these students had changed. This was almost completely absent from the student interviews, as most of the students (except for James) seemed unaware of changes which had been obvious to their teachers. There also seemed to be gaps in students' memories of events, such as which schools they had attended and at what point they had transferred to special education. Having identified these gaps, I approached the school to ask what material might be available to bridge them. Their recommendation was to access the Annual Review from the previous

school, sent to Special Secondary when the student was transferred. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, I then requested additional ethical permission to cover interviewing staff members and accessing their Annual Review documentation from the student's previous school, subject to the consent of the individual student. These supporting data (reproduced after each Portrait) were not used to challenge or undermine students' narratives, but to add depth and new perspectives to help triangulate the factors affecting students' experiences.

4.1.1   Supporting data

The students were asked for their consent to access the Annual Review documentation from their previous mainstream school. One student said no, as she "*didn't like it there*" (Elsa Transcripts), so seven students' files were accessed with their consent. These Annual Review reports were produced to support the referral of these students to a special educational setting. They can therefore be seen as potentially biased, focusing primarily on problems with the students' ability to cope at mainstream; but they are not uniformly negative. These documents were read through and selected quotes extracted. Information was gathered under the same categories used in the classroom observations - the student working alone, their interactions with peers and with teaching staff – to facilitate comparison. Two other categories – Key topics highlighted by the previous school; Other issues – were added to encompass any other relevant data which could have been missed otherwise. The chosen quotes suggest a particular view of the students: reflecting barriers they had encountered at mainstream school; the level of academic ability or social skills the students displayed before they started at Special Secondary; or the decision to transfer the student to special education. These data were collected after all other data, at the end of the research, but are presented here before supporting evidence from current teachers to give a sense of students' progress.

Students were asked if they would be willing to nominate a member of staff to approach for a short interview. The criteria were that the member of staff should be someone who had known them when they started at the school; and that they should be someone the student felt knew them well. The students were thanked for their earlier contribution, and reminded that they had the right to say no. All eight students were happy for me to approach at least one member of staff, and four students nominated more than one member of staff. Only one member of staff declined an interview request, feeling that they did not know the student well enough. This led to eleven interviews, nine with teachers and two with Teaching Assistants. One teacher was nominated by four different students, and was kind enough to talk about all four. Where more than one person was interviewed, the text uses quotes from both interviewees. Quotes have been reordered where necessary to follow the sequence of events, but with care taken to ensure their meaning was not altered. Informal data shared during the research which may assist in understanding the students have also been included here marked as Researcher comments.

4.1.2   Introducing the students

Further information on those young people who chose to participate in this project is given below. Details of Type of Educational Need and TA hours were extracted from the Annual Review from their previous schools (hence the absence of this information for Elsa). All the students here fell within the category of White British. While Special Secondary did have some students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, those students had additional physical or sensory differences which meant they had always attended special education and therefore did not match the target group for this project.

Special schools in this locality had a higher percentage of students (49.6% - 51.7% of students) receiving free school meals (FSM) than the national average for special schools in England (37.2% - 38.5%)[9]; this participant group includes slightly more FSM eligible students than would be anticipated. All students had a Statement of Special Educational Needs (and were also in the process of being assessed for an ECH Plan), ranging through Band 2 (described by the LEA[10] as "severe") to Band 4 ("medium").

The following portraits and supporting paragraphs are arranged in rough order of age, from eldest to youngest, as in Figure 11 (p.138). We start with Bob and Bella, who were 17 at the time of interview and in Key Stage 5, and then move to James and Eminem, who were both 15 and in Key Stage 4. Horrid Henry (Henry) (14) and Thomas the Tank Engine (Thomas) (13), who were in different classes, follow these. We finish with Elsa and Lydya2, who were both 12.

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[9] Table 8c, Special Schools (1): Number of Pupils Eligible for and Claiming Free School Meals, January 2015. In Local Authority and Regional Tables: SF16/2015
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2015
[10] Not referenced here to preserve student anonymity.

Figure 11: Participant demographics

Student	Age	Sex	Free School Meals	Ethnicity	Statement level	Type of need	TA hours
Bob	17	M	Yes	White English	Band 4 (medium)	Cognition and Learning Delayed speech and language	13.75
Bella	17	F	Yes	White English	Band 4 (medium)	Cognition and Learning	(not listed)
James	15	M		White English	Band 4 (medium)	(not specified in documentation)	13.75
Eminem	15	M	Yes	White English	Band 3 (high)	Cognition and Learning	(not listed)
Horrid Henry	14	F	Yes	White English	Band 2 (severe)	Severe speech disorder, severe delay of language skills and literacy	(not listed)
Thomas the Tank Engine	13	M		White English	Band 2 (severe)	Cognition and Learning ADHD and Autism Support	"Full time"
Elsa	12	F		White English	Band 2 (severe)	(Elsa did not give permission for access)	
Lydya2	12	M	Yes	White English	Band 2 (severe)	Language/Social Interaction/Behaviour Severe delay in language	27.25 ("full-time")

4.2 'Bob' Portrait

Bob was a young man of 17 years, who was a member of the sixth form. He had previously been part of the student council at Special Secondary. He was open with his opinions, although sometimes seemed to find it hard to explain more about his experiences. He was able to disagree when needed. He could be direct with his criticism, but tried to be mindful of others' feelings (*"no offence, but …"*). His progress through school seemed to highlight relationships with other people as a key factor in making his experience of education inclusive.

Bob's challenges with mainstream school started early, as he had been excluded from the nursery at his Primary school:

> *I've got expelled … I got it – 'cos I wouldn't sit down, she rung up on Sunday, obviously retired now … rung up on a Sunday, 'cos I like … couldn't sit down.*

He said this in a tone which indicated he had felt this was unfair, as it seemed to be related to other students there: *"That was the kids and that."* He went to a different nursery while he was excluded, although he *"can't remember"* how long for, and came back to this school afterwards. He summed up his time at the school: *"I didn't mind it. I was there since year 6, so I did pretty well."* Speaking to Bob later, he added that the teachers: *"they've got their favourites – Teacher's Pets."*

It was on Bob's move to mainstream secondary school that things started to go badly wrong. His twelve months there were marked by bullying, which is all he can remember about the school: *"I didn't like [Secondary], cos you got bullied and they used to pick on you rotten."* Asked what advice he would give to someone who would be going to that school, Bob said: *"If you're by yourself, in the changing room, you get your clothes on, and get out as fast as possible."* He was reluctant to record strong words on tape, but had felt *"quite scared"* attending the school. Asked about the teachers, Bob used percentages, estimating that about

10% of them had been *"alright"*. About the bullying, he added that the teachers *"they don't care, they call you a wimp."* Reflecting on this later, he felt that some teachers had been *"just as bad"* as the bullies, although others had been good. He finished by saying it had been like *"a horror movie."*

Bob's move to Special Secondary happened at the beginning of the second year of secondary. He and his family had to fight to get the transfer, with the support of local councillors. Bob noted of one of them: "*If it hadn't been for her, I'd still be there now*." Of his start at Special Secondary, he added:

> They had to squeeze me into that school! Move people around so I could get in! It was that packed, there was no floor.

It took about "*a quarter of a year*" to settle in, and for things to calm down for Bob. When asked about Special Secondary, Bob's first thoughts were of the people involved. He listed his best friends, and then talked about his favourite Teaching Assistants (and teachers) noting "*they are <u>brilliant</u> with the kids*." He liked to have a laugh with people, which he did in one lesson by dancing and (on request) "*putting his posh voice on*" to amuse people. His main complaint (and most frequently used phrase) was that "*it's boring*." During lessons, this was because of "*Staff who go on, and on, and on, and on*." "*If they go on then your mind just goes off daydreaming, you get bored.*" Bob found it hard to pinpoint what was boring in more detail, repeating the same words in different ways, but was able to identify several people who were not boring. This criticism also covered members of staff who talked about their private lives ("*no offence … but when they go on about their lives, that's boring*"[11]) and activities that Bob could not relate to his own life "*What's the point of me … using a map*?" Activities such as

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[11] Bob qualifies this later, wanting me to add "although it depends who they are."

these, where he did not see how the knowledge would be useful, seemed to him "*a waste of education*," which he felt also applied to assembly. (Assembly was run at Special Secondary as an interactive event, to help the school community think about an issue and to celebrate the achievements of students, both in examinations and their individual goals.)   Other than this, the only other difficulty he raised was with "*the noise*" in the students' common room, as he would prefer if it was quieter in there: "*not silent - just not as loud*."

When asked about how classes are different at Special Secondary, Bob noted that "*working at a slower pace*" was important for him. He described working at the speed of other students and how this had affected him at his previous school: "*I mean, you feel thick! 'Cos you can't catch up. You feel down, 'cos you can't … perform like them*."   He felt that lessons were at a "*better rate*" for him at Special Secondary (they "*take longer*" over learning things), although "*sometimes I think they explain it too much!*"   Later, he added that "*you don't have to wear school uniform*."   From watching Bob in class, he mostly worked independently. He could concentrate well for short periods of time and was able to refocus himself when he had been distracted, to some extent. He persisted with tasks, even if he seemed to be finding it difficult, continuing to try and engage with the topic and the teacher. During the focus group, he commented that being home educated would not work for him, as he does not work well like that. In one observation, Bob took some time out to work on an activity away from the group, addressing his own needs, but quickly returned. When observed taking part in group activities with other students, Bob appeared to be a team player, taking part without taking over. He noted later that this was unusual: "*I try to take over. … I get in as fast as possible*" and that his team playing was because the group had been using a camping stove: "*I didn't want to burn myself! I did it for my own reasons*."

On the topic of time spent on-site at Special Secondary, Bob only felt "*it's alright,*" and that "*[t]he staff are a bit better*" than at his previous secondary school. When asked if he could give more detail, he volunteered percentages, noting 50% of them were "*alright*", compared with only 10% at his previous school. When talking about school, he used numbers again to mark them out of 100: "*for certain things they'd get 50, and for other things they'd get less*". However, Special Secondary organises students' learning through a range of out-of-school trips and activities, which do not seem to be included in this criticism. Bob brightened up considerably when talking about this off-site provision. "*I like [a local College] … we used drills last week. We're making … a tool box*", although he did not want to go on to this college after Special Secondary "*I'd go somewhere better. Somewhere with a posher tone. The staff are nice, but it's an old building*".

He was particularly enthusiastic about the volunteering he was doing, organised by Special Secondary, working at a local Primary school "*I get down with the kids, and they like it, so …*." Returning to this later, he wanted to add that this Primary school "*is great*" and he looks forward to it. When asked, Bob noted that Special Secondary also made you feel welcome: "*At [primary] certainly more, but here as well*." This seemed to contrast with Bob's earlier experiences at his previous secondary school. While he could not think of an example of feeling included in school during the interviews, in the focus group Bob gave the example of a disability sports event for special schools in the region. Many students had gone – not just those taking part, but some supporters as well and the Special Secondary team had won.

While he was not particularly keen on school, Bob stayed at school for two after school clubs on different days: "*It gets you out of the house, bit more, instead of stuck in, doesn't it?*" At Film club, the students' picked the film, bringing in films from home or making requests,

although a member of staff had the final say. Of the other activity, he said "*I like the club! …*

the way they speak to you, they're very sweet."   He added "*It's good for the staff to do that,*

'cos it's getting [students] out [of] the house."   These after school activities gave him a rare

chance of mixing with other people. He no longer attended a youth club, due to more bullying,

and had no social contact with friends or family at home. Of his home, he said "*I don't like my*

street. I hate it," and there have been "*poison pen letters*" from "*two-faced*" neighbours:

> the neighbours come in the house … poison talk about you if they don't like you,
> and they do it right round the street.

When asked, Bob quickly nodded to indicate that it felt safer at school than at home. He noted

that there is less bullying at Special Secondary than at the other schools he has attended, but

asked why, he found it difficult to explain. His view was simply: "*'[c]os it's a special school. It's*

better here." Bob later wanted to add that he had counselling with a member of staff, which

was useful as they "*try to stop you sinking like the Titanic.*" This was very important to him,

and he wanted this to be included.

On the subject of education in general, Bob felt it was:

> Quite important, 'cos you wouldn't do it – wouldn't be able to learn, would you? …
> wouldn't be able to spell your name, wouldn't be able to read. Wouldn't get a
> job … nowt. You'd … just be on the benefits for the rest of your life. And what life
> would that be?

Later, he wanted to add that he would never go to a Day Centre, he wants a "*proper job*" and

that if you are not working, you're "*labelled as a sponge*". When asked if learning was always

enjoyable, he admitted even work on literacy (which he had highlighted as important) had its

problems: "*no … alphabet's boring as well – they go on – A, B, C, D …*"

Bob had a clear idea of his future. Based on his voluntary experience, Bob decided he wants to work in childcare. He had already spoken to the head of the primary he is volunteering at: "*I wanted to maybe take a job up when I've left there*," adding "*I like it there. The atmosphere - they make you feel welcome*," and "*they seem happier there, the staff*." He added he will have to be able to read and write to do this kind of work.

4.2.1 'Bob' Supporting information – previous school

Name: Bob
Key topics highlighted by the previous school [Bob] presents with a cognitive profile which suggests significant learning difficulties in all areas of functioning. A recent assessment suggests his performance is at least 5-6 years behind his peers
• **Issues relating to working alone** He has difficulties following print material and his concentration is poor. A recent visual perception assessment show that [Bob] performs at a low level in terms of his understanding and interpretation of visual information. His visual difficulties form one part of a global developmental delay. His fine motor skills are immature. [Bob] is able to produce legible copywriting. [His] letter formation is weak and he prints his work exerting a heavy pressure with no spacing between words. He is unable to read his work back and he is unable to spell high frequency words. [I]n terms of number work, [he] was unable to add 3 and 2, even when using his fingers. Overall, he is performing at pre-number skills levels associated with Early Years learning
• **Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA** He has delayed speech and language; he is keen to talk although he sometimes requires questions to be rephrased before he understands what is being asked of him. At times his speech is a little unclear. He is able to follow instructions and tries hard on all activities presented to him.
• **Issues relating to working/socialising with peers** He experiences difficulties orientating himself, particularly in a crowded surrounding. [Bob] has difficulties with the perception of depth, and he tends to bump into people. He has difficulty interacting with his peers at an age appropriate level. He is very vulnerable in the school situation and does not seem to understand at all the type of social interaction which normally takes place between secondary aged pupils.
• **Other issues** [S]elf-help skills continue to develop. He is able to remove his blazer and jumper and he is able to change for P E lessons with minimal adult prompting and assistance. Summary of Parents/Guardians Comments [Bob] is very happy at [mainstream secondary] school. Mum and Dad both happy with provision.

4.2.2 'Bob' Supporting information – Special Secondary

"He came - not like most of our kids from mainstream; he transferred after a year. And he'd been bullied quite badly, because of … I suppose, his learning disability. [Coming to Special Secondary] was seen as a chance for him to have a good education."

"Academically, he struggled with just about everything. He still can't read; he still has difficulty even counting [which] was pretty bad when he first came to us – he couldn't count to five accurately, or consistently. He did get quite frustrated, I think, doing that. I think he's a lot better when it comes to not getting frustrated about his limitations now."

"He had lots of opinions about things, and he was quite forthright in letting us know what his opinions were. So, I encouraged him to [stand for the school council], because he always had something to say, which is valuable in the school council, and he wasn't scared to speak in front of others. Quite a few others on the council probably weren't that confident in speaking to other people. [Due to his opinions] he was at times a little bit difficult to get on with. He was well behaved – he wasn't disruptive, or anything. He says that I'm 'alright now', but I've been trying to make him understand that it's not me who has changed, it's him."

4.2.3 'Bob' Researcher comments

When I approached the school with the consent forms, they told me that for some students, their usual practice was to ring the parents and gain consent verbally - which was the case for Bob's parents. While they did not offer any further information (and I did not enquire further out of respect for confidentiality) I interpreted this to mean that Bob's parents had literacy challenges (as did Bob) and/or some mind/body difference.

4.3 'Bella' Portrait

Bella was a young woman of 17 who seemed to be the centre of a group of friends. She came to the sixth form at Special Secondary after attending a mainstream secondary school, where she had gained qualifications. She was outgoing and seemed happy, smiling and laughing often. When she talked about difficult experiences, she did not dwell on these, finding something positive to add about most things. She was also a member of the Student Council.

She had a physical health problem during nursery school, "*I used to be in hospital with it.*" This meant she was frequently off ill. "*So, I didn't hardly go. And they phoned up my parents about it nearly every day. So, I stopped going.*" Bella's time at Primary school had been very happy. "*I enjoyed it there. We went ice-skating. Well, with primary schools, you go everywhere, don't you!*" She had worked with a Teaching Assistant that she developed a good relationship with:

> *got to know her, like, really well, and I used to go to her house for tea and all that! … I really do miss her.*

Her best friend from Primary school had carried on through secondary school with her. Bella had enjoyed her time at Secondary school. She had good friends there and several boyfriends over the five years. Despite this, she commented:

> *every time we used to do PE or something, when they ask to get in pairs, I was the only one that was left out. Nobody picked me.*

While she laughed at the memory, she admitted it "*felt real bad*" at the time. Bella had tackled this by teaming up with a friend, if she was there: "*I'm with you!*" Looking back on secondary school now, she "*felt really left out*" there, although it seems she had not realised this at the time.

She had found some things difficult. There were "*exams all the time. Which was quite hard. …*

But it was always maths, and I'm not really keen on maths." Lessons were very repetitive:

"*you did the same thing all the time. In maths, so … It was alright – quite hard*." When the

exams came around, she "*always used to fail*," and confirmed that the experience of failing

repeatedly had been quite hard for her.   She added that, as she had changed school, she

"*didn't go back to school to get [some of] my grades. So, I don't know what my grades were in

Maths or English*."   Another difficulty had been school detentions. This was a routine part of

life at the school for her, where "*I got that many detentions, I went into isolation. For a <u>week</u>*."

Some of these incidents had been in relation to other people talking; but she felt she had been

blamed. While other students had three course options: "*I had to take one of them away, for

ALP. Adult Literacy Programme*." This meant that she was not able to take an option she

really wanted to do.   From observation, Bella seemed to be a confident reader and writer. She

later commented "*I think ALP helped me at school – 'cos now I can do more things*."

While mainstream secondary school had its challenges, it also had rewards. Bella loved

performing, and had been in several plays during her time there. Towards the end of her time

there, she had been picked for a lead role: "*<u>I</u> got the main part in that! … I was real happy*!"

The experience had highs and lows. Alongside bad memories: "*I was like – what's my line?

What's my line?*", there were good memories:

> *I went and did my play, and everyone was like 'Wow, you did it, you did!' I felt real
> happy 'cos I didn't fail 'em. … They was real happy with me! [she laughs] All of
> 'em. Real proud of myself.*

Bella had not wanted to change schools and said she did not know why she had, although she

added: "*I've got learning difficulties … And I'm dyslexic as well*." She missed many of her

friends "*I 'ad more 'best' friends … [she laughs] to help me out*," but she had not seen them

much since leaving school.

While she had not wanted to change schools, Bella felt differently now: "*I liked it at [secondary school], but I like it here more.*" She still missed her old friends, but had "*loads*" of friends now at Special Secondary and these seemed to be closer friendships. Talking of two friends who had now left, she said they had "*been like a sister, and … brother*" to her, and that they had felt the same about her. This supportive atmosphere could be seen in Bella's lessons. When activities meant she worked alone, Bella smiled at her friends and checked they were alright when she could. Asked when she felt most part of things at school, she said "*where we work together as a team,*" and that she had more of these experiences at Special Secondary than at her previous schools. At one point during a lesson, she started up a conversation, and a student who was having a bad day joined in. Bella made an effort to support him, including him in the discussion and asking him questions about what he had said. When talking about this later, Bella remembered this and added:

> *I was trying to cheer him up. He was always in trouble. Even though sometimes it wasn't his fault, he still wouldn't talk to people, but I'll try and talk to him.*

She had many views on how they could improve the school, and "*cos I'm on the school Council, I like to make a change.*" She shared several of these ideas, which seemed to be ways to solve problems, showing she had thought these issues through. Bella had some thoughts about changes to the building the school was in, from more toilets, to moving where they have lunch as the current room is too small for wheelchair users to share. Outside of school issues, Bella suggested that instead of sharing the building with a mainstream secondary (this has been as part of a recent education restructuring), they should have moved the mainstream secondary to share with a mainstream primary "*Cos they're both the same, aren't they really?*", and then they could have shared their site with a special Primary school: "*I think they should 'ave done it like that. … 'Cos then we're all together, aren't we? The same.*"

In lessons, Bella worked independently without prompting. While she sometimes asked for help with tasks, if the teacher or TA were busy, she worked the problem out herself, and carried on. She thought about the topic of the lesson, and started conversations about this, asking questions and putting her own view forward. About lessons Bella said: "*you don't do the same things as you would at a mainstream school. Hard work or anything. … I think it's <u>real</u> easy!*" Asked if it was too easy, Bella said "*I don't know. Easy, yeah. But other people'd say it was hard and difficult.*" On the other hand, she noted: "*I think I've learnt more here – than I did at [mainstream secondary]. With health and safety, we didn't really talk about it [there]*", and that she had now learnt "*about all safety, and how to use a kettle properly, and an oven properly, and how to take [things] out of the oven*". During work, Bella focused on the task in hand and carried out her work while also talking to a friend at times. When she was working in the kitchen, getting glasses out, she noticed they were not clean, and washed and dried them all. Without prompting, she then realised there were not enough glasses, showing numeracy skills, and found more glasses, washing and drying these. As well as her independence and confidence, this task showed that Bella is resourceful and persistent, carrying out different tasks in order to meet goals that she has set for herself. Her literacy skills were called on several times, as other students asked her to read for them, which she did easily and confidently. She explained that in some lessons, other students talk a lot:

> *Does my 'ead in. Cos you're trying to concentrate and listen … And if you go wrong, you blame that person for talking to you.*

At both mainstream and special secondary schools, she had found that "*teachers … run your life!*" Recently, she had been told by a Teaching Assistant that she could not have a relationship with a younger student: "*she said I can't go out … with him,*" although Bella's mother knew about the relationship, and "*she's alright with it.*" As Bella argued, "*I mean, if I love him, then what's the problem?*" This intervention was a problem for them, as school was:

> *[the] only time I get to see him though, really … we might live far away from each other. So, the only time we get to see each other is in school.*

In her previous school, Bella noted that:

> *I got … told off [there]. Because – I'm not, I've forgot why, but – I had to stay in social area every lunch time. I got bored of it.   But I got a boyfriend and, like, I didn't go to social area, for a week! And I didn't have dinner, for a week! 'Cos – I just wanted to be outside. … Not being stood at window all the time, talking to friends.*

To Bella, education was "*very important,*" as "*I want a good job.*" She wanted to go to college to study, although she had not quite made up her mind what to study yet: "*I wanna be a hairdresser, or … a nail person or … work wi' children*." She was not sure whether this would be possible as "*you know how old you have to be? Sixteen. But I won't be able to do it*" (as she is already 17[12]). Teachers had been encouraging her, though, "*everyone's saying that – that I would be good at it*."   Later, she added that she felt like she was "*rushing into college*" and had decided to go to a local training centre first, which "*looks like a nice school … like one of our schools*[13]." Three of her friends would also be attending the centre.

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[12] Bella had not realised that there was no upper age limit on this training.
[13] This training facility works with young people with learning difficulties.

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4.3.1 'Bella' Supporting information – previous school

Name: Bella
Key topics highlighted by the previous school [Bella] is chatty and sociable and this can mask her very real deficits. Adults may tend to over-estimate her cognitive functioning and believe that she is capable of tasks and activities that are, in reality, beyond her skill level. (Educational Psychologist)
• **Issues relating to working alone** She has difficulty concentrating during lessons and struggles to understand some of the most basic concepts. Her ability to think abstractly is compromised and she lacks higher order thinking skills useful for problem solving. She also struggles to transfer or generalise skills from one situation to another or use other strategies … In addition any learning is limited by her severely reduced memory capacity which compromises independently functioning and requires a high level of adult supervision to keep her safe.
• **Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA** [Bella]'s cognitive ability is so poor it's likely that there will be few, if any, other children in her school who present with such a cognitive delay. This, in turn, has implications for inclusion as it's very unlikely that there will be anyone else in her age group with such severe difficulties
• **Issues relating to working/socialising with peers** …has to be supervised at break and lunchtime to ensure her safety
• **Other issues** [Bella] enjoys school … would prefer to stay at [mainstream secondary] for another 3 years first though. [Several comments that she wanted to stay there.] Type of future provision required that would realistically meet the young person's needs …The options at [mainstream secondary] have been explored but they cannot offer a suitable course at an appropriate level. [S]afeguarding … supervision cannot be guaranteed [at local college] [Bella] needs specialist teaching from staff experienced in SLD

4.3.2 'Bella' Supporting information – Special Secondary

"She appears very able, but she's also incredibly vulnerable too. … She also struggles with relationships a little bit, in that she ... wants to be friends with everyone. We had a bit of trouble the first term, she'd told about three boys that she wanted to go out with them."

"Bella was lovely from the moment she walked in. … She was very negative with a lot of things … when she was drawing, or having to do any writing. She would say 'oh, this is hopeless, I can't do this' or 'I'm not good at this' ... I think ... just seeing [her own] pictures on the walls, and the other children saying 'wow, did you do that [Bella]?' does help. Made her feel better about herself. … And I think that's one thing that [Bella] has improved, she's gained more self-esteem, and confidence really."

4.3.3 'Bella' Researcher comments

During the interviews Bella spoke about three different young men – a current peer, a former

peer, and a younger student – referring to each as her boyfriend at times. It seemed

inappropriate to mention in the Portrait, but does support her vulnerability as mentioned in

the Supporting Information above.

4.4 'James' Portrait

James was a young man of 15 with a ready smile. He was shy and could pause for a very long time (up to 15 seconds) before he said what he was thinking. In activities he seemed to wait for someone else to go first before he joined in. His responses show that he thought about his actions and was prepared to share these thoughts, given time and a supportive listener. James was able to talk about difficult issues, such as his own past behaviour. He focused on the positive, but appeared sometimes to feel less positive than his words suggested.

His memories of primary school were not good ones. "*I was in trouble … Most of the time.*" James was able to describe what happened and explain the reasons behind it:

> *I used to ignore everyone. 'Cos I was young then. … couldn't have been more than that, 'cos I got frustrated … and walked out. Just …stayed out while I'd calmed down and were ready to come back in.*

As well as getting in trouble for his behaviour, James also felt he had been blamed for things that were not his fault: "*When summat's 'appened … it would always be me. … who's done it.*" He remembered playing football at break times, but that the people he played with had only talked to him in lessons "*now and again*" and they had not stayed in touch when he left. When summing up his experience at the school, he said he had "*some good memories and some bad memories,*" but he found it difficult to remember anything good about the school.

Talking about his current school (Special Secondary), James said that his behaviour had improved "*ever since*" he first started there: "*I've changed. For better. Outside of school.*" He spoke about going shopping to explain this. "*Well … when I was little, I used to … hate going shopping. And I … refused to go.*" While he seemed embarrassed, he admitted "*when I was younger … If I didn't want to do anything, I'd just … had a little paddy.*" Asked if there was anything else he had learnt at Special Secondary, he said "*controlling my temper a bit better.*"

Unfortunately, when I spoke to James, he was having a hard time at school. A group of students had been causing trouble, with one in particular making threats to him and his girlfriend (which was being dealt with by the school). He noted that this had been "*the first time*" he had experienced bullying, and that he "*was shocked about it*." This had led to a problem between him and a friend, which had upset James again. Several classmates seemed to show their support for him during lessons. Although they did not say anything, they smiled at him, or came over and patted his arm, which they did not do with other classmates who were involved in the situation. James seemed much more cheerful when speaking about his favourite lesson, Maths. When asked whether this lesson had helped take his mind off the situation, James commented it had done at the beginning: "*when it first all started … it has like … took my mind off it. [A] Little bit*." James felt that, while the bullying had not ended, he was coping better: "*sometimes it's on my mind, and … sometimes … it's not. … As it's gone on, it is getting easier*." There seemed to be a mixed message though, as James found it hard to talk about school without bringing up the bullying. "*I feel … real happy in maths. 'Cos it … there's no way [that anything could happen] … it takes your mind off it*." Asked what it had been like in lessons before the bullying had started, he commented:

> I thought to myself, everyone will have calmed down everything. It'll all end up ending and … move on but … the next day – nothing's changed.

Looking at his current experiences at school, James knew that he was safe in class "*Like, in lessons now … I know nothing's gonna 'appen*," but despite this, he was still worried during lessons, thinking about what was going to happen when the lesson ended: "*it's break times and play times what I'm quite worried about. … That's when all, like, trouble starts*."

He also brought up a classroom experience from two years ago, when a student "*used to pick on people*" during class, although they were "*told not to do it*" by the teacher. Other students had shared this experience: "*well, everyone … wa'n't[14] happy, because … He's hit some people in the class.*" James had been particularly worried in PE lessons at that time, when using bikes designed for two people to ride together (at what James described should be a "*steady speed*"):

> he used to go <u>super</u>-fast. Zoom! … I didn't feel safe. Every time I went on a bike with him …because the speed we was going at. … Either thought I was gonna fall out or we was gonna crash or something.

The situation with this student had escalated, and he "*got dropped out*" of school after a serious incident. However, James had seen the student at a local Fair, a few weeks before, and "*it brought it all back*."

Seeing James in class, he did seem to be upset and distracted at times. When he could concentrate, he seemed able to work independently for a short time. He seemed happiest when he could work alongside a male friend and have a laugh while working. He enjoyed Maths, his favourite subject and put a lot of effort and concentration into his work. While he did not say much in lessons, his engagement with the lesson could be seen; laughing at a teacher's joke, when no-one else had been paying attention. A student common room was also used during break times and James felt relatively safe there. He weighed up the situation, and felt that nothing big would happen "*'cos there's all the staff about there … so they can't really plan nothing, for there, or anything like that*". Although the playground area at Special

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[14] wasn't

Secondary was also watched by teachers and TAs during break times (in shifts), this was a risky location for James, where something could happen.

> *When I go on the playground … when I go to see [my girlfriend] and my friends …*
> *the people … who's been doing this … they're always around. … (sigh) I feel like*
> *they're … gonna hurt … [my girlfriend] or me. Or one of my friends.*

When asked when was the last time he felt he could relax, James commented "*With all this … thing that's going round … it probably has been a month*."   James said that he "*used to love coming to school. Every day*" at Special Secondary. Asked whether this had been the same at the Primary school he had been at before, he sighed and said "*Not really, no*."

James had a long-standing relationship with his girlfriend, a classmate, as they had dated off and on for three years. They had been going out this time for four months, but only saw each other at school. "*Outside school … we don't see each other really. We tried asking my parents, but …*" James did not attend after-school clubs, but did attend school football training. Outside of school, James spent his time with his family and said "*we're all close*." They all went swimming together once a week ("*unless one of us is poorly*"), and to football matches on Saturdays. He "*goes up town … now and again*" with an older brother, who sometimes took him to the cinema.   He also went to a Youth Club, only missing this if it clashed with a match.

James felt that school was "*really important*" as "*you get qualifications, so you can get a job and move on. You know, get to college*." He wanted to go to college after the sixth form at Special Secondary, but there was some uncertainty about this, due to possible changes to the sixth form: "*people's been saying … it's going down. There might not be a sixth form, there might be – there might be one so … They don't really know*."

4.4.1 'James' Supporting information – previous school

Name: James
Key topics highlighted by the previous school
• **Issues relating to working alone** [James]'s level of cognitive ability makes it very difficult for him to access the curriculum. Without 1:1 support, he is unable to join in any class activities except PE and Games. [He] has made no progress in [memory skills] over the past 12 months; in fact he has regressed over the past two years; he is not longer [sic] able to remember 3 items with consistency and now has difficulty naming some simple items, for example, animals such as 'cow' or 'horse' in a memory game.
• **Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA** [P]arents are concerned about [his] lack of progress in understanding and using language. [T]he pattern and severity of [his] difficulties mean that he is likely to struggle to access the curriculum at the same level as his peers and will need a lot of support in the classroom. Instructions to the whole class may need repeating specifically to [James] and complex instructions should be broken down as much as possible. [He] also needs extra time to process instructions and questions. Passive in his relationship with TA reluctant to follow instructions or help
• **Issues relating to working/socialising with peers** [James] needs a high level of support to process language, express himself verbally, to listen and sustain concentration. He also needs to learn social skills and strategies to avoid aggressive behaviour towards his peers. Peers note "Helpful"; "Sometimes kind (especially if he is helped)"; "sometimes starts fights"; "Good at working with others"; "Doesn't do what Mrs M. says"; "does what he's told". [S]till does not spontaneously greet adults and even when he is addressed it may take several repetitions of "Hello [James]" for him to answer or look at you. He rarely laughs, even when other pupils are sharing a joke. … he still has to be reminded to look at and listen to the other child. When … talking about emotions he has difficulty with anything beyond happy or sad. [He] is often not able to make his views known or to understand the social setting in which he operates. This results in him being mainly passive in class and somewhat isolated within his peer group.
• **Other issues** Parents request a place at a Special School … [James] is unable to make a view known. [Parents] have concerns about the increasing incidents involving aggression from [James] to other children at school and his lack of understanding danger whilst outside of school. He does not appear happy in school except when taking part in physical activities.

4.4.2 'James' Supporting information – Special Secondary

"He was very quiet when he started with us[15] ... It was very difficult for us to get him to speak up ... Working in small groups gave him a bit more confidence. There were 13 in that class, and that might have been a bit daunting for him … you know, he wasn't like a little mouse, he didn't hide in the corner when the class were together. But he was not all that confident. He's grown in confidence. He's a pretty shy kind of person, but not as much now as he was then."

"He's got global academic delay, except in maths – he's quite good with numeracy. … The words are there; his comprehension – his reading and his speaking comprehension are good. But he doesn't always articulate words at the normal speed. So you have to give [James] extra time, and you have to resist the temptation … to finish his sentences off for him. Because [James] is so polite … that if you finish a sentence off, he'll say "yes", and it might not be what he wanted to say."

"He's very level headed, and very sensible, and he's also very honest. … I know on quite a few occasions, he spoke to … others who were being influenced and going off track a bit. … Not because we asked him to, but because he felt that was right, and that's what he wanted to do."

"Things run very deep with [James]. … He lets it run deep for a while, and then it comes out. Either as needing support, or worse still with [James], it'll come out as aggression. Which is surprising, because he's such a lovely boy. He's got wonderful manners. But if his buttons are pushed just a bit too far by the other students, he will turn around and become quite aggressive. But that's only happened ... once since September? Maybe once in the whole of the academic year before. He's used the support system, rather than let it get to that point."

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[15] Although James had not remembered this, his teachers knew that James had started attending a special primary school one afternoon a week, on placement from his mainstream primary, before starting at Special Secondary full-time.

4.5 'Eminem' Portrait

Eminem was a young man of 15 who was having a hard time at school when we spoke.

Several students mentioned that he had recently been excluded, but he did not mention this[16].

With his friends and class mates, he seemed socially confident and happy. He appeared to be confident with cleaning up tasks, did chores at home and helped at school by offering to wash other people's cups after break times. In class and interviews, Eminem engaged with activities and topics, answering in short sentences (ten words or less), but most of his interactions with me were short (one – two words). He seemed much less confident in interviews. He was able to disagree with me and felt confident to check details: "*does that mean Primary school and all?*" He did not always understand questions, and we had a few misunderstandings that became clear while talking.

During interviews, at times he tapped on the desk. This first happened when talking about bullying, stopping when the topic changed, suggesting he may have felt uncomfortable or unhappy with the topic. At times when I asked about his previous school, he started tapping again. It seemed that while I was not asking about the bullying, just talking about this school prompted Eminem to remember the bullying. He confirmed this later.

Talking about his Primary school, Eminem said "*it was alright*," but also that he "*used to have loads of fights … me and this other kid*." He said very little about Primary school, but added that the work was "*real easy*" there – easier than at Special Secondary.

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[16] He confirmed this when reviewing the portrait, but did not talk about it.

Eminem had started at a mainstream secondary and had stayed there for a year and a half. This had not been a happy time for him, as "*I used to get bullied a lot. … They was in different class. Break time and dinner time they used to pick on me*." Apart from the bullying, he could not remember anything else about the school. Asked whether he had felt left out or part of things at that school, he said "*I felt left out*," but that he "*can't remember actually*" why he felt like that. Lessons there were "*boring*."

For Eminem, the move to Special Secondary seemed to be just to get away from the bullying. He was not sure why he had come to a special school, but his mum seemed to have made the decision: "*I don't know. My mum just said she wanted me to come 'ere. 'Cos the work was too 'ard*." When asked why Special Secondary, rather than one of the other schools in the area, he said: "*Me mum rang 'em*."[17] He had visited the school to see what it was like and remembered seeing the swimming pool, but did not remember anything else. Eminem said he enjoyed being at Special Secondary more than his other schools, although he could not say why. He enjoyed lessons there and he had not enjoyed lessons before coming to the school. He added "*the work's a lot easier*." While lessons at mainstream secondary had been "*boring*," lessons now felt "*safe*" at Special Secondary. Looking at school experiences overall, he felt his experience of bullying (while only a small proportion of his total time at school) had been a "*big*" experience, while his experience of feeling part of things at school had been "*small*."

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[17] His brother already attended a special primary which had links with the school.

His favourite lesson at Special Secondary was Maths, "*'cos I like it*" and Swimming, where he liked "*all of it*," doing "*loads of laps*" but he did not remember how many. He also attended two sets of Art lessons, but when asked if he enjoyed art, he said: "*sort of … but there's loads of writing!*" Some of his lessons, particularly English, were difficult for him as "*people, like, wind me up.*" They "*call my mum [names], and all that lot*" during classes, and "*that's when I kick off … I just walk out.*" When asked if he was managing to learn anything in English, he said "*no, not really. Not now I'm not*", but that "*I don't mind, because I hate English.*" He said he hated "*all of it*," finding it "*boring … 'cos they do, like, rubbish things*" (this is GCSE coursework) "*and I failed!*" In contrast, he felt he did well in Maths "*I got a level three … in me entry levels,*" adding he did get a level one in English "*but I still passed.*" When asked if the teacher did anything different in Maths to make it interesting, Eminem had said "*no.*" During one Maths class, he had been trying to do an online quiz but was getting the answers wrong. He gave up answering the questions and started making people laugh instead by swearing. In one instance, his classmates had looked quickly around the room to check no-one was listening before they laughed.

At home he said that he listened to music (but only to Eminem), watched football on TV and played sports games on the PlayStation, either alone or with people he had met online. Eminem's social life revolved around his older brother and this brother's friends: "*Only my brother … take me to town. Do you know … so I can get some PlayStation games?*" "*And sometimes going to cinema with 'im. Whatever they go, they go watch, I just go with 'em.*" He had a girlfriend, who he saw "*every day, yeah. … At school*" but not outside school as they live "*miles away.*" They hoped to go to a local college together. His brother was studying catering at the local college when we spoke. Eminem wanted to go to college himself: "*when I go to college, I wanna be a mechanic. And I want to do sports.*"

4.5.1 'Eminem' Supporting information – previous school

Name: Eminem
Key topics highlighted by the previous school
Global Developmental Delay
• **Issues relating to working alone** [S]truggles to access the specialist curriculum provided for him in a nurture group in spite of the work being differentiated to meet his needs and given additional adult support. His literacy skills fall in the moderate to severe range although his reading skills are slightly stronger than his overall ability [H]as poor attention and concentration skills and is easily distracted. He finds it difficult to follow instructions and needs lots of prompting and coaxing to stay on task. [He] struggles to understand things and finds it difficult to retrieve information. He has developed a range of avoidance strategies which he uses as soon as the work becomes challenging. He struggles to work independently   … is unhappy at being in school. He tends to get frustrated and upset easily
• **Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA** He struggles to follow complex sentences and requires information modifying to a level that he understands. It is reported that the school have grave concerns regarding his behaviour as no sanctions or interventions appear to have any impact on him. He is permanently on report and removed from classes due to inappropriate behaviour.
• **Issues relating to working/socialising with peers** [H]as difficulties establishing relationships with peers due to his poor communication and interaction skills but is able to build better relationships with adults as they tend to lead conversations and set clear boundaries [H]e comes across as a co-operative boy who is keen to please, however, he is extremely vulnerable to the influence of other students and is easily led astray He has no social awareness or true real friends and is subject to bullying by his peers e.g., name calling. His peers also encourage him to do things they consider amusing that get him into trouble, which [Eminem] seems to accept.
• **Other issues** [Eminem] is a compulsive liar and will always deny any act that he has committed. He displays many anti-social behaviours e.g., makes sexually explicit comments, goads other students into inappropriate behaviours, becomes involved in fights and incites fights between other students. His latest incident resulted in the police being called and a strict risk assessment being put in place He has no awareness of danger or the consequences of his own actions. Unstructured times are a major problem and [Eminem] is included in a lunchtime club to keep him safe [R]ecommendation to stay at [mainstream secondary] with some sessions at [Special Secondary] school as previously agreed.

4.5.2   'Eminem' Supporting information – Special Secondary

"He spent two years in mainstream secondary. Because of his learning difficulties, he'd been bullied quite badly. He just wasn't thriving in the mainstream environment. His younger brother was already at [a special primary], and he was doing well … his mother saw about trying to get [Eminem] transferred here, because she thought it would be a better place for him."

"[T]here was a student here who wasn't suited to this school, he was quite aggressive and violent. Unfortunately [Eminem] made friends with him … he had a bit of an aggressive attitude towards the staff, and towards some of the students as well, because of [t]his friendship. If this other student hadn't have been here, I think it could have been very different"

"[Eminem] used to come along to a football club at lunchtime [with another student] … as helpers for the teaching staff. That was something else we tried to encourage him to do, to give him some responsibility, and also keep him out of problems in the playground, which worked."

"Last year, there were some situations where he was just a bit silly, and did some things that he shouldn't have done; you know, fighting with people … He's had quite a bit of difficulty this year and last year, fitting in with the school and fitting in with the staff. There's been a few periods where he's been on report for things that he's done – he's been involved in fights, and stuff like that."

"[H]e's really good at getting [one of the younger pupils] onto the wheelchair bike, and taking her round, and taking responsibility for her. So, we've tried to give him responsibility, and he's responded well to that. And then, when he goes off to do something else, it can all change. So, we try and make progress where we can."

4.6 'Horrid Henry' Portrait

Horrid Henry (Henry) was a 14-year-old young woman. In the year below James and Eminem, she shared some classes with them. She seemed very determined, working for long periods of time on a group of tasks without support or encouragement.

Thinking about her primary school, Henry noted: "*I liked it there.*" She "*had a lot of friends*," including her best friend: "*I knowed her when she was a baby … she's nearly my cousin, but we call each other cousins, but we're not!*" Henry said she still saw her regularly. When she had been at Primary school, Henry had some health problems which had affected her speech:

> *Well, I could talk, but … I couldn't say anything else. I couldn't say, like …. Really hard names, things. But now sometimes I can.*

When asked if it had been hard not to be able to communicate all the things she wanted to, she agreed, adding "*people don't really like me when … I was disabled, so ...*" It emerged that she had been bullied by students at her old school. This used to happen during the day, and "*staff said 'you will be alright'*". They only dealt with bullying at the end of the day, though. This had led to the situation being made worse:

> *At home time 'cos I used to walk home on my own, the people who was picking on me was waiting for me, and when I came out, the people [were] slapping me across my face.*

This carried on for "*ages*" but "*they stopped my bullying when I was moving.*" Some of the bullies had lived near Henry, as they had been "*waiting at the park as well.*" Eventually, Henry's family had made the decision to move house to get away from the situation. About the school, Henry noted "*I still liked it there, though. Not all the time.*" She had liked the work "*and once, playtime.*" When asked about feeling left out, it was this school she came back to: "*I never … except me old school.*" She stated she had felt included in lessons though: "*'cos none of them bullies were with us. … 'cos we all swapped [class].*"

She had left at the end of primary school, when all her classmates were leaving. Most of them had left to go to the same secondary school, but Henry had not wanted to: "*I wanted to go to special needs school*." When asked why, she explained "'*cos my throat – I couldn't talk, then*." She continued: "*And I thought, 'mam, am I disabled?' and she's like 'yeah, you got a mind of a six years old.' So now I came here*." Henry remembered there had been a presentation about secondary school: "*Well, at me old school, was doing a PowerPoint*" (about the school most of the students went on to), but Henry had not liked it. Someone had told her there were other options: two special schools. Henry decided on Special Secondary "*because I thought it was good. From the picture. I was talking about it*" and her mum had rung up to ask if she could go there. "*I like it here now*."

> *At my old school, they used to [have] erm ... a Speech Peri? [Peripatetic worker] ... I wanted [a] Speech Peri here, as well. I thought they can help me with speech. But I haven't.*

Despite this concern, Henry felt her communication is "*better*" now. When asked why, she said "*I don't know. I feel more ... erm <u>safe</u>*." When asked about "*feeling included*," she said she felt included at Special Secondary: "*Every day! And every time*." She noted that some classes can be disrupted by students, and at these times she felt:

> *really scared. In case, like, ... one of them hit me ... 'cos they're in my class, and sometimes they start in a class. So, I thought 'Oh my god, oh my god! Somebody's gonna break summat!'*

She added that what made her feel better was "*just getting away from it*." Comparing the situation to her own bullying at Primary school, however, she noted that "*here the staff sort it out straightaway*." At her old school, she remembered other students were just warned not to "*do that again*."

Talking about her current experiences in the classroom, Henry noted: "*well, it's alright. But it's just when they argue.*" When her classmates are not arguing, she sounds much more positive, and says that classes are "*good … excellent.*"

> *If they alright, I feel happy. But if they argue … I'm feeling sad. So … I'm like a little bit - like, in the middle.*

She added that other students were trying to be good, as they had targets for their behaviour, but that she had never been excluded: "*I'm real good.*" One thing she did have trouble with is that, as she says herself: "*I like to help. But, like, I get bossy, a little bit*." She felt "*sad*" when this caused problems. She sometimes found it hard to concentrate "*'cos if I can't do it, I just get really [irritated].*" When Henry could do it, "*I'm alright. I'm really excited that I done it!*" Asked if there are things the teacher did that made a difference, she thought and said "*helping … help me.*" She felt confident about some subjects, noting "*I like working very hard*" and "*I am clever at Maths*." Summing up, Henry noted that "*I love coming to school, and learning.*" When asked if there was anything in particular she loved about coming to school, Henry added "*seeing friends and … not getting bullied.*"

About the future, Henry noted that "*I like learning because, when I go to college, I'll know what everything [is] then*." Her big sister was away at university.

> *I'm trying to go to college first, and then Uni. Like me sister …. My sister said, when I go to Uni ... she [will] try to get me a room … next door with her.*

She was not sure what she would study at university, but eventually, she wanted to "*look after old people.*"

4.6.1 'Horrid Henry' Supporting information – previous school

Name: Horrid Henry
Key topics highlighted by the previous school Severe speech disorder, severe delay of language skills. Literacy severely delayed.
• **Issues relating to working alone** [Horrid Henry]'s attention can be single channelled – generally manageable and attention can be brought back with verbal prompts. She prefers to follow her own agenda.
• **Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA** [She demonstrates] Appropriate eye contact and non-verbal skills. [E]njoys one to one games with an adult.
• **Issues relating to working/socialising with peers** Her speech is severely disordered and unfamiliar listeners may find it hard to understand her … [She needs support with] engaging with the social life of the school environment, such as making friends and making a contribution.
• **Other issues**

4.6.2 'Horrid Henry' Supporting information – Special Secondary

"A lot of the students in mainstream ... ended up getting left further and further behind the more they went through the school, because the support just wasn't there for them ... that's what happened with [Horrid Henry]." "Not sure if it was her ability she was bullied for. … But I know that she was bullied. But that never happened here, and she's always been one of the popular ones, with a lot of friends here. So that's been good really."

"When she first came in, she was quite quiet and timid," "A bit unsure of herself" … "within weeks she came out of her shell. She kind of knew that she was ... of a higher ability than some of the other students in the class ... really made her shine. She used that to her advantage ... to help them, and her confidence just came out. … They used to have little story clubs going on in the back room, she used to set it all up like a school. Or she had a shop going; she was teaching them all the coins."

"Sometimes in a morning, she would want attention, so she would maybe make up a story or something, what had maybe gone on at home. And it's because she just wanted you to herself. To sit down, and talk to you. And she was always given the opportunity to sit down and talk to whoever she wanted to."

"The biggest thing … we just gave her independence ... and she ran with it. She was like my third TA! But she <u>liked</u> that, and it was good that, because when she <u>was</u> teaching others, it was reaffirming <u>her</u> knowledge. I even found one day, she'd even written a report, on one of the children in the class! 'Child X, knows numbers to 10. Can't write them. Can write them to 5'. … [W]hen I actually came to test this child, his numbers were better than when I'd previously assessed him."

4.7   'Thomas the Tank Engine' Portrait

Thomas the Tank Engine (Thomas) was a young man of 13. He had attended three primary schools before transferring to Special Secondary.   He had mixed feelings about this transfer and sometimes thought he should go back to a mainstream school. When we first met, he spoke about wanting to go to the school his sister and some friends of his from a previous school attend. He was outgoing and made friends easily.

Thomas could not remember much about his first Primary school, noting that he was not there for long. He added: "*my mum just didn't like it, so I just left that place.*" He thought he had just stayed for the nursery year, but was not sure. There were a couple of memories he had of this school. His first memory was of being told off:

> *when I'm getting milk, and I got told off for something. … I think I was in a queue or something, and I pushed in, I don't know what.*

This suggested he had not known or understood what the problem had been at the time.

Later, he remembered something good about the school:

> *They had like a road – a proper crossing … They had loads of these pretend cars, you used to have. Loads of 'em. … I remember, we used to take turns on 'em. So, I went in a car all the time. I can remember that!*

From the wording, it seemed that he did not take turns, which he confirmed.

Thinking about the second mainstream primary school he went to; Thomas had remembered an incident:

> *I tapped someone to – saying hello. But I – he didn't like me anyways, but I tapped him, but he fell down the stairs. And I runned away. And I should have said sorry and I got in trouble. And I didn't mean to push him.*

At this school, he had three "helpers" (TAs):

> *The first one was because there was another boy who was looking after – who she was looking after. And she couldn't do both of us. So, I had someone else, but she was … She was on holiday?*

So, while he waited for her to return, another TA came to help out. "*But we had our <u>own</u> desk … That helped a bit.*" When one of these TAs left, Thomas remembered:

> *we did a picture, 'cos she – she bought a frame. For me. To remember her. She took the picture and she put it in there.*

He had an accident at school which had involved a trip to hospital and a day off. "*And everyone made cards, to get well. <u>Everyone</u> did. And when I left the school, that's what they did as well*". Asked about friends at this school, Thomas said he "<u>*did* </u>*have much friends there, but … For one reason they won't be my friend, and I don't know why.*" Thomas found this a bit "*weird.*"

The first thing that Thomas remembered about his third primary school, is that he:

> *got sent home … only once. 'Cos I was kicking a child [the back of their chair] ... many times, I think. For fun, I don't know why. I forgot.*

This had been at a special event at the school, so the child's mum had also been there, although he did not think she had seen this. He did not remember how he had felt about being sent home, but thought he had probably not been upset, as this had meant he could go home early. He had two helpers there "*but not at the same time. 'Cos one left, and I had to have another.*" They had been "*good*" and "*told me some things [like] what to d*o." To help him with Maths, they had made various learning support aids from card, including a train, "*a '504 four times table train'*" that he could use in class. "*And every time I did it … I just counted it, and it helped me.*"

He had a lot of friends at this third primary school through a pre-school playgroup his parents had taken him along to. He also mentioned he had helped at nursery at this school and through this: "*I ... mostly probably had more little friends!*" This came about as Thomas' teachers had realised some activities were too long for him. Instead, they had arranged for him to help out with the nursery class during these activities.

Thomas had moved to Special Secondary at the end of primary school. Asked if he had a choice of schools, he says "*Nah, my mum didn't let me.*" He had been accepted into a competitive secondary school, "*but mum said it wouldn't be good for me, so I went to here.*" He was having second thoughts about this decision. "*My mum said it'd be better and quite a lot of times I just want to leave*" but "*my mum won't let me.*"

Thomas had three concerns about the work at Special Secondary. Firstly, they did less work:

> *my old mainstream schools ... they did more in the morning. And more in the afternoon, but they go home, like, earlier.*

He had discussed this with his teachers: "*They told me I can ask [for more work].*" He also worried he was repeating the same work:

> *most of it, I've done all the work here. … And I've probably done it, like, five times at probably my mainstream schools. Each of 'em. So, I've probably done it over and over again.*

This used to make him feel "*angry?*" but after talking to his teachers, Thomas was "*not bothered anymore. 'Cos you need to do it, don't you? Over again.*"

His third concern was the progress he was making, compared to mainstream students like his sister.

> *They'd be like – four or five years … on their work. And I most probably need help, 'cos … my sister's like three years [younger than Thomas] but I probably couldn't even do her homework. … She can do harder work than me, though.*

This brought up the related issue of classroom support. His Special Secondary class had two Teaching Assistants, who worked with different students throughout the day. While the teaching was designed around students with learning difficulties, Thomas did have less one-to-one support than in his mainstream school. If he went back to mainstream, he felt he would be doing: "*Probably a bit harder work? But you'd have assistant with you as well. Helper*."

Friendships within school were also a concern for Thomas. When talking about his sister's school, he returned to the friends he had mentioned earlier from his second Primary school:

> *they're most probably not my friends anymore. But they most probably stare at me and be mean to me. Don't know why.*

One of them had acted like this, which had made it difficult for Thomas to know how the others might act.

Later, when I asked Thomas about feeling 'left out' at school, he mentioned being bullied, when "*they randomly … swear at you, or something? Think that they're going to hurt you*" and this related to a classmate: "*lately, he's been a bit mean*" (although teachers do "*tell them off*"). He felt this kind of behaviour had no reason: "*they randomly do it. For nothing*." When we spoke a few months later, this bullying seemed to have largely stopped. It was still "*a tiny bit like that – but [it] doesn't happen as much anymore*." By this time, Thomas also no longer wanted to change schools: "*I don't mind anymore, I like it here*."

Thomas found his classroom at Special Secondary "*noisy*," which bothered him. There were

other problems:

> *sometimes it annoys you, when you're trying to work and people walk out. And*
> *the teachers has to get 'em, so we have to wait and just trying to learn.*

This happened "*nearly every day – but not today*." He added "*I like all the lessons*." In class,

Thomas did not always understand the instructions given by the teacher or TA. In one

particular exercise, he spent the first few minutes saying he did not understand, but the TA

was busy, so he had to wait for a response. He seemed discouraged by this. Once the teacher

had explained the topic in a different way, Thomas finished his work quickly, before the rest of

the group (particularly since he had started last). He missed out part of the exercise, returning

to work on this once it had been pointed out.

Given some time on the computer, he played games for half an hour, making his way around a

landscape and exploring by himself. When other students came over, he talked to them or

helped them. When the class was taking a break together, he tried to make conversation but

other students did not always respond.   He did not seem upset by this and carried on trying.

Asked about when he had felt part of things at school, he thought a group activity:

> *we're doing the Christmas play … today. … I'm the Narrator! We 'ave to wear the*
> *jumpers, and jeans. My mum's coming and my sister is … I'll be coming home*
> *early. So, I'm not going home on the bus.*

This made him feel "*happy*."

Thomas stated that learning is important "so you can get a job when you're older." He

planned to "be a mechanic … And get an apprenticeship. When I'm sixteen." A relative has

spoken to him about this and will help him find an apprenticeship when he is ready.

4.7.1 'Thomas the Tank Engine' Supporting information – previous school

Name: Thomas the Tank Engine
Key topics highlighted by the previous school
• **Issues relating to working alone** [Thomas] thinks his Maths has improved, but he finds writing difficult. [O]ccasionally guesses and doesn't apply strategies to read … positive reinforcement used to apply himself and concentrate – confidence and personality are really developing. [His] concentration span is short and he needs constant reminders to help his stay on task. If he is not engaged, he tends to put his head on the desk and begins to rock. He often 'wanders off' to other subjects, when discussing the subject in hand.
• **Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA** [His] listening skills are limited. He can listen to the teacher for a short time especially in a class situation. His listening skills are much improved when he is working on a one-to-one basis. He repeatedly asks for clarification and assurance from the TA Most people understand what [he] is trying to say, although he speaks very quietly in class and needs encouragement to 'talk around his ideas'
• **Issues relating to working/socialising with peers** [Thomas] is an active member of the 'Social skills group' although he needs much support in communicating with others. … Once in school, his behaviour and attitude is generally satisfactory. He enjoys PE lessons and takes an active part … He now needs to develop his team working skills [Thomas] said he likes school because he now has more friends and he likes his teacher. [He] is beginning to form some good friendships with other children. He has one friend who he plays with on regular occasions … we have no behavioural problems once he is in school.
• Other issues

4.7.2 'Thomas the Tank Engine' Supporting information – Special Secondary

[On the issues affecting his transfer, and his early time at Special Secondary]

"For a lot of our children that do transfer at the end of year six, it can be a pretty difficult time for them, because in many primary schools … there was a great focus, in year six especially, on the Key Stage 2 SATs. [Thomas], and many of the children who transfer at the end of year six, don't perform well in SATs, and they struggle." "If they're 'dis-applied' for doing Key Stage 2 SATs, they're not taught alongside the rest of the class, and they might be taught by or with a TA, while the other kids are doing Key Stage 2 type work." [This was the case with Thomas.] "We did have three or four kids who joined us the same time as [Thomas], and all of them had fairly similar experiences." "I think quite a few of them might have problems socialising with their peers, 'cos they might be doing different things, and they might not be with them all the time. … The differences between them and the fact that they are 'different' and 'special' become more apparent. And quite a few of the children that we had into the school at the end of year six, they've had a rough time, because I suppose it affects their self-esteem, their friendships. Quite often they might be frustrated with things, and it's a very difficult thing for the children and their families as well, to cope with."

[On starting at Special Secondary]

"I think he found it a bit difficult actually. At that time, the secondary department were organised by ability, and he was in the 'more able' class. But we had 'more able' children from years seven, eight and nine, so there was quite a big gap between [Thomas], who was only just 11, and the eldest in the group, who would have been 14 going on 15. Although we did have some children who were of similar ages to him, he didn't particularly want to strike up friendships with them. … so, I think for a while, he was struggling for friendships". [Since then] "He probably got a bit happier, and settled in more. I think he developed more of a friendship with somebody in the group."

4.7.3 'Thomas the Tank Engine' Researcher comments

Thomas the Tank Engine often mentioned his mother and younger sister, who seemed

engaged with and actively supportive of his learning. While clearly confident in making friends,

he expressed uncertainty about previous friendships. The earlier draft of his Portrait reflected

his concerns, but was edited to reduce this as he was uncomfortable with the topic.

4.8 'Elsa' Portrait

Elsa was a 12-year-old noted by her classmates to be shy. In class she had a best friend she spent time with and a few other close friends. When she felt comfortable talking, she spoke in short sentences and could share her opinions. The interviews were difficult for Elsa. She seemed happy at first, but found it hard to understand some of the open questions "*I don't know most of the things that you're saying*." After a while, Elsa said "*my brain says I shouldn't say anything*" and while she was willing to come to interviews, she said very little after this point.

Elsa and her family had considered changing Primary school: "*I was going to, but Mum said no, she wanted to keep me at* [mainstream primary]*.*" She couldn't remember why, though: "*I don't know 'cos it was a long time ago … I still remember my friends … Can't remember anything else*." After her friends, Elsa remembered Teaching Assistants. One "*had blonde hair … She was nice and she had brown eyes,*" while the other "*was a little bit strict*." Her teacher "*was … a teeny bit strict. And … she … was … erm a bit nice*." Elsa was "*bored*" there:

> I didn't really like that school. 'Cos all you had to do, every afternoon, every day, was … work and work and work and work.

The only time she remembered being "*real happy*" at this school was "*when it was home time*". Other than this, Elsa remembered:

> I had some problems when I was in year 1 and I used to bump my head every playtime. I don't know how I did it … Just kept bumping everything.

She had four weeks off school for an operation, but did not have any school work during this time. She felt "*good*" about this time off school, and had not missed her friends.

When the choice of secondary school had come up, Elsa had the choice of two special schools. She had visited the one her brother goes to, but "*did not like it*." She had not visited Special Secondary: "*I didn't want to come in when there was classes. 'Cos I was too scared*." It seemed too busy for her. She picked Special Secondary, even without going, because of what they offered "*it had a pool … you can ride bikes … go in soft play … sensory room … I can't remember what else*." In the focus group, Elsa had said that she enjoys swimming. Asked how she felt about going on community visits with her class, she said "*Erm it feels … happy*." Later, she mentioned the PlayStation, too, as something she enjoyed.

While she seemed patient in class, Elsa said that this is not always the case, and that it is hard to be patient "*when it's something exciting*," and she has to wait for her turn. Elsa gave the example of when she is "*stressing*," "'*cos I want to do it!*" At these times: "*I just start jumping around … And then I calm down*." This is the only time she jumps around, other than: "*if I drink coke, I get hyper … I start laughing all the time*." She felt this was not often though. When talking about her classroom experiences, she said she was not thinking of anything, but just listening to what the teacher says. Elsa could not think of anything that distracted her during lessons initially, but later she said that people talking sometimes distract her. Seeing her in class, Elsa seemed involved in the lesson, thinking about the topic, and volunteering answers. The teacher will sometimes ask for other volunteers, instead of taking Elsa's offer up, showing that this level of interest is usual for Elsa. When a class mate volunteered an answer that the teacher did not understand, Elsa tried to explain, supporting her classmate. She was able to ignore classmates talking sometimes and refocus herself on her work without help. She waited quietly for others to finish tasks. At times, she could appear restless, but was able to stay quiet. Later, she added that sometimes she can distract others. Recently she had been talking to someone in class, and her best friend had been distracted and could not get back to work because of this. She said this did not happen very often though.

Elsa spoke very little during the initial focus group, with one of her classmates commenting she was shy.   Watching her during classes, at times she did not seem confident of what to do in groups, waiting to see what others did first. She did take the lead when working together with her best friend, which suggests she can be more confident with the right people. Elsa smiled at and talked with her classmates during group work (but not when the teacher was talking).

While she had not talked about this during the interviews, Elsa later said that she had decided she wanted to be a "*nail artist*." She recently had her nails done and thought it would be a fun job to do. She did not think she wanted to go to sixth form. When asked, she thought it was where you do exams and she does not like exams, so she did not think she would enjoy it. She would like to go to college.

4.8.1 'Elsa' Supporting information – Special Secondary

[Transition from mainstream Primary school]

"We didn't get anything – any books, any old work ... Some of the pupils came with massive files, from year 1 to 6, or a lot of them had one-to-one: 'My one-to-one did this with me, and this works best' or 'I learn best when'. She had nothing. Very limited other than what she's told us, and mum. But at her review, mum had said that she was just like a little shell, and at playtimes she wouldn't play with anybody, she'd just stand next to the adult. In class, she wouldn't do the work, 'cos she couldn't do it, but she wouldn't ask for help. And she had no one-to-one, so she was literally just abandoned. ... From what mum was saying, she fitted in like the 'middle bracket' in the school. So, they pushed the higher achievers, and they pushed the lower achievers. People in the middle, like [Elsa], just went through the net, basically."

[When she first came to the school]

"[S]he was very timid. Felt a bit insecure with herself in a lot of things. When she came here, she would try and cling to a member of staff. She'd always want to be near you, or know that one of you was around. We've encouraged her to go off with her friends and play ... she's done it absolutely brilliantly." "It's taken till about two or three months ago that she started, like, speaking in class discussions or assemblies or anything. You'd ask her in circle time to talk, and it used to be like [imitates Elsa shrugging her shoulders]. So, she has come a long, long way."

There were challenges for Elsa to participate in mainstream PE lessons, because of physical health issues. The comments here relate to swimming, which is now Elsa's favourite lesson:

"The first pool session, she just cried, and stamped her feet on the floor, laid on her belly stamping because she didn't want to go in the water. Now she's underwater, and ... It is amazing what it's done for her, really, when you look back." "she's off swimming, she's getting under the water, doing 'sinkers', and it's taken that time just to spend with her, and give her the confidence. We've just built on that, really, with [Elsa], we've really tried to build her confidence and give her ... that little bit of power, I think. To empower her."

[How Elsa has changed]

> "She seems to have really come out of her shell. You can laugh and joke with her now, you can have that little bit of banter, and she can actually give it back, as well! She's got that really wicked sense of humour, you know, a dry sense of humour! She's really good. She will come out with some one-liners, and she'll have us all in hysterics!"

4.8.2 'Elsa' Researcher comments

It was mentioned to me during the research that Elsa's brother attended a different special school, specialising in students with autism, and that her parents were seeking an autism assessment for her. Elsa struggled with the interviews, finding the questions challenging and chose not to respond at times (as discussed in Methodology); hence her portrait is short. This is discussed further on page 130. As noted earlier, Elsa did not give consent to look at her Annual Review, and so these data were not collected.

4.9 'Lydya2' Portrait

Lydya2 was a young man of 12 who had transferred to a special primary school before coming to Special Secondary. He had substantial speech difficulties previously, but it is hard to realise this from speaking to him now. While he could not communicate well at his previous schools, his observation skills and memory were evident from the range of details he remembered about them. He was curious about everything including the research process, asking about the interviews and the recorder.

He had enjoyed nursery school. "*All the people in my class were kind*" was the first thing he said about his experience. While he did not know the words to explain it, he still remembered that the nursery had a kind of adventure playground, and communicated this effectively: "*The outside … area was … Like proper right awkward – running, hiding, climbing …*" even though he did not remember ever going on it.

Thinking of his first primary school, Lydya2 said: "*They couldn't handle me at all*." He added it had been "*a little boring*" there. "*The food … wa'n't[18] real nice*" and the seats had been uncomfortable: "*we used to sit on benches, in rows … should be better*." There also seemed to be several different playtimes, which he had felt "*was silly*." Lydya2 also remembered "*The head … master … used to go to 'im a lot.*" When asked why, he continued: "*I did one-to-one. With him. When I was starting*." Describing this head master, Lydya2 spoke fondly, reporting he was: "*Not half bad. He was real good*." Asked if he had many friends at this school, Lydya2 said quietly "*I never used – never had a friend there*" with a look of sadness. Later, when I asked him if he could think of a time when he felt left out at school, this is the time he recalled.

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[18] Wasn't

Lydya2 had attended another school after this. He could not explain where he went or why, but just that he went from his Primary and returned there afterwards. "*I went there only five days*." He knew it was not a Primary or a Secondary, but something different. He remembered going there in a car, but not with his dad or mum, but someone else.

> *All the people were actually mean. To the teacher. Know when you say 'F off, I'm not doing that work' … fighting tons an' that. … punching and kicking.*

Talking about the move to a special primary, Lydya2 remembered how they got to the building and what his new school was like inside, but did not know how he came to attend a special school. Thinking back later, he said he did not know who made the decision for him to change schools. He did remember that first he "*got a book*" with teachers in it, and then he had gone for a visit with his mum before he started at the school. Asked how different his new school was from his previous primary school, he felt it was a "*little different, like. Say 50/50 different.*" The playground had been the same, but: "*Stuff like I never did PE. Now I do … We do swimming now. I never used to do swimming.*"

Speaking about the school he attends now, Special Secondary, Lydya2 said it was: "*Real good. I love it.*"   Comparing it to his experience at a special primary, he said it was a "*proper change.*" This included "*loads of friends.*" He said there were "*fun activities,*" including "*painting … PE … swimming … play at lunch … iPads*" as well as a PlayStation, although "*you only get, like, 10 minutes [each]!*" Thinking about a time he felt part of school activities, Lydya2 gave the example of a whole day football tournament from Special Secondary he attends every few months with several classmates: "*in the morning, it's training … And in afternoon it's matches, all different matches.*" He noted later that this is an event for many different schools, with "*about 40 children*" attending, and "*about 10 football fields.*"

Lydya2 seemed to try very hard and paid attention in class. His observation skills made this difficult, as he was sometimes distracted by things happening outside the room. He seemed so excited about work that he sometimes started before he had understood the instructions. He felt things very deeply, getting upset when things did not go well or there were misunderstandings with other students. Lydya2 liked to help others, which sometimes seemed to cause him problems. In one session, the teacher had held a competition to find the most shapes in the classroom. Every time Lydya2 found a new shape, he went to see his friends and share this information. When the competition ended, he had not won and several people had higher scores than him, which had upset him. One example of Lydya2's experiences in the classroom was boys showing off to girls, to impress them. In the cartoon he drew, he used the Hulk to play this role: "*It's Hulk, showing his muscles …   To a girl.*" This sort of thing happened "*Maybe like first day we come back. From the … holidays. Or … out a day … off sick*."

In lessons, he kept an eye on his girlfriend, who had physical health difficulties and was often having a bad day with these. He showed his concern for her in a variety of ways. He smiled at her and tried to make jokes to make her smile. He would also go over to stand by her or just stroke her arm, trying to make her feel better. They had known each other for five years and he stated that he admired the way she was "*happy all the time*." During the research, he asked her to marry him, bringing an engagement ring into school.

Discussing education in general, Lydya2 said that you "*need to learn … To go to college*." When asked what it was important to learn, he said "*anything*." If he was not at school, he thinks he would not learn, and "*End up be bored, every day*!" Lydya2 did not know yet what he wanted to do when he left school, but thought he might go to college: "*I don't know. Wherever my girlfriend [is] going*."

4.9.1 'Lydya2' Supporting information – previous school

Name: Lydya2
Key topics highlighted by the previous school   -   support level had been Band 3 (increased to Band 2) [previous surgical intervention] and a history of hearing difficulties. He has severe delay in his use of language, a moderate delay in his understanding of language and social communication and interaction difficulties … also has a developmental delay and presents challenging behaviour on a daily basis.
•   **Issues relating to working alone** He finds it very difficult to concentrate and does not always contribute appropriately. He has very limited concentration. He does not cope well if his routine is changed.
•   **Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA** Despite the support and extra resources we make to differentiate tasks, the Key Stage 2 curriculum does not meet [L]'s needs and he is finding the structure and routine of the day very difficult … finds this increasingly difficult and frustrating and consequently his behaviour has become a major concern. The Key Stage two curriculum and structure of lessons does not meet [L]'s needs. He becomes very tired in an afternoon and cannot cope with the mainstream school timetable Lydya2 … can be a happy friendly boy. His moods and response to different adults and task continues to be erratic. [D]ue to [his] poor attention and listening skills instructions often need to be repeated. His use of language is hard to assess due to his low speech intelligibility. This causes [him] frustration and distress when others cannot understand him. [Lydya2] can take part in PE lessons but his behaviour lets him down. This is often when the requirement and level of the activity is beyond his development stage of understanding. Therefore, he sometimes has to work one to one with his support assistant so it can be catered to suit his needs. He tends to chase around the hall or playground with no regard for his or anyone else's safety. He likes to have his own agenda. If [he] does not have his own personal equipment he is reluctant to participate and is often unwilling to share with a partner or in a small group.

- **Issues relating to working/socialising with peers**

[He] can be very disruptive and violent towards both adults and his peers, swearing, kicking, punching and spitting at people and over equipment

[H]e is often withdrawn from the classroom environment if he is being disruptive or violent towards others. Recently he has had to be separated from other children when walking up or down the stairs as he cannot be trusted to keep his hands to himself. On a few occasions, he has shown that he is beginning to deal with the consequences of his actions but this is not sustained.

[He] is able to ask simple questions to obtain information but does not respond well to others when working in a small group with appropriate behaviour. He does not like to share his ideas and becomes angry or upset when someone has the same ideas as him … he requires constant prompts to remain focused and take turns with adults and peers. He does not always cooperate appropriately

- **Other issues**

All persons present at the meeting feel that [his] needs will be best met when he transfers to [Special primary] in September

[Lydya2] has spent time at the seclusion unit … Last year [he] had five days fixed term exclusion and a half day fixed term exclusion. Various reward systems have been tried.

4.9.2 'Lydya2' Supporting information – Special Secondary

"I went to his annual review in his year 6 at his primary school, as part of his transition. And the paperwork about [Lydya2] ... portrays a different little boy to the little boy we have here. When I went to the school, to the meeting, I wasn't allowed to meet him. I met his mum, and I met his brother and sister, but I wasn't allowed to meet [Lydya2], he was ... well, they didn't say where he was, but I guess he was in crisis somewhere."

"When he came, a typical day for [Lydya2] was that he would come in without most of what he needed for school – he probably wouldn't have his coat on, wouldn't have his bag, wouldn't have his PE kit, wouldn't have anything. Would just come in, raging about something that had happened on the bus, or at home, would immediately go under the table, under his chair, and begin to either throw pencils, throw scissors, little things, just not engaging with his work but being generally disruptive. In a very significant way - it wasn't low-level stuff; it was high level stuff. Deliberately damaging other people's work, throwing things round the room. And it took a long time, in that first term, to build a relationship with him whereby he came to understand that a) we wouldn't accept that, but b) we'd still love him and nurture him."

"Playground was very stressful for him; he didn't know how to interact socially with the other children. And was often in confrontation with other children about something or nothing, really. And that was typical of [Lydya2] in that first term. By the end of the second term, we had him singing in the choir, even though he could barely speak. We identified in that second term that he should have been having Speech and Language Therapy all along, but his paperwork hadn't arrived. He also hadn't been having it in his Primary setting, even though there was a program written for him. So, his speech at that time was largely unintelligible."

This lack of development with his verbal skills meant that a planned operation had been postponed, as he had not made enough progress to make the operation worthwhile.

"He was speaking, but it was unintelligible, most of it, and that was the great source of his frustration. So, we started in the middle of that term, we managed to get his speech and language program, which we then delivered on a daily basis. The Teaching Assistant at that time worked with him, and I worked with him, on a daily basis for about 10 or 15 minutes a time, often twice a day, using his speech and language programme. And by the Easter, they were talking about the progress being so good that he was going to have the surgery."

[Further improvements]

"Although he still had a behaviour management programme, it was very much shortened. The opportunities for crisis were really reduced, he hardly had any. We're talking about several a day when he first started. Several a morning – a lesson, even! Down to maybe one or two a week. And generally, with a good cause. His engagement with the other children was superb by this point, he was playing in a normal way with them, able to communicate socially with them, because his speech had improved such a lot. And his learning was coming along in leaps and bounds. The progress he made when he first came, it was difficult to get an accurate assessment of him. By the start of his second year here, he was filling in so many gaps that he'd got in his foundations, you know, his basic level of attainment was lower than it should have been, really. Because of his communication difficulties, he'd not accessed learning. Because of his behaviour, that had been a barrier to learning. Once the communication and the behaviour improved, he just started to go on this upward trajectory. And by the time he came … into [teacher's] class last year, he went from being what would have been a middle ability class, into one of our high ability groups, and has gone onward and upward from then."

4.9.3 'Lydya2' Researcher comments

More information was available for Lydya2 from both Special Secondary and his mainstream primary than for other students, and therefore more has been reproduced here. The Supporting information here from his previous (p.185) and current (p.187) schools came partly from the Headteachers of both schools, who had spent time getting to know him and understanding the challenges he faced. The Special Secondary headteacher had previously worked at the Special Primary he attended, and therefore had been present during his transfer process; meaning a more complete picture could be gained.

Having explored here the students' individual experiences and supporting information from their current and former teachers, the next chapter will present the analysis of group themes, including data which come from triangulating these data with each other and across research interventions. These group themes emerged from process of establishing themes and exploring common experiences as detailed in the Methodology chapter (p.121).

Chapter 5 Analysis of disabled students' experiences in schools

In this chapter, I move from individual experiences to common themes. The significance of these students' experiences in mainstream and special educational settings are discussed here, including nursery, primary and secondary schools. Data from student and teacher interviews, classroom observations and Annual Reviews from previous schools were triangulated to better understand students' experiences of education. These data were used to answer the research questions, with particular attention paid to issues mentioned by several students. The first two research questions produced the same categories of data and are covered together.

- What barriers to inclusion have been experienced by disabled students in schools?

- What factors have influenced disabled students' experiences of inclusion?

Responses to these research questions were grouped by "presence, participation and achievement" (Ainscow 2005:119). Most school experiences shared by students focused on interpersonal interaction with classmates, friends, peers, teaching assistants and teachers; relating to participation, with sections on participation therefore longer than presence or achievement. While some achievement experiences were also social, involving TAs; achievement in mainstream settings was problematic for these students due to normative standards present within the standards agenda and National Curriculum (and assessment by normative standards (Lloyd, 2008; Douglas et al., 2016) inappropriate for students labelled with severe learning disability (Aspis, 1998)). While much data clearly indicated barriers or factors, a few issues were described positively and negatively by different students. This discrepancy seemed to infer the presence of student voice, so these data are analysed with the final research question, which is:

- In what ways have disabled students used their 'voice' in school?

The data which emerged from this research question did not align with the previous categories, and so this question was analysed separately.

5.1 Research question 1: What barriers to inclusion have been experienced by disabled students in school?

The students here all shared a common label of severe learning disability (categorised as cognition and learning educational needs), but also had other labels like speech and language differences, autism (p.138) and developmental delay (p.163). One participant here (p.140) had no special educational needs assessment in mainstream, despite the significant impact of their differences on their mainstream school experience (p.145).

The strongest barriers to inclusion experienced by students were regulatory. In terms of the typologies of barrier explored in the literature (p.34), regulatory barriers overlap with but do not exactly match those identified; due to the different areas encompassed by this concept. In addition to curriculum and assessment (as acknowledged by Inclusion International, 2009) these barriers seemed embedded within school funding and financial incentives (or penalties) for teachers (consequently producing negative teacher attitudes to these students). These might be construed as material barriers (Arthur & Zarb, 1995) but these typically describe a lack of personal resources impeding an individual's access to social goods (such as education) rather than strategic decisions around the funding of these. The best fit for these students' experience is the grouping of attitudinal, environmental and organisational barriers (Rieser, 2008b), although environmental barriers were more complex.

Different barriers were experienced by students in relation to participation and achievement. There were however no unique barriers to **Presence** distinct from those to participation or achievement. On the contrary, a lack of student presence appeared to result from students' responses to their experience of barriers to participation or achievement, leading to disciplinary exclusion and/or transfer to special education as indicated in Figure 12 (p.193).

Barriers to **Participation** (Figure 14 p.201) affected students' social and educational

engagement in school. Social barriers arose from peer social experiences, including bullying.

Affective barriers resulted from students' emotional response to school or wider experiences.

Attitudinal barriers indicated underlying discourses in teachers' understanding of (and

responses to) student behaviour (Harwood & McMahon, 2014). Barriers to **Achievement**

(Figure 15 p.212) related to students' engagement with classwork and assessments.

Regulatory barriers (in mainstream settings only) emerged from the National Curriculum and

Standards Agenda regulating the content and pace of classwork and assessment. Classroom

barriers (in mainstream and special education) indicated classroom experiences subject to

teachers' influence. Internalised barriers prompted individual disengagement, following

Mason's idea of "internalized oppression" (Mason, 1990).

5.1.1 Barriers to presence in mainstream and special educational settings

Barriers to disabled students' presence in mainstream education might have been expected

from guidance redirecting them to special education (UPIAS, 1974) or from the physical

environment (featuring in all the typologies of barriers p.34) as experienced by students who

use wheelchairs (Davies & Contact a Family, 2008 in Wales; Ackah-Jnr & Danso, 2019 in

Ghana); but this was not the case here. As with most disabled students in England now

(Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001) it was anticipated these students would

attend mainstream settings. The physical environment in English schools did not present

impenetrable barriers for these students labelled with SLD (none of whom were wheelchair

users), mirroring findings with disabled students in Scotland (Woolfson et al., 2007); but did

impact on participation (see p.208). Three students reported having time off school for

operations and/or recovery time (Transcripts: Bella, Lydya2, Elsa). School work had not been

provided for planned absences, confirming similar experiences of autistic students absent from

school (Cook et al., 2018) and contrasting with a study of education provision during hospital

stays in England (Seymour, 2004), such provision was not experienced by these students.

Figure 12: Barriers to Presence
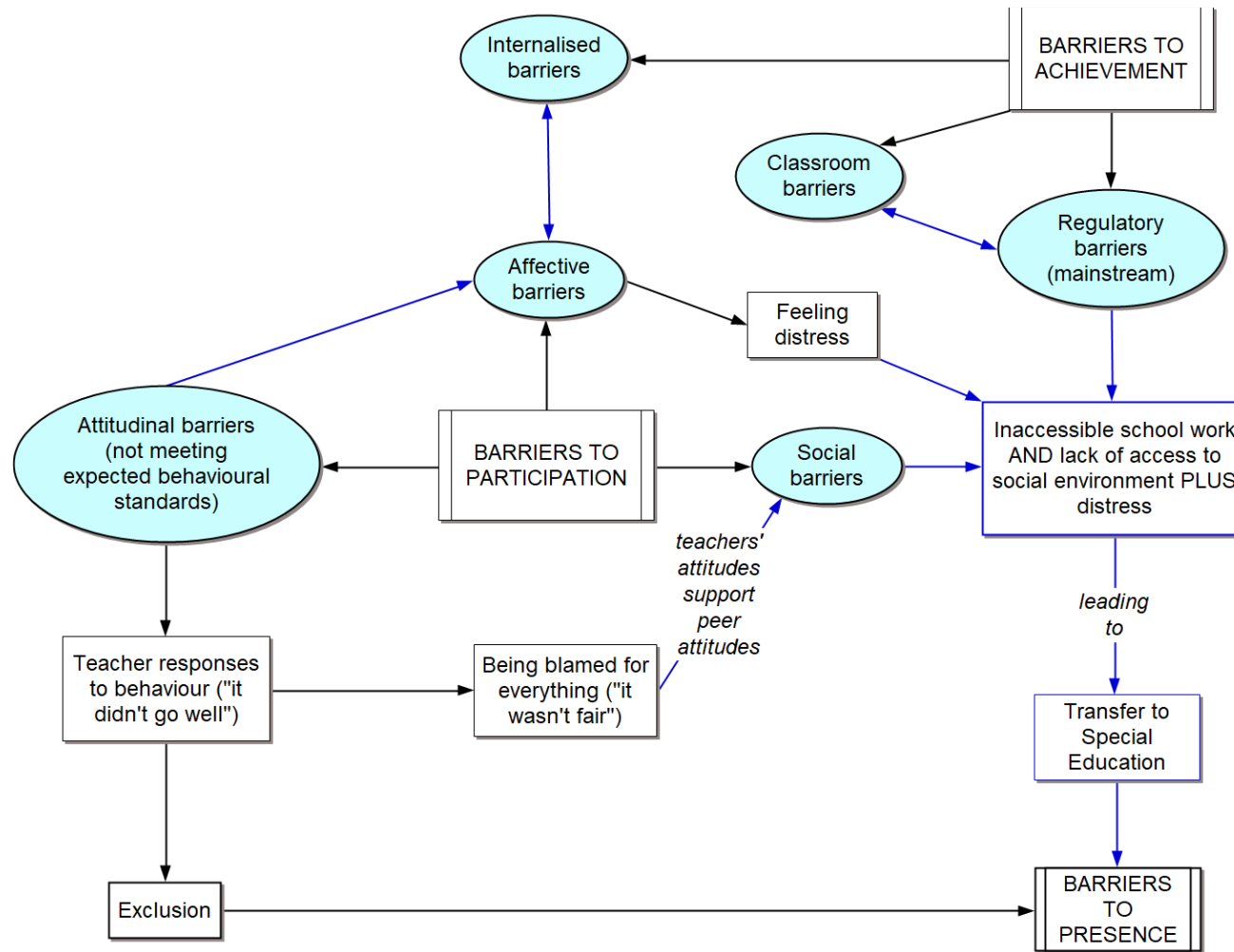
Due to their movement between mainstream and special educational settings, two different types of presence are explored here. Firstly, students' experiences of disciplinary exclusion from mainstream (and special) educational settings are explored. Secondly, transfer from mainstream schools to special educational settings will be examined. The largest barrier to disabled students' presence at school seemed to be disciplinary exclusion (in line with Booth, 1996; Allan, 2006; subject to slight qualification by Hatton, 2018), affecting four of the eight students. This proportion is in line with assertions that students with SEN statements are more prone to exclusion than their peers (Ambitious about Autism, 2014) with the added dimension here of gender (as also noted by Jull, 2008). All the students here who experienced disciplinary exclusion were male (Bob p.139; Lydya2 p.183; Thomas the Tank Engine p.171; Eminem p.160), often in relation to physical altercations. While Hatton's evidence suggests that students labelled with SLD are less likely to be excluded than non-disabled peers they are more likely to physically assault adults (Hatton, 2018), as experienced here (Lydya2 p.186).

During students' recollections of the process to exclusion, an underlying pattern seemed to emerge (Figure 12 p.193). Normative standards present in the design of educational content and targets (Regulatory barriers p.213) made mainstream classroom learning inaccessible to these students (as already observed (Alexander, 2010)), presenting barriers to achievement. The mismatch between their skills and abilities and those required in the mainstream classroom led to challenges, with students (including some who had not been excluded) reporting being in trouble with teachers frequently. An initial trigger for this was thoughtfully articulated by one student, noting his previous inability to manage his own emotions and behaviour (James p.154) to the extent the mainstream classroom required. These students seemed to become perceived by mainstream teachers as problematic in themselves, developing into attitudinal barriers (discussed on p.206) with several students asserting they were treated unfairly (Transcripts: Bob, Bella, James); consistent with these students being

perceived as of lesser value than peers meeting normative standards (Slee, 2019). If we

understand culture to be the "web of meaning" which is constantly being created within a

social group (Geertz, 1993), it is unsurprising that teachers' attitudes might influence peers

within the mainstream school or classroom, supporting the development of social barriers

(p.202). The resultant mainstream culture enabled these students to be bullied by peers

(p.202) or socially excluded (p.204). Peers appeared to take advantage of negative teacher

attitudes by deliberately provoking the disabled student into (re-)actions for which the

disabled student would be held responsible, even resulting in the student's exclusion: *"[t]hat

was the kids and that"* (Bob p.139). The combination of barriers to achievement and to

participation resulted in students becoming distressed (affective barriers), which some

students voiced through challenging behaviour prompting disciplinary exclusion, while others

withdrew (internalised barriers). Their distress or withdrawal led parents to intercede with the

school and/or request a transfer (exemplified here by James p.159, Thomas the Tank Engine

p.172 and Elsa p.180). For other students, social barriers like bullying exacerbated distress until

the situation became untenable (as seen here with Bob p.139, Eminem p.161, Lydya2 p.182).

While students were excluded in special education, the reasons for this did not match the

mainstream pattern. Students were able to access learning (without normative standards) in

special educational settings, with Special Secondary teachers being cognisant of the barriers

faced (e.g., Eminem p.164) and more supportive than mainstream teachers had been (e.g.,

Eminem p.163), taking an active role in bullying prevention and creating a 'safe' space. The

consistent issues between settings were challenging behaviour (although less frequent) and

peer provocation. As discussed later (p.237), students' behaviour had changed significantly

during their time at Special Secondary; but students occasionally lapsed to old patterns of

behaviour (e.g., James p.159) especially when triggered by peers (e.g., Eminem p.162).

Challenging behaviour was a key part of this pattern, as most of the students excluded were noted to express themselves through challenging behaviour (Eminem p.163; Lydya2 p.186; James p.158) or discussed such behaviour in their interviews (James p.154; Thomas the Tank Engine p.171). For one bullied student, this had been the primary focus of his mainstream secondary's Annual Report (Eminem p.163), which listed the strategies they had tried unsuccessfully, escalating to Police involvement. A different student (who had not mentioned being bullied) shared this pattern of escalating aggression. His current head teacher described his previous behaviour, noting "it wasn't low-level stuff, it was high level stuff. Deliberately damaging other people's work, throwing things round the room" (Lydya2 p.187) while the student himself observed that his mainstream primary "*couldn't cope with me at all*" (Lydya2 p.182). Students subject to exclusion did not always discuss peers' attitudes but expressed sadness at social barriers (p.202) such as bullying (Eminem p.161; Bob p.139) or isolation (Lydya2 p.182). This seemed to indicate that these students had been expressing voice through their behaviour, in line with the literature (Jull, 2008; Sellman, 2009). Exclusions experienced by these students (in both and special educational settings) appeared to be for a week or less (Thomas the Tank Engine p.171; Eminem p.160; Lydya2 p.186), as one strand of a behaviour management plan (p.163; p.186). Those students who spoke about being excluded did not report any long-term lack of access to education (in contrast to Harwood, 2010) or any adverse impact. Conversely, one student enjoyed their time excluded (Thomas the Tank Engine p.171) in common with a different student away on sick leave (Elsa p.177), potentially indicating disengagement from their respective mainstream primary settings.

In general, mainstream schools seemed to be extremely reluctant to refer students to special education; despite the student's acknowledged inability to access learning or the distress of the student (Bob p.145, Eminem p.161 and p.163, James p.158). Four students were transferred mid-year due to a crisis (Bob p.139, James p.154, Eminem p.160 and Lydya2 p.182).

Most of the students appeared to have been extremely unhappy in their previous mainstream school; yet unhappiness by itself did not make them seek transfer. For several students, the impact had become extreme; with the strength of these students' reactions appearing indicative of post-traumatic stress. One student described their mainstream secondary school as a "*hellhole*" and the experience of attending as a "*nightmare*" (Bob p.139). A second was unable or unwilling to talk about their feelings about mainstream secondary at all, communicating their distress non-verbally (Eminem p.160). This distress seemed the motivating factor for parents' (usually mothers' (in line with Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Runswick-Cole & Ryan, 2019)) involvement in the transfer process for students. The role played by mainstream schools in the decision to transfer to special education varied, with some schools supporting parents in seeking transfer (Lydya2 p.183 and p.186) while others argued against it (Bob p.145 and James p.158). Without school support, transfers seemed to require significant pressure; such as the intervention of local Councillors (Bob p.140). Even with significant levels of challenging behaviour, one mainstream secondary only recommended a mixed placement (Eminem p.163), indicating the scarcity of special education places.

When asked about their transfer, some students seemed unaware of a choice between settings. Several students were unable to say why they were attending Special Secondary rather than a mainstream school, with one or two seeming puzzled by the question. Female students (Transcripts: Bella, Horrid Henry and Elsa) responded by stating they were disabled, suggesting this explained their transfer to special education by itself; even though Bella had not wanted to leave her mainstream secondary (p.152). This might indicate a reason given to these students to explain their transfer. Only two students were aware of a choice between mainstream and special educational settings at the primary/secondary transfer point (Thomas the Tank Engine p.172 and Horrid Henry p.166). Figure 13 (below p.198) gives details of transfer points and an approximate transfer age to assist non-UK readers.

Figure 13: Transfer point to special education for each student

Student	Transfer Age (approx.)	Special education transfer	Previous schools
Bob	12	After 1 year of mainstream secondary	2 nurseries (expelled), mainstream primary, mainstream secondary
Bella	16	At the sixth form transition	nursery, mainstream primary, mainstream secondary
James	10	Mixed placement (special and mainstream) for a year of primary. Transfer to Special Secondary at primary/secondary transition	mainstream primary, mixed mainstream/special primary placement
Eminem	13	After 1 ½ years of mainstream secondary	mainstream primary, mainstream secondary
Horrid Henry	11	Primary/secondary transition	mainstream primary
Thomas the Tank Engine	11	Primary/secondary transition	(pre-school playgroup), 3 mainstream primaries
Elsa	11	Primary/secondary transition	mainstream primary
Lydya2	10	Transfer to a special primary after a seclusion unit placement	nursery, mainstream primary, seclusion unit, special primary

Students presented their own analyses of why they had changed schools, with several

overlapping reasons given by students or emerging from teacher and TA interviews. The most

common issues cited by students were that they could not access learning and/or had been

bullied (to be covered on p.202). Some students seemed not to have been offered the option

to attend a special school and struggled to gain a special education place. The views of the

mainstream school differed, with some students having the support of their schools for the

move (Lydya2 p.186) while other mainstream schools seemed to be against the transfer,

requiring intervention from parents (James (mainstream primary) p.158, Bob (mainstream secondary) p.145). For Bob and his parents, moving to special education had involved a political fight, with the support of their local councillors. The needs of students, and how these were perceived by the mainstream school, were influential in this decision.

Three students' mothers had been concerned the school was not meeting their needs (James p.158; Thomas the Tank Engine p.172; Elsa p.180). One was unable to remember anything about his mainstream primary other than his unhappiness there (James p.154). The Annual Review indicated his disengagement from both learning and social activities there; although this school had maintained they were able to provide for him (James p.158). The second student's mother had been deeply involved in his schooling to the extent of taking a job at the school itself; and had twice previously moved him to a different mainstream primary (p.170). The third student, while asserting she had "*loads*" of friends at mainstream primary, was observed by her mother to have become socially isolated, a change in behaviour of which the student was unaware (Elsa p.177 and p.180). She reported struggling with lessons but had no classroom support (p.180). The parents of all three students elected for their child to move to special education at the primary/secondary transition point (Figure 13 p.198).

The needs of one student had not been considered significant enough to merit an SEN assessment before his application to transfer, as he "*had to have a test*" to get into Special Secondary (Bob p.140). His Annual Review had highlighted physical and sensory differences (p.145); so perhaps the severity of his learning disability had not been recognised. This underestimation of need would seem to have been the case with Bella, too. Her Annual Review underlines this situation, stating that her social skills "can mask her very real deficits" leading teachers "to over-estimate her cognitive functioning" (p.152), quotes taken from a psychologist's report in her mainstream secondary Annual Review. It is possible that a gap

between actual and perceived needs might apply to other students, such as Elsa, who did not have mainstream TA support. Once Bella's needs had been reassessed, the school made the decision to move her to special education against her wishes and those of her mother. This re/assessment for Bob and Bella leading to a special educational place might support Shaw's argument that students labelled with SLD and challenging behaviour have been generally directed to special education (Shaw, 2017). The Annual Review confirmed that neither Bella nor her mother had wanted her to move schools; reminiscent of Lewin's example in this respect (Lewin, 2014), Bella's mother had felt they were not providing sufficient safeguarding (Bella p.152). While the term covers a range of serious issues, the material on boyfriends in her Portrait (Bella p.151), supporting evidence from a Special Secondary teacher (p.153) and my own notes (p.153) indicate this related to intimate relationships. Although the transfer was framed as an inability to offer appropriate courses, ignoring previous attendance at that school during years 7 – 11 and achieving qualifications (p.152), the request for additional support seemed the only change to her situation. This would fit with evidence that support outside lessons is believed to require Special Educational settings (Lindsay et al., 2005).

5.1.2 Barriers to participation

As noted earlier, barriers to participation comprised of Social Barriers presented by peers including bullying and social exclusion or marginalisation; Attitudinal Barriers presented by teachers (and reflected in the design of the built environment); and Affective Barriers emerging from within the student in response to their experience of Attitudinal and Social barriers. Figure 14: Barriers to Participation (p.201) sets out the barrier nodes.

Figure 14: Barriers to Participation
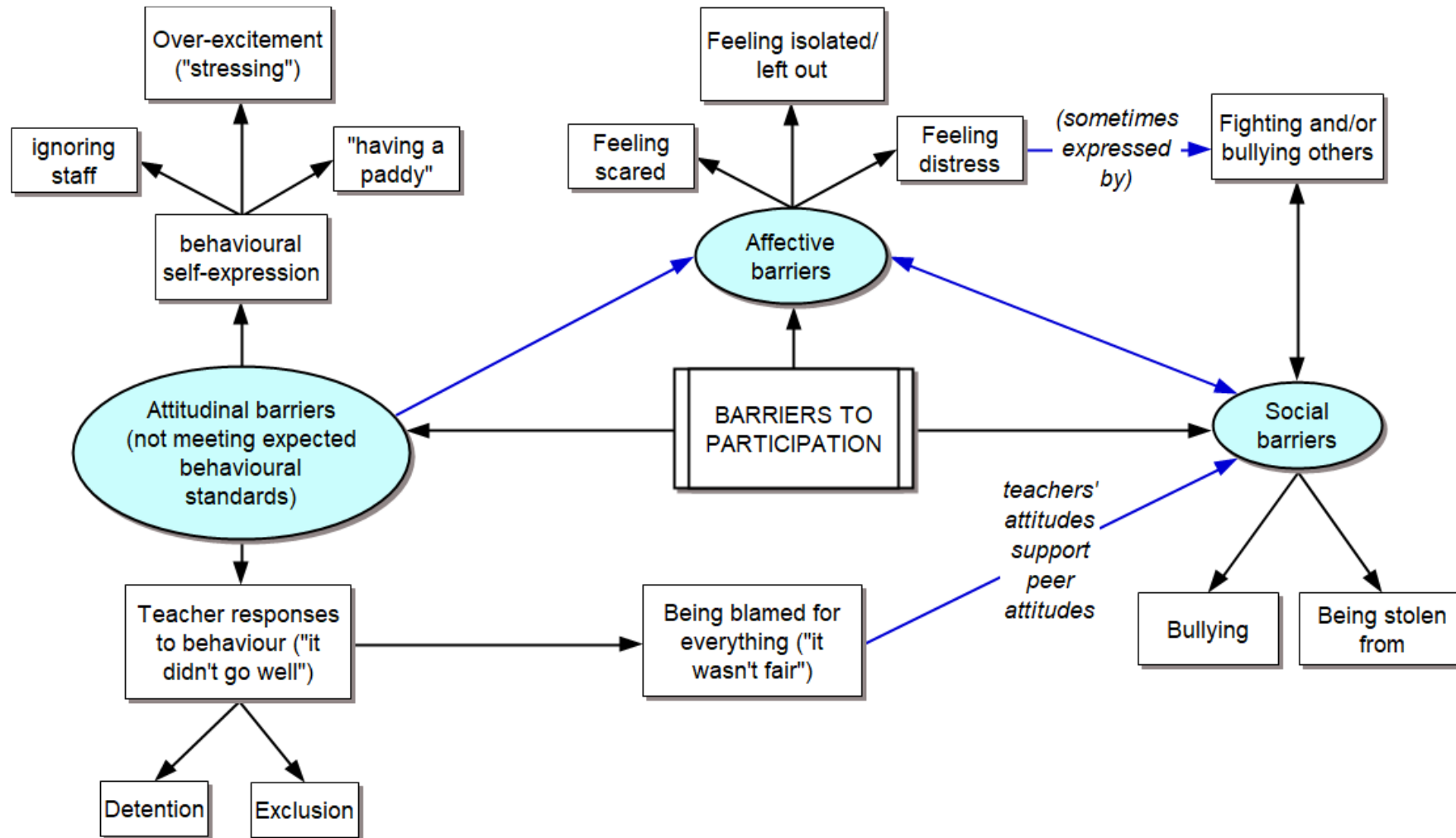
The social environment seemed significantly problematic for these students, in line with the idea that it represents a "hidden social curriculum" in schools (Ytterhus, 2012). These students faced difficulty in social interaction; through behaviours and understandings which were not consistent with normative developmental standards and expectations (as confirmed on p.145) and speech and communication difficulties. These contributed to students' experiences of being bullied and of feeling excluded from peer social culture. This led some students to withdraw from social interaction with peers (Elsa p.180; Bob p.139) while others presented with challenging behaviour which could present a significant risk to others (Thomas the Tank Engine p.171; Lydya2 p.186; Eminem p.163). During my observations, students had minor disagreements with friends, over stationery (Elsa Observation 3b), in relation to a competition (Eminem Observation 2b) and over a joke which had fallen flat (Thomas Observation 3). While the interactions I observed did not appear particularly serious or distressing for the students involved, one significant physical altercation between James and his best friend took place before my visit one day. This was viewed by staff to have been triggered by such a misunderstanding (although the students viewed this differently). This demonstrates how what might appear to adults as minor disagreements have a profound impact on students and their peer networks, as well as on students' learning.

The largest category of negative experiences related to bullying, mentioned by five of the eight students. Mainstream schools had made some attempts to manage this, but some students continued to be bullied. One mainstream primary could not prevent a student from being bullied outside school (Horrid Henry p.165). As with other students (e.g., Bob p.145), the bullying which had been a substantial part of her mainstream primary experience was not mentioned in her Annual Review (p.168). Only one Annual Review acknowledged the student was being bullied (Eminem p.163), which could indicate a lack of awareness of the vulnerability of these students or an unwillingness to address the issue. One Special Secondary teacher

confirmed that many students who came to Special Secondary from a mainstream setting had struggled socially in mainstream schools because of their differences (as noted in Thomas the Tank Engine p.176). Following the social model, the prevalence of bullying seen here could indicate a culture of disability hate crime in some mainstream schools. Three students seemed to have left mainstream education in relation to bullying which their mainstream school had been unable to resolve (Bob p.139 Eminem p.161, Horrid Henry p.194). The two students who had left mainstream secondary school after a year or so mentioned the level of work there had presented difficulties; but their own motivation for the transfer had related to bullying (Bob p.139; Eminem p.161). Another student initially asserted she had made the decision not to attend her local mainstream secondary herself, presenting the decision as a positive choice (Horrid Henry p.166); but later it became clear that bullying had also been a factor in her transfer (p.167). In some cases, this bullying seemed to involve the victim being manipulated by others into challenging behaviour (discussed on page 194) that would result in disciplinary action (Bob p.139 , James p.156, Eminem p.163). One student acknowledged that he had been influenced by a peer and now regretted some of his previous actions (James Transcripts and p.154). This message was echoed by another student's previous school:

> [h]e has no social awareness or true real friends and is subject to bullying by his peers e.g., name calling. His peers also encourage him to do things they consider amusing that get him into trouble, which [Eminem] seems to accept (Eminem p.163).

Eminem's behaviour, taking increasingly extreme actions in order to be accepted by some peers (Eminem p.163), might support notes about disabled young people becoming bullies themselves. This student's reflections on this time (p.161) however indicated his distress at being bullied; contrasting with the school's mixed message in identifying his peers' bullying behaviour, but describing them as peers rather than as bullies. Peer manipulation was expressed in some narratives as confusion over whether former peers were friends:

> *"they're most probably not my friends anymore. But they most probably stare at me and be mean to me. Don't know why."* (Thomas the Tank Engine p.170)

While peer attitudes were not discussed, I suspect that these disabled students had become used to this treatment by their school peers (as a former teacher had instructed Bob to, p.140) and therefore it was not noteworthy to the students; except in relation to their current school where teachers had routinely addressed such behaviour. Bullying also extended to the local community, with two students having been bullied in their local community as well as at school (Bob p.142, Horrid Henry p.192). For Horrid Henry, this bullying resulted not only in her special educational transfer but also in her family moving home (Horrid Henry p.165). These experiences of community bullying of young people labelled with learning disabilities are consistent with national research (MENCAP, 2008). The experience of bullying within and outside schools was mirrored in students' experiences of social exclusion.

For several students, social marginalisation had been a painful and distressing experience in mainstream schools and experienced by some in other areas. Outside of school, several students commented that they had little to do (Transcripts: Lydya2, Bella, Bob), in keeping with other research (Connors & Stalker, 2003). As with Connors and Stalker's special school participants, students here tended not to have local friends (Connors & Stalker, 2003). Bob, who had been bullied at a local youth club, attended after school activities as his only social outlet (Bob p.142). This wider experience of community discrimination is held to be ableism (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013). Participants with slightly older or younger non-disabled siblings gained an extended social network, allowing them to join group activities such as cinema trips (James p.157, Eminem p.162) or computer games (Lydya2 transcript). Where another sibling or family member was disabled, students' social world was further restricted. This affected Bob (p.146), Bella, Eminem and Elsa (p.181); Bella observing they no longer even went shopping as a family (Transcripts: Bella, Eminem) and only two students had family visit their home regularly (Bella's grandmother and Thomas' uncle), further limiting social contact. This external social isolation highlights the importance of the school social environment.

Most of the students said that they had felt left out at mainstream school. In the most extreme cases, some seemed completely isolated at mainstream primary; one commenting that he had no friends at all (Lydya2 p.182), another grimacing when asked if he had felt included (James' transcript). Those with friends still experienced being left out at times (for example, pair-working in lessons Bella p.147). The experience of social isolation in school matches those of Ytterhus' students and peripheral students in Allan's study (Allan, 1999a; Ytterhus, 2012). Concerns about others' lack of engagement with mainstream peers were expressed by teachers or parents (Elsa p.180 and Thomas the Tank Engine p.175) although these students had not felt excluded; conflicting with the perspectives of the adults around them and mirroring findings with some disabled students (Messiou, 2003). This might reflect autistic students having a different view of what constituted a friend (Holt et al., 2017). Elsa, viewed as isolated at her previous school (p.180) listed all her former classmates as friends, while the TAs in Bob's current setting took the place of friends in anecdotes (p.140); evocative of students using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) considering everyone in a setting to which they belonged as a friend (Østvik et al., 2018) (although these students did not use AAC). One other student's Annual Review had noted she would benefit from support for social interaction (Horrid Henry p.168), potentially reflecting students' self-reported difficulty making friends without support (Shogren et al., 2015), but she herself reported she had been happy there (except for the bullying) (Horrid Henry p.165). One student was receiving autism support (Figure 11: Participant demographics p.138) and a second was awaiting an autism assessment (Elsa p.181, mentioned informally). Since medical information was not sought and no students chose to self-disclose, other students may have been autistic.

Three students had been labelled with a "delay of speech"), having previously experienced speech and communication differences which led to difficulty in being understood (Bob p.145; Horrid Henry p. 165, p.168; Lydya2 p.185, p.187). While not the primary focus of study, these

students represent three of the eight participants here. At entry to Special Secondary Lydya2's speech had been "largely unintelligible" (p.187) as unlike Horrid Henry he had not received speech and language support at mainstream primary.   While worrying, this is in line with the noted difficulty gaining access to speech therapy (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2001) and might reflect behaviourally voiced distress being seen as a complicating factor which limits access to speech therapy (Lindsay et al., 2005), and/or indicate a focus on functional skills (in this case, behaviour) blocking access to the curriculum (Zascavage & Keefe, 2007). While all students here shared a label of SLD, two of these three students were not labelled as facing "cognition and learning" barriers (Figure 11 p.138) which would seem to be central to an SLD label. Each of these students faced social challenges from bullying or marginalisation in mainstream, noted with both SLD (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; MENCAP, 2008) and speech and language difference labels (Lindsay et al., 2005) but might indicate insufficient cultural action by mainstream teachers to prevent this (Faris & Felmlee, 2014) due to concerns about the time required for communication (Marshall et al., 2002; Bornman & Donohue, 2013).

Attitudinal barriers to participation were evident, with some students sharing that they were always in trouble in mainstream schools. While it might be easy to suggest this was only their perspective, the material present in the Annual Reviews did not dispel this notion, giving a mixed and contradictory view of the students at times. For example, two students reported being in extreme distress at their previous mainstream schools, facing barriers to learning and socially isolated (Eminem p.161, Lydya2 p.182), while the Annual Reviews conversely focused on challenging behaviour escalating to a point where they had exhausted available options (Eminem p.163 and Lydya2 p.182, p.186). Several students expressed unfairness at being subject to teacher discipline, often as a result of the actions of others. Students noted when their social group would chat in lessons they were the only one punished (Bella p.148); they were always blamed for things other students had done (James p.154); and that their peers

had sought to get them into trouble (Bob p.139). One mainstream secondary Annual Review

indicated they were aware that one student was being manipulated by peers into breaking

rules, but gave no indication of action taken against his peers although the student had been

reported to the Police (Eminem p.163). Teachers might not always be aware who has

triggered problematic situations, particularly where a student's vulnerability is being used

against them. Even with minor rule breaking, like talking in class, the disabled student seemed

to be the only one punished (Bella p.148) - one student noting *"they've got their favourites –*

Teacher's Pets" (Bob p.139). One way in which this was experienced was as the teacher

blaming the student for anything that went wrong in class even when they had not been

involved (for example "*[w]hen summat's 'appened … it would always be me. … who's done it"*

James p.154). These words mirror the situation of another student labelled with a learning

difficulty (Cerys) (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013:319). Students reported being blamed by

teachers for classroom events instigated by mainstream peers (e.g., Bob p.139, James p.154,

Bella p.148), and some mainstream teachers being unsympathetic to students' experience of

bullying (e.g., Bob p.140). This fits with observations of the policing of behavioural norms in

classroom/school culture by peers (Allan, 1999a) and teachers' role in providing tacit support

for this socially sanctioned bullying (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). Students did not share any such

anecdotes from their special educational experiences.

While we cannot know exactly what their mainstream teachers thought; we do have access to

some comments from them in their students' Annual Reviews. These were not all written by

the same teacher; in some cases (e.g., p.163 in particular) several different teachers'

handwriting could be seen, and different teachers varied in their perspectives. For example,

one student was portrayed as "a compulsive liar" by one teacher but as "co-operative" by a

different teacher (Eminem p.163). These differing perspectives of the same student reminded

me of findings that a simple change of teacher can lead to students' needs being met in

mainstream, and special education transfer cancelled (Pijl et al., 1999; van der Veen et al., 2010). Another student was described in deficit terms by teachers but more positively by his peers, who reported him as: "[h]elpful", "[s]ometimes kind (especially when he is helped)", "[g]ood at working with others" and "does what he's told" (James p.158) balanced by only two negative comments. In general, the Annual Reviews appeared to reflect the medical model, with a focus on labels and students' inability to meet normative standards. For example, one review contains five medical terms: "significant learning difficulties," "visual perception assessment," "global developmental delay," "delayed speech and language," and uses the word "difficulty" five times (p.145). Mainstream schools reported problems in assessing some students' academic progress due to communication difficulties (Horrid Henry p.168; Lydya2 p.185); which might explain why one student (p.154) was reported to have regressed (James p.158). Another student and his parents were recorded as happy with mainstream secondary, conflicting with both the student's own views and his parents' actions in seeking support for a transfer (Bob p.139). Special Secondary notes both this student's willingness to talk and ability to be direct (Bob p.146); problematising this Annual Review. Given the student and his parents faced literacy challenges (p.146), they could not have read such written comments to disagree.

Attitudinal discrimination was also present in the design of the built environment. Mandatory adjustments to English schools have addressed some barriers for wheelchair users, adding ramps and lifts to settings but access challenges such as hard floors and echoing spaces (Marks, 2013) for students with hearing differences or the lack of braille signage for blind students remained: these depend on school or Local Educational Authority action rather than being prescribed in law. The built environment presented spacial challenges to participation for these students. Corridors and stairs, where disabled students had to pass through small spaces with large numbers of their peers at peak times, seemed to present locational opportunities for conflict and bullying, creating distress and heightening social marginalisation.

Although as noted earlier the physical environment was not a barrier to presence for these students, it could constitute a barrier to participation. One student was reportedly prone to "bump into people" at his previous mainstream secondary (Bob p.145), ascribed by his previous school to his visual difference; two others discussing injuries at school which they were not able to explain (Transcripts: Elsa; Thomas the Tank Engine p.171). The social model perspective taken here argues that it is not the individual but the structure of formal education which presents barriers and that should adapt (Graham, 2008; Hart et al., 2011; Veck, 2012), while access-based educational interventions follow the individual/medical model in being difference-based and aimed at the perceived deficits of an individual (e.g. Banda & Hart, 2010). Physical injuries could have been explained by barriers in the way the school environment had been planned without considering the needs of students with mind/body differences. This might include social barriers such as bullying; poorly designed space or lighting; or organisational barriers such as insufficient time to travel between classes creating bottlenecks at locations like stairwells. Two students here had been in trouble due to interpersonal conflict while using the stairs with peers (Thomas p.170; Lydya2 p.186). The noise generated by "the tight enclosed stairways and echoing corridors" of one such mainstream primary may create sensory barriers (Marks, 2013:33). Another student highlighted the importance of school toilets due to mind/body differences (Bella p.149); another location for improvement.

While bullying is covered elsewhere, having been bullied continued to have an impact on some students in their internalisation of the experience, resulting in affective barriers; with a distress response caused by bullying experiences (p.202) present long after the experience of bullying had (in some cases) ended. The outcome of previous experiences of bullying seemed to have left students insecure and anxious in group settings, any further interpersonal aggression (feared or actual) re-triggering this earlier distress even when they were not involved in such incidents. Two students stated they were sometimes scared in class in Special Secondary,

unable to focus on classwork and fearing other students would hit them (James p.156 and

Horrid Henry p.167 respectively) even when they were not involved in such incidents. One

such example was the only student currently being bullied, noting the sight of someone who

had bullied him several years ago had brought back the experience (James p.156). This

distress caused by such memories could be seen in interviews, with nervous gestures such as

Eminem tapping the table at such moments, or James' tendency to pause becoming more

pronounced. The incident(s) appeared to occupy students' minds for a long time after the

topic had been mentioned. The first time such distress arose, I verbally acknowledged their

distress, and suggested we move onto different experiences. While they agreed with this,

students kept returning to the topic they found upsetting. On these occasions, they did not

add anything new but struggled to discuss any positive experiences: it seemed their memory of

bullying limited the kind of memories they were able to recall. However, four students (Horrid

Henry, Bob, James and Eminem) all used the word "safe" (unprompted) to describe Special

Secondary: three of these had not felt safe at previous mainstream schools. Two students

talked about walking out of class during lessons (James p.154; Eminem p.162). For Eminem

this had been in response to peer insults, getting upset and needing time to calm down, but

such actions had sometimes resulted in punishment (James p.154). I did see a classmate of

one of my students walk out of a class I was observing. She had appeared agitated

beforehand, which might confirm this as a response to distress.

In one of my classroom observations, one student experiencing bullying was distracted from

learning in Mathematics. The bullying made it difficult for him to concentrate, focusing on

what might happen at break time (James p.156) and being told off for not paying attention.

This contrasts with non-disabled students experiencing the classroom as a safe place where

bullying did not happen (Bhatti, 2011). As well as having significant emotional impact (Faris &

Felmlee, 2014; Rose et al., 2016), bullying has been shown to have a detrimental effect on

educational outcomes (Ponzo, 2013; Delprato et al., 2017), which would seem to fit with

James' experiences. Bullying took place in and out of school for these students, with Henry

and her family moving house to get away from bullying (p.165), confirming other reports

(MENCAP, 2008). Bob was also told by teachers at his previous mainstream school he should

"get used to it" (Bob p.140) (as noted in MENCAP, 2008) such attitudes reinforcing bullying as a

social norm (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). Eminem, James and Bob's experiences confirm that:

"[s]ome children with a learning disability have been forced to change schools to escape

bullying" (MENCAP, 2008:9). Although students seemed less aware of peer perceptions of

them, how they were treated in interactions had an impact on their experiences (Bunch &

Valeo, 2004; de Boer et al., 2012). Next, we explore barriers to achievement.

5.1.3   Barriers to achievement

Barriers of achievement faced by these students can be viewed as deriving from what I have

termed regulatory barriers and classroom barriers (Figure 15 p.212). **Regulatory barriers**

derive from government regulation in the form of the National Curriculum and the standards

agenda, requiring mainstream schools to meet uniform educational targets for all students,

regardless of the appropriateness of these targets for students labelled with severe learning

difficulties; resulting in **classroom barriers**. This led to students being "disapplied" by

mainstream primary schools (e.g., p.176) to remove these (low achieving) students from

school results. These barriers were only experienced in mainstream settings, as (at the time of

research) special educational settings operated outside these standards. A further barrier

developed within the students themselves following their classroom experiences, termed

internalised barriers (following Mason's concept of internalized oppression (Mason, 1990)).

Figure 15: Barriers to Achievement
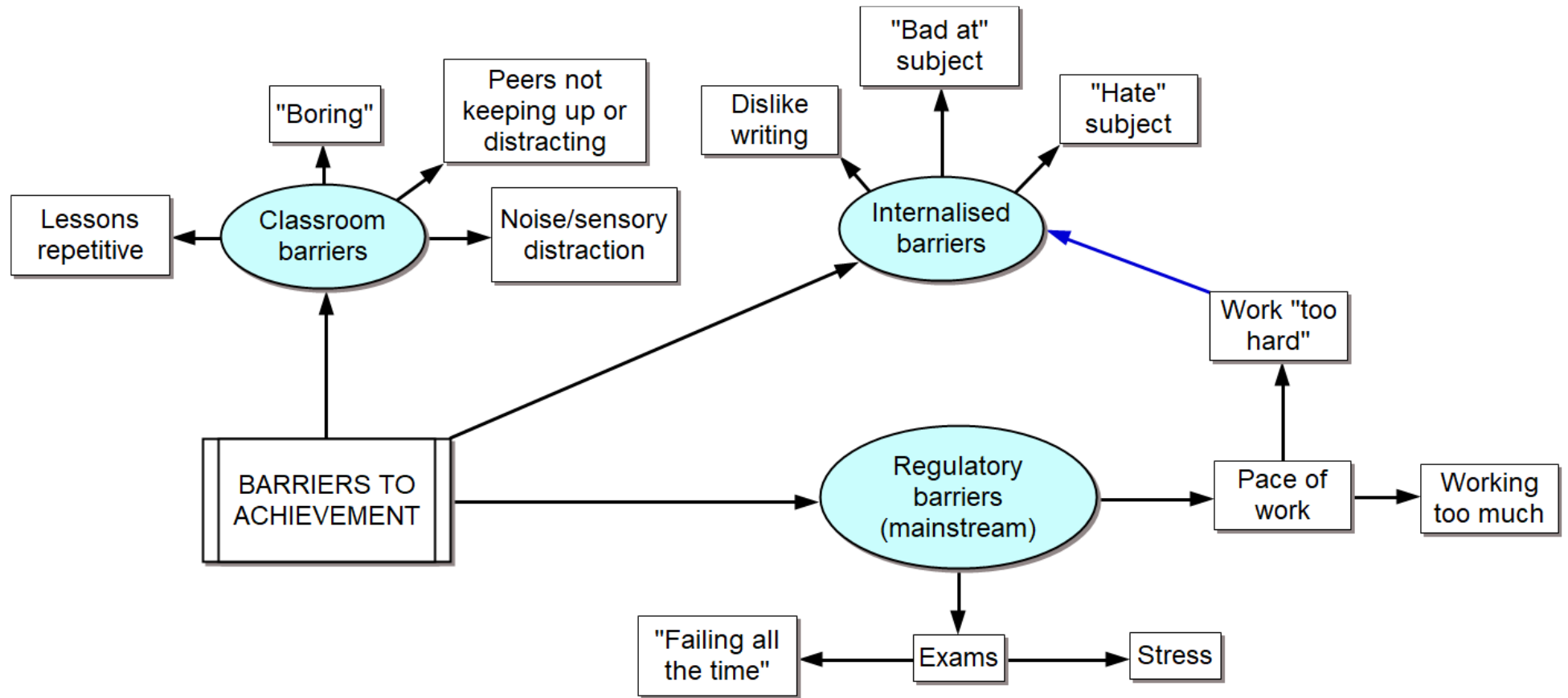
While regulatory barriers have been identified previously by teachers; here these were experienced by disabled students. Most of the students seem to have struggled to access learning at their previous school. The most frequently stated problems with lessons were the pace and level of work (as determined by the standards agenda and the National Curriculum). In mainstream settings, the pace of work was too fast (Elsa p.177) and the work too hard (Eminem p.161). Bella also talked about a cycle of repeatedly working on the same topics (GCSE Mathematics) in order to take the same examinations, then failing and starting the cycle again (p.148). In addition to repeatedly experiencing failure, repeating the same material could be "*boring*." Several students used the word "*boring"* to describe lessons across the board in mainstream school (Portraits: Eminem, Elsa, Lydya2) and for some subjects at Special Secondary (Portraits: Bob, Eminem). The word "boring" might indicate a lack of engagement in an activity or environment for these students; which might be of use in assessing disengagement in other students. While Bella was the only student to mention examinations, she was the only one of these students to have taken GCSE examinations in mainstream school. If other students had been disapplied during mainstream primary school (as Thomas had been p.176) they would not have experienced examinations. While Special Secondary did successfully submit students for assessment via a range of examination bodies, students did not seem to perceive these as parallel achievements (perhaps as they were not GCSE level).

Disabled students also had trouble concentrating; making this barrier more acute. Distractions were a problem for some students (Bella p.150; Lydya2 p.184), tentatively supporting research noting students labelled with SEN have greater difficulty reading and spelling against conversations than non-disabled peers (Dockrell & Shield, 2006). Two students noted the noise at school was problematic (p.174; p.141) in line with research with students labelled with SLD (Whitehurst, 2007) and autistic students (Wood, 2020). This leads us to classroom barriers.

Classroom barriers were produced by the level of students' educational need being underestimated by mainstream schools. The amount of mainstream classroom support could be identified from student interviews, teacher interviews and (in some cases) the Annual Report from their previous school (although this reflected only the most recent arrangements prior to the student's transfer). While these students all fell within the category of Severe Learning Disability, the level of support they received varied significantly. Some students had a choice between mainstream and special educational settings available to them at the primary/secondary transfer, due to their difference, while others had to fight to achieve a special education place. Students without friends (particularly those with communication differences) experienced bullying and social isolation which significantly limited their engagement with learning. All students seemed to share some barriers to achievement; but the significance of these barriers appeared to be lessened by their relationship with a TA.

For two students, a close relationship with their TAs helped them access classroom activity. Their TAs did not just help them access learning but became like family, getting to know and understand their learning process (Thomas the Tank Engine p.173) and visiting outside school (Bella p.147). Another student was recorded to have full-time classroom support (Figure 11 p.138 Lydya2) but had not mentioned one-to-one classroom support in their reflections on school. It was unclear why; but it did not suggest a significant or positive relationship. Elsa seemed to have had no one-to-one teaching assistant support at mainstream primary (p.180). Other schools used alternatives such as nurture groups of smaller classes (Eminem p.163), which may have indicated that the assessed resources were being used in other ways than TA support for these students. Special Secondary, for example, had one or two teaching assistants per class, who worked with several students at times, rather than dedicated one-to-one support (as was commented on by Thomas p.173).

Bella was also subject to within-school segregation (Chatzitheochari et al., 2016:698); deliberately isolated from mainstream secondary peers at break times due to concern about her safety when unsupervised (Bella p.151,p.152). This enforced isolation was not intentionally disciplinary, but acted to regulate her physical or mental differences, reinforcing this difference by limiting the social interaction necessary to reduce stigma (Holt, 2004a). A different type of exclusion was experienced by Elsa, in that she had previously not been permitted to participate in physical education (PE) lessons, due to a heart condition. This is in line with evidence that other students with physical differences are often excluded from PE (Holt, 2004a) and it is considered less important for TA support (Maher, 2016); which might confirm the existence of some training needs in differentiation for this subject (Vickerman, 2012; Maher, 2018). Elsa's current teacher noted that (after an operation to fit a pacemaker) PE had initially been difficult for her as she had little or no experience of activities like swimming (p.180). This was now her favourite subject, concurring with concern that exclusion from PE may result in students' enjoyment of school being restricted (Holt, 2004a).

Several students were struggling with reading and writing in Special Secondary. This was managed with active support from classroom peers during lessons and literacy support from teachers during form period. Literacy (and numeracy) challenges affected their experience of school and all subjects (Bob p.143, p.145; Eminem p.164), as progress in practical subjects like Art had to be recorded. The lessons I observed with these students were more focused on discussion and verbal work than classes I observed with other students, with a small amount of written work to record student progress. In contrast, Bella's previous literacy difficulties had been overcome via a compulsory Adult Literacy option in mainstream secondary (Bella p.148). While this had been frustrating at the time, she was now a confident reader regularly asked by other students for help with spelling and reading (Bella p.150).

Negative experiences in mainstream classrooms had produced internalised barriers in some students. These students had not been able to maintain the same level of academic achievement as their peers and felt bad about themselves; disengaging from learning as a result: "*you feel thick! 'Cos you can't catch up. You feel down, 'cos you can't … perform like them*" (Bob p.141). A similar experience was noted by Bella in relation to Mathematics (p.148). In Special Secondary, two students were conversely concerned that the pace of work was too slow (Thomas the Tank Engine p.172) or the work too easy (Bella p.150). Bella had attended mainstream secondary school until sixth form; while Thomas was aware of the gap between his achievements and a younger sibling at a mainstream school (Thomas transcripts). Such experiences may have formed partial barriers to participation, but could be overcome. Where mainstream pace had been too fast or work too hard, it had been impossible to overcome these. Having addressed barriers to presence, participation and achievement experienced by students, the next section discusses the second research question; factors influencing students' experiences of inclusion in mainstream and special education.

5.2 Research question 2: What factors have influenced disabled students' experiences of inclusion?

During student interviews, various elements emerged which seemed to have had an impact on their experience of inclusion. Most of the factors shared had been experienced positively, increasing inclusion, but the extent to which they had been positive had varied. Interestingly, the same categories are present here as within the barriers section, demonstrating that the same issues are at the core of both experiences. A diagram of the Factor nodes follows (Figure 16 p.217). Related child nodes in different groups have been linked where appropriate. The node "good at subject" (Internalised Factors) appeared in students' narratives alongside "enjoy subject" (Classroom Factors) while the node "Fictive Kin" related to both "friends at school" (Social Factors) and "part of community" (Attitudinal Factors) and is located between them.

Figure 16: Positive factors influencing inclusion
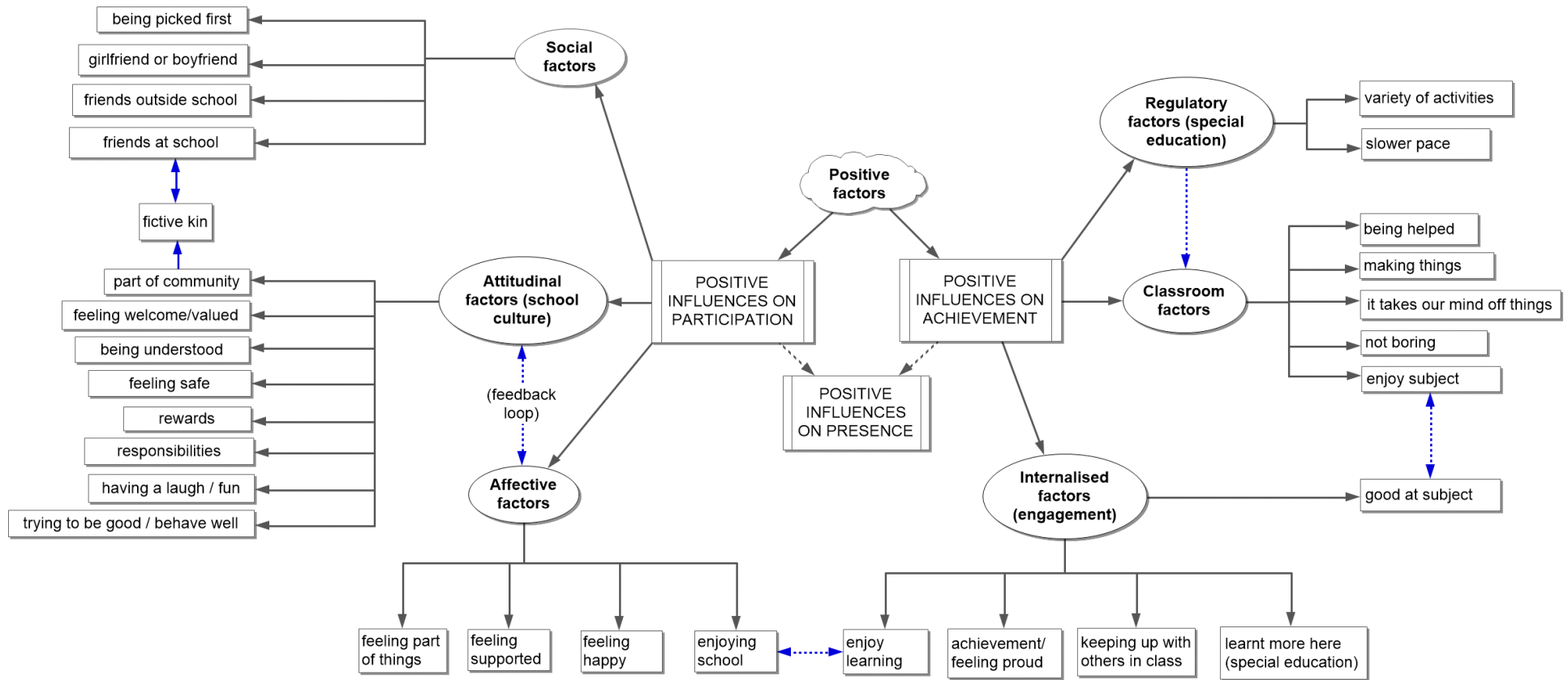
5.2.1 Factors influencing presence

Factors which influenced presence were those that could interrupt the cycle of negative attitudes and discipline presented in barriers to presence (p.192). School leaders appeared to be significant in this process, through their attitudes to students and in having the authority to withdraw students for alternative activities. Parents (especially mothers) were also positive factors influencing mainstream inclusion and special educational transfer.

Head teachers were mentioned by Lydya2 and Thomas the Tank Engine as part of their mainstream primary experience. These two students had been removed from activities they found extremely challenging: one was diverted from school trips with his class due to concerns that these were too long for him (Thomas the Tank Engine p.172), the other from class for one-to-one time with the Head Teacher (Lydya2 p.182). Such practices have been described elsewhere as illegal exclusions (Contact a Family, 2013) or internal exclusions (Power & Taylor, 2020), removing students from shared experiences with their peers and limiting their access to the curriculum (Power & Taylor, 2020). Despite these concerns, both students experienced these interventions as positive. While it has been argued that social skills interventions are detrimental to the peer social group by undertaking skills work outside of the context where it is to be practiced (Baines et al., 2015), this seems to have enabled Thomas to engage with other (younger) community members and allowed Lydya2 to develop a good relationship with his Head Teacher (an isolated positive in his mainstream primary experience). The underlying factor in both interventions was students being listened to and understood. Someone with authority within their schools (the Head Teacher) had looked at the challenges faced by these students and made alternative arrangements accounting for their needs. These interventions did not preclude disciplinary action being taken (e.g., p.171 and p.186).

Parents (especially mothers) were frequently mentioned in relation to key points in students' educational journeys and particularly in the transfer to special education. While the process of transfer and the barriers leading up to this have been covered under research question 1 (p.192 onwards), the involvement of a parent may have been influenced by the students' feelings and how the school treated them. Some students mentioned both parents concern about their mainstream school experience, but mothers took the lead in educational decisions for five students (Eminem, Thomas, Lydya2, Elsa and Bella) following Runswick-Cole/Ryan (Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Runswick-Cole & Ryan, 2019). These students' experiences provide evidence of mothers as allies and advocates, sharing in their child's experience of "discriminatory practices and attitudes" (Ryan & Runswick-Cole, 2008:202) and the distress such discrimination causes. Several students reported being extremely unhappy in mainstream school (Bob p.139, Eminem p.161, James p.154, Lydya2 p.182). Other students did not report being unhappy in mainstream but these were noted by adults to have withdrawn (Elsa p.180) or had reported experiencing social barriers (Bella p.151, Horrid Henry p.165 and Thomas p.173). Some schools seemed not to see a problem (Elsa p.177 and p.180) even when they acknowledged the student was not learning (Bob p.140, James p.158) or needed more support (Horrid Henry p.168); as long as the student was not disruptive. Mothers appear to have advocated with mainstream schools directly (e.g., p.158, p.170). Where students were disruptive, mainstream schools tended to locate the problem within the student (Eminem p.163 and Lydya2 at times p.186) leading mothers to become actively involved in mediating with the school. The mainstream schools involved were not able to resolve the situation, leading to special educational transfer. While two schools had put TA learning support in place, with these students having had positive experiences in mainstream (Bella p.147, Thomas p.171), their mothers felt the support did not meet their needs (Bella p.152, Thomas p.172).

For most of the students, the decision to move to special education had resulted in them being happier and becoming successful learners, improving their participation and achievement. Yet from the point of view of presence within mainstream inclusive settings, the result has diminished social inclusion in mainstream by their absence.

5.2.2   Factors influencing participation

The factors which influenced student participation could be grouped into three categories (see Figure 16, p.217). These related to **social factors** involving students' experiences with peers; **attitudinal factors** supporting or limiting their participation in the classroom and beyond deriving from the influence of teachers; and **affective factors**, located within the student. As noted earlier, these categories are not separate and each of these can influence other areas.

Under the heading of social factors, several issues arose. While the experience of social isolation matched concerns in the literature, pre-existing friendships appeared to be significant to students' school experience. Some students asserted friendship for peers they did not spend time with (for example, Elsa listed her whole mainstream primary class while externally appearing isolated there). Disagreements with peers could undermine this stability, having a significant impact on students. Those students who presented their experience of mainstream education as significantly more positive also talked about having friends at mainstream school, two students starting primary school with pre-existing friends. One had gained a network of friendships through his parents' decision to take him to a pre-school playgroup (Thomas the Tank Engine p.172) while the other went to mainstream primary school with someone she had grown up with (Horrid Henry p.165). A third made a friend in mainstream primary who continued throughout mainstream secondary with her (Bella p.147).

Those with friendship networks seemed to be protected from bad experiences colouring their entire experience of school. While first mentioning the times he had got into trouble at each school (e.g., p.170), Thomas still felt positive about previous schools, as did Horrid Henry despite being bullied (p.165). She seemed able to separate her classroom experiences from the bullying to some extent, talking about her time in lessons positively. Bella, despite the challenges of a stricter disciplinary atmosphere and GCSE examinations, had thrived at mainstream secondary and had not wanted to change schools (p.152). Several students who had been isolated in mainstream had friends at Special Secondary (James, Eminem, Elsa, Lydya2) and even those without close friends interacted with Special Secondary peers regularly during classroom observations (Bob p.141, Thomas the Tank Engine p.174, Horrid Henry p.167). During the map exercise, only two students had seen a current school friend outside of Special Secondary. Thomas reported his parents had invited a classmate over, to encourage a friendship to develop. Bella had been visited at home by a peer living nearby but noted that as the catchment area for the school was particularly wide, she was unable to spend time with her friends. Bella, James and Lydya2 all reported unhappiness at not seeing their boyfriend or girlfriend outside school, James noting his parents were against this (p.157).

Those students who were isolated in mainstream fell into two categories. Those who were aware of their social rejection may express their agency through aggression (like Lydya2) or acting in challenging ways that gain them some peer approval (like Eminem). These responses would seem to be caused by their position in a structural environment which is designed to exclude them from learning, and a social environment in which peers are aware of the external standards they are being measured by, and the extent to which they and their disabled peers are meeting these standards. Social marginalisation appeared to have profoundly altered these disabled students' participation.

The second group of students did not follow this pattern. Elsa's isolation in mainstream primary was a concern for her mother but not for her (p.177, p.180). For Thomas the Tank Engine, the school memories he shared revolved around his TA, who seemed to provide a social context for him in mainstream (p.171). Both students felt that they had a multiplicity of friends in their previous schools. Elsa listed all her mainstream primary classmates as friends, mirroring the experience of "Simon" who varied who he spent time with since: "[e]veryone knows me" (Holt et al., 2017:1369). Holt's research was with autistic students specifically and while my data had (deliberately) not included medical documentation of diagnosis (due to a social model rather than medical model approach), both students were understood to be autistic (Elsa p.181 and Thomas p.138). It is possible that their experiences matched those of Holt's students due to neurodiversity, sharing the experience of a "different quality of friendship" (Østvik et al., 2018:342); with friendships reflecting companionship rather than intimacy (Cook et al., 2018). This alternative categorisation of friendship might also explain research identifying students externally perceived as isolated but who did not see themselves that way (Messiou, 2003). Thomas and Elsa expressed "belonging [to their respective mainstream school communities] as a form of friendship" (Østvik et al., 2018:341). Their experiences of social interaction had been mixed and confusing (Thomas p.173, Elsa transcript). Thomas the Tank Engine recounted negative anecdotes which seemed inconsistent with friendship, fitting with Holt's observation that: "some young people … had friendships which were ambivalent, transient and particularly conflicted" (Holt et al., 2017:1369). He did not understand such interactions, explaining: "_did have much friends there, but … For one reason they won't be my friend, and I don't know why_" (p.173). This is consistent with two of Holt *et al.*'s respondents: "James", noting "all my old friends … kept picking on me" (Holt et al., 2017:1370) and "Carl", mystified by verbal abuse, remarking "I don't know why" (Holt et al., 2017:1370). It is not clear whether externally perceived isolation affected presence, participation or achievement for these students.

While formal verification of autism is not present here, this does not invalidate these small observations. As a member of the disabled community, I recognise that official validation of a mind/body difference does not always match the experiences of that individual, with diagnostic assessment being subjective, culturally based (Barnes & Mercer, 2005), subject to reclassification (Goodley, 2001) and a limited resource as a gateway to accessing resources. The students in this study did not self-identify with any label, and had a variety of differences of which they were aware to different degrees. Finally, as can be seen from Bob's example, formal assessment and diagnosis is not always timely, and can require a considerable amount of parental pressure and knowledge to facilitate. I feel these observations are still valid and may have relevance for other students who may not have been referred for diagnosis.

The inclusion literature has focused on student agency (Allan, 1999b; 1999a; Davis & Watson, 2002), teacher action (Mowat, 2010; 2014) and school leadership (Ainscow et al., 2013; Ainscow & Messiou, 2018) in being levers to address barriers to disabled students; but the narratives of these students labelled with SLD problematise these issues. Without receptive peers, students' attempts at asserting agency went unnoticed. Teacher action and school leadership were experienced through class (and school) culture; which in the mainstream experiences here was mainly exclusionary, reflecting the persistence of regulatory barriers. Positive interactions or relationships with adults such as teachers and TAs were a common factor appearing across various students' narratives. I classified these under attitudinal factors as these interactions seemed to reflect them taking a positive attitude towards these students, as opposed to the negative attitudes previously analysed under attitudinal barriers (p.206). Students' experiences with teachers were mixed, perceived as positive and negative in both mainstream and special education. As might be expected given the students' eventual move to special education, more anecdotes relating to mainstream teachers had been negative.

Some students did recount positive experiences with mainstream teachers. One felt that although mainstream primary teachers were not able to stop the bullying outside school, they had supported her by separating her from her bully (originally in the same class) (Horrid Henry p.165); while another felt positive about his relationship with mainstream primary teachers despite being subject to discipline there (Thomas p.171). One student, in significant distress throughout mainstream primary, nonetheless spoke fondly of the Head Teacher there who did one-to-one work with him (Lydya2 p.182). As an isolated positive mainstream relationship (no other teachers, TAs or peers featured in his anecdotes), this relationship seemed significant. Such work seemed indicative of attachment (Parker et al., 2016) and professional love (Page, 2018); although the latter concept is usually applied to early years care. While not many mainstream teachers were mentioned by students, this type of professional love seemed in evidence in the practice of some mainstream TAs.

Some of the students had excellent relationships with their mainstream Teaching Assistants. The strength of attachment between these students and their mainstream TAs suggests TAs occupying a "motherly" role (Clarke, 2021). Two students commented at length on their positive relationship with their mainstream TAs, these individuals woven into students' anecdotes and stories and with reciprocity present in the relationships (e.g., Bella p.147 and Thomas p.171). This seemed to indicate professional love, in line with evidence about TAs taking an active role in social justice and advocating for their students within the school (Rutherford, 2011). Both students wanted to stay in mainstream settings (Bella p.152, Thomas p.173) and had been happy. The experiences here suggest that despite concerns (e.g., Giangreco et al., 1997; Giangreco et al., 2005), TAs acted to support students' engagement with mainstream learning (e.g., Bella p.148, Thomas p.171). This indicates that the discouragement of TA attachment within educational support may be counterproductive.

Although these experiences had been very positive, other students made no mention of the TA relationship. The transcripts, participant demographic chart (p.138) and Annual Reviews were also reviewed to triangulate these data; at which point a second pattern became evident. Several students had apparently been supported (some full-time) by a TA in mainstream but when specifically asked during the interviews, had denied having TA support. This appeared significant; since some students (e.g., Bob and James) with half-time TA support (13.75 hours) and full-time support (Lydya2 with 27.25 hours – the same as Thomas) still seemed to have been excluded from mainstream learning and social culture. In Special Secondary, TAs seemed to be allocated to the class group, working with several students consecutively or concurrently; perhaps due to classroom learning being more appropriate for the students' needs. Students seemed fond of them (e.g., Bob p.140), but did not report a close relationship. Positive relationships with teachers seemed to provide the foundation for the work students undertook in Special Secondary, not just in terms of academic engagement but also behavioural change; where professional love seemed to be seen as part of the teacher's role. James noted that his behaviour had changed since arriving at the school (p.154) during the school map exercise, describing the difference in the new school context. This support for behavioural change can be identified in Special School teachers' interviews, teachers noting that they emphasised students' good qualities while setting personal targets which allowed them to make progress (e.g., Lydya2 p.188). Such work takes time, one student taking around a year to speak in group situations (Elsa p.180). Teachers also played an active role in supporting students' agency through giving them a part to play in the school or class community and ensuring positive actions were acknowledged through a rewards system.

Some previous attention has focused on the agency of disabled students as a primary tool for social inclusion at school (Allan, 1999a), it has also been observed that this agency may go unnoticed at times (Davis & Watson, 2002). One student adopted a social role as someone

who entertained his peers, his mainstream secondary Annual Review noting that he had been encouraged by peers to take actions that would result in teacher discipline (Eminem p.163). He was believed to have embraced this; but his own memories of mainstream secondary were of being bullied (Eminem p.161). This role had continued to some extent at Special Secondary, where I observed him swearing in class to amuse his friends when he found work difficult (Eminem p.162). Another student had a different role with a male peer, competing to push (but not break) acceptable behavioural boundaries for this class (which might be reflected in his comment about people "*showing off … for a girl*" in class (Lydya2 p.184)). In a French café activity, there were limits to how many pastries each student was to have; but while well behaved and participating with the activity, Lydya2 and his peer did not comply with this. During a quiz he gave his friends answers although this resulted in him being upset as he had not done as well as his friends (Lydya2 p.184). Other students did not seem to have fixed roles. One had a clear motivation to do what was right (James p.159) but found it hard to express himself (James p.154). Others tried to be social and make jokes, but did not yet have the skills to successfully communicate with peers (Thomas the Tank Engine p.174).

In terms of teachers supporting agency, various aspects could be seen. For example, at times when Thomas had been taken out of mainstream class activities, he had been invited to help with the nursery class. He enthusiastically described helping the students with their lessons, like a Teaching Assistant, and that because of this he had a lot of younger friends at the school; perhaps more younger friends than friends his own age (p.172). In a similar way, Horrid Henry had supported peers with learning on her own initiative. In her first year at Special Secondary, if Henry finished her work first, she was allowed to support other students in class as it was felt these activities reinforced Henry's own learning. At break times, she had set up a classroom where she and her peers would practice activities they had done in class. Sometimes it would be a pretend shop, where students could count coins, buy items and give change (p.169). Her

class is now older, working towards qualifications, and the dynamics of classroom learning have changed, leaving her out of a role as there is less opportunity for her to help others. The social networks have shifted within her class, which now learns in subject based option groups, often with students from the sixth form. She has taken over a more solitary role, volunteering to clean out the classroom fish tank instead, as she does this at home with her own fish. Special Secondary used roles like this intentionally; not just to increase opportunities for student voice, but instigating some roles as a creative way of tackling a particular issue with a student. Eminem's teacher noted that he went through a period of difficulty in the playground, and during this time he had been enlisted as a football helper (p.164). Classes at Special Secondary also spend break times together. This allows for roles for students to volunteer to make a drink, or to butter some toast for staff and students to take a snack break together. All students are encouraged to take part alongside staff. Making drinks for the whole class was one of Henry's favourite parts of the day.

Unrelated to helping roles, some classes at Special Secondary made use of a reward structure, mentioned by several students during informal discussion. Tokens could be gained by good classwork (such as artwork), test results and good behaviour by students, which could be saved up for an item from the class reward box. Behavioural rewards were geared around personal targets, rather than generalised good behaviour. For example, while I was observing classes, Lydya2 had a target not to make fun of other students. Special Secondary viewed behaviour (which could be amended) as separate from the individual student who could be appreciated and valued (Lydya2 p.187) and set incremental targets for behavioural change. Students were given one specific behavioural target to work on at a time, with other problematic behaviours addressed at a later point. Most students seemed to be successfully meeting personal targets, motivated in part through a rewards system in class, and with behavioural achievements celebrated and formally acknowledged at school assemblies

alongside academic success. Not every class seemed to operate a reward system, but positive recognition was incorporated in school culture in several ways. At assembly, students were awarded certificates for progress they had made in lessons, in social skills, or in being helpful to others, where their progress was celebrated by the whole school community. Each class had a traffic light inspired system where each student's photo could be placed on green (for good), amber (for caution) or red. The head teacher also had the same system on her door, by which students were invited to assess her performance.

Several of the students interviewed were active members of the school council at Special Secondary (Bella, Henry, Lydya2) with another student (Bob) having previously been a member. Council members made decisions about school events and activities, supported by a teacher. Classes were involved in whole school events, including the weekly School assembly, and participating in school productions. It appeared that each year group had its own performance at Christmas, so every student had the chance to take part. Students also played an active part in annual review meetings on their Statement/ECH Plan, where decisions were made about their education. Every student was involved in their meeting and discussion, however limited their communication. The school was actively adding more committees to increase student participation. These included an environmental group, looking at recycling in the school, and an enterprise group, linked to business activities in lessons. Special Secondary also took part in fund raising for charities. At one charity day arranged by the School Council, several teachers (including the Head) had been nominated by students to have a bucket of ice water thrown over them by a student for charity. Several members of staff were part of a band playing songs on request for students to sing along with or dance. Other rooms were selling hot dogs (from the canteen) or fairy cakes (made by students) to raise money for charity, while younger classes had competitions to enter or games to play. A display had photos of a previous coffee morning, noting the amount raised.

Once these students had started in special education, their experience of school and how they felt about learning changed. They were now part of a group with similar abilities, in classes where they could access learning and start to achieve. The teacher interviews noted that students generally started at Special Secondary as quite reserved, but that after a while they had gained self-confidence (e.g., Elsa p.180). This had taken different amounts of time for each student, perhaps reflecting the time students needed to feel safe to be themselves within their class. It is hard to find concrete examples of this; since most of the students did not express awareness of how they had changed over time (e.g., Bob p.146). While it had not been her decision to move to special education, Bella said she was happier at Special Secondary than she had been at her previous mainstream secondary.

Bella offered a unique perspective among the students interviewed, in that her identity had clearly shifted. She stated she now felt part of a community of people with learning difficulties. Bella, together with other students who had made friends with mainstream school peers (such as Thomas and Henry) retained a positive self-image and good memories of their time in mainstream. Despite having bad experiences at mainstream, these friendships seem to have provided them with protection from these. Two students described friends using a 'fictive kin' description; assigning them a role as a cousin (Horrid Henry p.165) or sibling (Bella p.149). Six of the eight students volunteered that they had a boy or girlfriend at the school. This seemed to indicate being a part of this school community, since nearly every student I met at Special Secondary wanted to tell me about their girl/boyfriend. Very few of the students had friends outside school and were mostly not part of a larger community of activity, so their chances for such relationships were limited. One student identified herself as part of a community of people with learning disabilities. She disagreed with the recent school restructuring which had located special and mainstream school buildings together; feeling that the local special primary should have been brought on site with Special Secondary as they are

"*the same*," and identified a local (learning difficulty) training centre she is thinking of

attending as "*one of our schools*" (Bella p.151). While as a member of the School Council she

felt she could "*make a change*" (Bella p.151), Bella was concerned the school dining hall was

not big enough to include all the school's wheelchair users, so some classes ate lunch in their

classrooms. The classes were organised by academic ability, resulting in separate classes of

wheelchair using students with more complex mind/body differences. Bella suggested

expanding the eating space into the sports hall, so everyone could eat together.

Several students mentioned the school dinners with some disgust[19]. It seemed this was an

issue that had been discussed, due to the students' level of knowledge about what various

people thought about the meals. One complained that, due to issues with the food, they had

permanently requested a jacket potato for lunch but this had often been given away before

they arrived. Another student noted that sometimes they chose to go hungry rather than eat

the food available. Not having enough to eat might play a significant role in the social and

learning participation of students, especially those with dietary differences. Having explored

factors influencing participation, I will move on to factors influencing achievement.

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[19] Due to confidentiality, I have not referred to the students' names here.

5.2.3 Factors influencing achievement

The factors which influenced achievement could be gathered under two headings; regulatory factors (since the standards agenda and National Curriculum were no longer in effect in special educational settings) and internalised factors reflecting students' engagement with learning. It is to regulatory factors we turn first.

The students generally engaged with lessons well, with fewer problems than suggested by their experiences at mainstream schools. The disengagement students previously experienced may have been reduced by the Special Secondary curriculum (in the absence of the standards agenda in special education) being appropriate for their level and accessible to them. In addition, mildly challenging behaviours by students or observed were not escalated to a disciplinary response at Special Secondary as they may have been in mainstream school. If they found something difficult or challenging, students could become frustrated. One such example was Lydya2 (Portraits: Lydya2), who became upset about having a low score in a class competition. This was managed with some redirection from the teacher, and he was able to refocus himself on the next task. In contrast, when Eminem encountered such difficulties, he redirected his efforts to amuse his peers (Portraits: Eminem). This strategy was noted in the Annual Report from his previous school, suggesting this had been in place for some years. Students became distracted in class (or interviews), particularly if someone walked past the room. Thomas and Bella were distracted by classmates at Special Secondary (Portraits: Thomas, Bella), which they had not mentioned in relation to mainstream school. Talking in class had been a disciplinary offence at Bella's previous school (Portraits: Bella). Noise in class was a problem for Bella and Thomas, while for Bob the noisy area was the common room used for breaks (Portraits: Bob). Despite such distractions, during classroom observations students also displayed an ability to refocus themselves and return to work.

Internalised factors, reflecting students' engagement with learning, had been reflected very clearly in the observational data as well as interviews. Given that students had previously struggled with lessons in a mainstream school (James p.158; Eminem p.163; Thomas), I had been surprised by the level of confidence in their abilities that students expressed. Most of the students smiled when talking about lessons, particularly those they enjoyed. Going beyond just enjoyment, students were able to name subjects they were good at, which generally included Mathematics. James noted he took after his father in his talent for Maths (James p.155), but also that he enjoyed being challenged by work that was more difficult (p.156), corresponding with non-disabled students views on challenge in learning as positive (Wall, 2012). This stood out as James was the only student to make such an assertion. Special Secondary was using a range of different sub-GCSE qualifications with students, prior to their taking GCSEs (which some students did in the sixth form). Most students mentioned Physical Education among their favourite subjects (e.g., Lydya2 p.183; Elsa p.180). Special Secondary placed particular emphasis on Physical Education, with some students timetabled for three half-days of physical activity each week, in addition to football sessions at lunch.

Having addressed the first two research questions, we now move to research question 3 and explore in what ways students have used their voice in schools.

5.3 Research question 3: In what ways have disabled students used their 'voice' in school?

Student voice provided a key underpinning to this thesis, being the focus throughout the research. In taking a social model approach, it was crucial to this study that disabled students be invited to present their own school experiences. While the data relating to the first two research questions were provided by student voice (the students providing their own perspectives on their experiences), the third question was designed to gather information from a different angle; the different ways by which students expressed voice. It seemed that a Portraiture approach, in listening *for* rather than *to* a story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), generated data which seem significant for mainstream inclusion. The primary focus of the student voice data was the students' self-expression during observations and interviews; yet a second set of behavioural data emerged from the research. In interviews some students reflected on their own previous patterns of behaviour (for example, James p.154; Thomas the Tank Engine p.171). These recollections were enhanced by supporting information from their current teachers, noting how much these students' behaviour had changed since they started at the school. Annual Reviews from previous schools confirmed these data and gave further detail on these students, providing insight into previous teachers' views of these students and their behaviour. After reviewing these data, a contrast was revealed between students' memories of mainstream school and their former mainstream teachers' comments. Students' recollections focused on their overwhelming experience of distress in relation to bullying (Portraits: Eminem; Horrid Henry) or unfair treatment by peers and/or teachers (Portraits: James; Bob); but did not always reflect the behavioural expression of this distress. Conversely, the Annual Reviews focused on the behavioural voice expressed by students and the management of challenging behaviour, while students' distress was rarely acknowledged. Three behavioural patterns emerged, with students passing between these at different times.

5.3.1   Previous behavioural patterns

As has been explored, these students faced significant barriers to learning and the social environment. Their participation in mainstream settings was limited due to regulatory barriers which blocked their access to learning (see p.213); experiencing the pace of lessons as too fast and the work too hard (Elsa p.177, Eminem p.161). Most also experienced social exclusion or marginalisation; failing to locate themselves within both social and learning environments.

These students were not able to access mainstream classroom learning and had difficulty navigating the social environment, leaving them isolated socially and from learning. These students disrupted classroom learning, James reflecting that he had not at that point learnt to follow instructions in class (James p.154). While people had been "*kind*" to Lydya2 at nursery (p.182), his mainstream primary teachers and peers had difficulty understanding what he said (Lydya2 p.185, p.187) due to his communication difference; an experience shared to some extent by Bob (p.145) and Horrid Henry (p.165). Some students responded to their experience of marginalisation or exclusion through aggression towards peers and adults; asserting their voice in ways which challenged their marginalisation and the school. Others tried to withdraw from the social environment and sought to mask their mind/body difference.

The first pattern, which I would describe as **frustrated and in crisis**, was the most obvious; that of distressed students appearing to express themselves through challenging behaviour (as explored on p.196). As noted earlier, this was identified retrospectively in students' own memories of previous schools as opposed to their Annual Reviews for the same period. This applied particularly to Eminem and Lydya2, but elements of other students' early mainstream experiences also seemed to fit this pattern (e.g., James p.159 and Thomas the Tank Engine p.171). For some this was in relation to particular peers (e.g., Eminem p.160; Thomas the Tank Engine p.170), while others had difficulty with peers in general (e.g., Lydya2 p.182). While teacher perceptions of these students as problematic in themselves have already been

explored here (p.206), some of these students had not experienced social difficulties in group settings prior to mainstream school (e.g., nursery - Lydya2 p. 182; playgroup - Thomas the Tank Engine p.172). This would seem to indicate a trigger present in the mainstream environment for these students to cause this change. Not all these students articulated a reason for this, but two did seem to imply peer manipulation (Bob p.139; Eminem p.162). As this trigger had not been addressed, the challenging behaviour had escalated to a level where mainstream schools had exhausted their usual strategies (p.196) resulting in disciplinary exclusion (Eminem p.160, p.163; Lydya2 p.186) and eventual transfer to special education after parental intervention.

Other students tried to mask their difficulties in the mainstream classroom to fit in; but struggled to negotiate the social environment. Due to the puzzlement expressed by these students, I have termed this pattern as **mystified and in trouble**. Their social isolation and educational disengagement were not always attended to by mainstream teachers (e.g., Bob p.145; James p.158); but their distress had been evident to parents (Bob p.140; James p.158, p.159). Those students who were not able to hide their difference from peers (in particular) by passing (Goffman, 1963; Lehane, 2016) or masking/camouflaging (Hull et al., 2017; Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2019; Porter & Ingram, 2021) were bullied or manipulated by peers, and at risk of disciplinary exclusion if they responded. They did not understand the behaviour of peers, resulting in their being subject to discipline either through a lack of understanding or being manipulated by peers who were aware of this difficulty (as Eminem had, p.163). One had used the phrase "I don't know why" several times in interviews in relation to social interaction (e.g., Thomas the Tank Engine p.173); a second asserting that his exclusion from nursery was due to his peers (Bob p.139). Mainstream teachers seemed to be aware of some social difficulties (e.g., Horrid Henry p.168), but some seemed to feel their responsibility ended in the classroom, one student noting *"they don't care, they call you a wimp"* (Bob p.140).

If students known to have mind/body differences did not disrupt the flow of classroom learning, some teachers seemed unconcerned with how much the students learned or even to be fully aware of the extent of their differences, hence I describe these students as **passing and invisible**. Distress indicated through social withdrawal and/or learning disengagement did not attract teachers' attention (these students were not invisible to their peers). One student had been taught to copywrite to keep up with mainstream class progress (Bob p.145) despite his inability to read; and his needs had not been perceived significant enough to be referred for special educational needs assessment (p.140). It is hard to imagine such needs being "invisible" to mainstream teachers; but Bob's example demonstrates this. Successful masking has been noted to result in teachers not perceiving a need for support, where "symptoms were missed due to their seeming ability to cope at school" (Cook et al., 2018:310). The experience of those without TA support (like Elsa) was not consistent with coping; these students becoming disengaged and switched off from learning. This is a cause for concern.

Young people in general have been noted to mimic behaviours in learning to present themselves within gender roles (Cook et al., 2018), and while both male (Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2019) and female autistics "imitate others in social interactions or camouflage their difficulties" (Cook et al., 2018:311), female autistics are indicated to be more successful than males in doing so (Hull et al., 2017). The female students here (Bella, Elsa and Horrid Henry) seemed more able to comply with classroom behavioural norms, as indicated by the observation that Bella's social skills "can mask her very real deficits" (p.152) (supporting Moyse & Porter, 2015; Hull et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2018). Unlike neurotypical "reputation management", autistic masking is noted to have a negative impact on mental health, resulting in exhaustion, depression and suicidality, as well as on identity (Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2019), which might explain why Elsa had been "like a shell" (p.180) while Bella (not known to be autistic) did not seem to have impacted in the same way by mainstream experience. Elsa and Bella did not seem aware of a choice to mask, differing from those students who

deliberately adopted unspoiled (or less stigmatised) identities (Allan, 1999b; 1999a). Only one

student labelled with moderate learning difficulties was present in Cook et al (2018), and no

autistics with learning difficulties in the other studies (Hull et al., 2017; Cage & Troxell-

Whitman, 2019). This study contributes by acknowledging the experience of passing/masking

in students (both autistic and neurotypical) labelled with SLD.

5.3.2   Current behaviour

Students' actions and social networks in Special Secondary had not remained in their previous

behavioural patterns, the progress students had made in this area volunteered informally (and

unprompted) by teachers at Special Secondary. They expressed themselves and were

understood; made new friends; supported each other and made peers feel better. The

perspectives of some students' previous mainstream schools (e.g., Eminem, Lydya2) having

been so different from this made this particularly noteworthy. The nodes on current

behaviour arose from Classroom Observations and are illustrated in Figure 17 (p.238). Several

of the students here actively used new social skills to support peers, regardless of their

previous level of social skills (represented in grey in Figure 17 p.238). One student noted by her

mainstream secondary to have a high level of social skill (Bella p.152) spent time trying to

cheer up a peer feeling low (Bella p.150). Contrasting with her mainstream primary's report

that she herself required support for social interaction (p.168), Horrid Henry initiated

conversations with other students working alone, complimenting one on his work and later

supporting him in initiating social interaction (p.167). Possibly the most striking development

of social skills was that of Lydya2, in a state of crisis in mainstream primary (p.188) and

exhibiting challenging behaviour (discussed on page 194). He now worked with peers (p.237)

and supported his girlfriend, trying to make her smile (Lydya2, Observation 1) or just simply

touching her arm when she was unwell (Lydya2, Observation 3).

Figure 17: Coding map - voice expressed behaviourally in class (from observations)
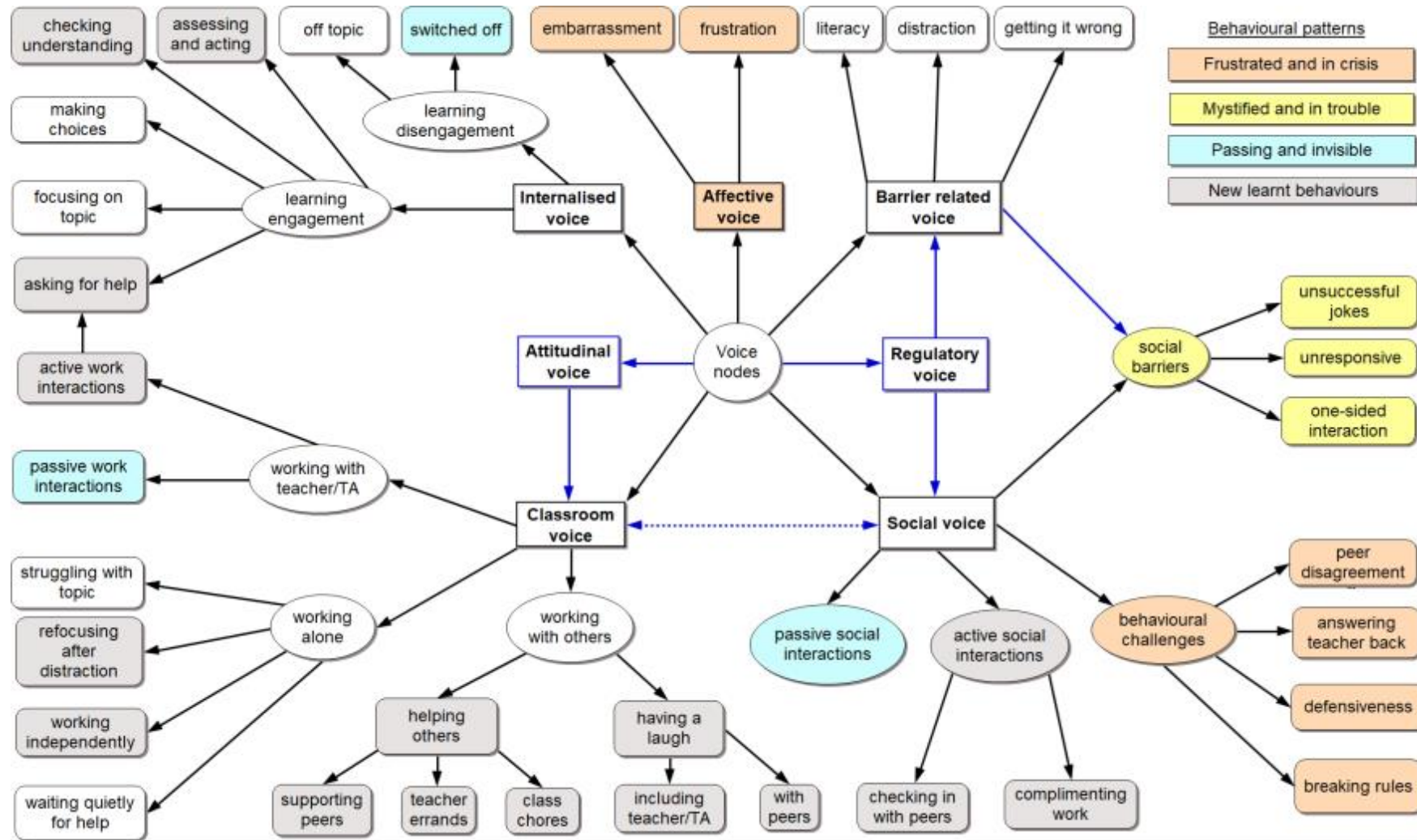
Consistent with earlier barrier and factor groupings, I identified Classroom voice, Social voice, Affective voice and Internalised voice categories. Regulatory and Attitudinal voice were not present in students' actions, but provided context for student behaviour. This was particularly the case with Barrier-related voice, covering interactions which may have been influenced by a mind/body difference in their frequency or impact but which may have been problematic in mainstream due to regulatory and/or attitudinal barriers present in that setting.

I identified some voice events which could link back to previous behavioural patterns; but without the severity indicated by previous schools. In terms of the first pattern, **frustrated and in crisis** (p.234) (**peach** shaded nodes in Figure 17 p.238), I identified two types of Affective voice: frustration and embarrassment. These were present in classroom activities (for example, Lydya2 p.184); but while these emotions were expressed visually and sometimes verbally, these did not result in behavioural expression. This pattern also emerged in actions under Social voice with a few low-level disagreements (limited to a sentence or two) which did not escalate or result in aggression, such as breaking rules by covertly swearing in class (Eminem p.162). His previous mainstream secondary's description of "a range of avoidance strategies which he uses as soon as the work becomes challenging" (p.163) supported my sense that by making peers laugh he was drawing attention away from his difficulty with a test; but also seemed reminiscent of an article on Pupil Referral Units noting that students:

> adopted bad behaviour as a defence mechanism. By acting up they distract teachers from the fact that they do not understand what they are being taught. (Quine, 2015)

This description seemed consistent with Eminem's behaviour in this incident, and might indicate an attempt to mask mind/body difference.

There were also a few examples which seemed to relate to the second pattern, **mystified and in trouble** (p.235), under the Barrier-related grouping (shaded **yellow** in Figure 17 p.238) with several unsuccessful social interactions. These related to students remaining unresponsive to peer or teacher engagement (Elsa transcripts) and unsuccessful (one-sided) attempts to initiate conversation or tell a joke (Thomas the Tank Engine transcripts). In terms of the third pattern (**passing and invisible** p.236) (shaded **blue** in Figure 17 p.238), there were a few interactions which might give an indication of this; but these were by no means conclusive. These were passive social and work-related interactions and being switched off from such interactions (or disengaged from work), which might be present in any student; but did not reflect student engagement. While this is only a possible indication, it is highlighted here for future research on this group of struggling students who may not attract teacher attention.

The largest category of current behaviour identified in Figure 17 p.238, shaded **grey**, were those interactions which might point to **new learnt behaviours**. As noted under Factors influencing participation (p.220 onwards), Special Secondary teachers had modelled a range of behaviour in the classroom. While the social skills of these students were variable, all students appeared to replicate these behaviours (under Social voice) in supporting, caring and empathising with others; which had not been present in some students' previous behaviours (in particular, Lydya2 p.185; Eminem p.163). Some students had little Mainstream experience of working with others (under the Classroom voice grouping), either working one to one with a full time TA (e.g., Lydya2, Thomas the Tank Engine (Figure 11, p.138)) or experiencing social isolation and/or bullying (e.g. Bob p.139; Eminem p.161), but now showed a range of teamwork skills. For many of these students, Regulatory barriers (p.213) would previously have denied these students the opportunity to contribute to group work as an equal.

The opportunities presented by Special Secondary teachers for these students to learn and contribute led to the development of new behaviour. As the student was able to access learning, their Internalised voice became more confident, engaging with learning in a variety of ways and able to ask questions without fearing stigma or that they might "feel thick" (Bob p.141). They were able to successfully work independently (Classroom voice).

5.3.3   Mixed Factors

As noted earlier, there were some factors which could be experienced either as barriers or positive factors and to different degrees, depending on the situation and student. These included **Sensory factors**, relating to body and environmental factors experienced by the students, influencing both participation and also students' engagement with learning and therefore Achievement, together with **Classroom factors**. These references derive from the respective students' transcripts; since these were minor points, they were not directly relevant to the students' Portraits.

For example, work being tiring was a sign that you had worked hard and learnt something for James (relating to Special Secondary), but a negative sign for Elsa (relating to a mainstream primary). Being healthy, similarly, was a good aspect of school life for Bob, but a pejorative description of school dinners by Horrid Henry. Periods of exclusion and time off sick were experienced as unpleasant and simultaneously as a holiday from having to attend school by both Thomas and Elsa. Behaviour management plans involved having to work on personal behavioural change, but also other students being held responsible for their actions. Elsa and Thomas discussed being injured at school, but separate from any context. It was not clear how these incidents had happened, and the students were not forthcoming.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, the barriers to presence, participation and achievement experienced by these disabled students, including the reasons why they moved from mainstream to special education, have been explored. The factors which influenced these barriers have been discussed, including those student-led factors and those which were teacher-led. In addition to these voiced experiences, giving insight into the lives of young disabled people, three behaviour patterns emerged from the data in response to these students' experiences in mainstream education. One of these patterns resulted in disciplinary attention, while passing did not appear to attract attention, leaving teachers unaware of these students' difficulty. In the next chapter, these issues will be discussed further and linked with the literature in this field to identify new information which has emerged here.

Chapter 6 Discussion

This research prioritising students' voices identified the barriers to (and factors impacting on) inclusive education as experienced by disabled students labelled with severe learning difficulties in England. They were not asked about any topic specifically but invited to share memories of their previous schools, choosing to volunteer experiences which were significant to them. Two closely related themes emerged from their stories which seemed to contextualise their experiences: not being valued by mainstream teachers (underpinning anecdotes relating to social and education exclusion in schools) and the impact of supportive relationships with teachers and/or TAs in reducing such exclusion. Students did not specifically state they were (or were not) being valued, but this was implicit within their anecdotes, consistent with their narratives and the memories they chose to share, and relationships (or lack thereof) were an intrinsic part of almost every memory. While these are linked issues in that good relationships are ones in which people are valued, and not being valued could be consistent with poor relationships; this is complicated by another factor. English educational structures currently position students who cannot meet normative standards as having low value (Slee, 2019), with this low value experienced by students across the range of their interactions within mainstream schools. Following Harwood and McMahon, I argue that this constitutes an exclusionary discourse implicit within the English mainstream educational system. For teachers to take an opposing position, valuing these students, requires not just professional love (Page, 2017; 2018) but also a commitment consistent with ethical subversion (Morris, 2021) to undermine the prevailing discourse. Although the concept of professional love is more usually linked with early years education, it seems appropriate to the experiences students describe. It is also required for a "holding" environment for therapeutic engagement (Winnicott, 1965) which reflects the work which was undertaken with these students on reaching a special educational setting, where their distress was heard and students supported while behavioural patterns were changed. These experiences would support MacBeath's claim that some disabled students are being traumatised by mainstream education (BBC, 2006).

6.1   Not being valued as an exclusionary discourse

Access to learning for these students appeared to be limited by what are described here as regulatory barriers (p.213); that is, barriers formed by the mechanisms through which the state education system in England is managed and its success evaluated (Colley, 2020). Students labelled with severe learning difficulties are asserted to have been "very largely excluded from the policy and practice of inclusive education" (Colley, 2020:721), this exclusion being compounded by the use of normative standards in educational practice (Weddell, 2008). These mechanisms allow for the participating schools and teachers to be rewarded in line with their perceived success (or failure) in meeting these standards; providing a strong incentive for schools to focus on these outcomes (Slee, 2013). In this study, disabled students confirmed that they themselves had experienced these barriers to their inclusion, which were not just embedded within policy but pervaded all areas of student experience including teachers' attitudes, the importance placed on their class attendance and decisions about resources (Lindsay et al., 2005). These powerful barriers and students' repeated experiences of them across different interactions could indicate an exclusionary discourse (following Harwood & McMahon, 2014) implicit within mainstream educational practice in England.

The impact of an exclusionary discourse could be seen across the range of student experiences in mainstream schools. Inherent within this seemed to be Slee's observation that disabled students are seen by schools and teachers to have less value due to their inability to meet normative targets (Slee, 2019). The closest student quote was from Bob's view that mainstream teachers "*don't care*" (p.140) in relation to bullying (echoing the words of students in Marks' research (Marks, 2014)); but the discourse was more complex that just not caring. Students being valued also did not appear to be explained by students' own sense of self-worth or of belonging. Some students' expressions of challenging behaviour (e.g., Lydya2 p.187 and James p.159) appeared to indicate an attempt to assert agency consistent with (at

least, an initial) sense of self-worth, as opposed to withdrawing like other students (Elsa p.180), but neither student felt valued by teachers in their mainstream experience. James had felt he had no friends at mainstream primary, although his peers were more positive about him than their teacher had been (p.208), suggesting he may have been more accepted than he and his teacher had believed. Thomas and Elsa both expressed a sense of community belonging with their mainstream primaries through assertions of universal friendship in the setting, consistent with experiences in other studies (Holt et al., 2017; Østvik et al., 2018); but mainstream teachers were barely mentioned in their narratives. Bella had likewise felt part of her cohort, but safeguarding concerns could indicate she was being taken advantage of rather than seen as an equal and her experiences of teachers were also unclear.

The perceived lack of value of disabled students was implicit within normative standards in both learning and social culture, leading to distress and behavioural responses from students. Mainstream teachers were largely absent in anecdotes although some of their attitudes could be perceived in students' classroom experiences, supported by teachers' written comments in Annual Reviews, analysed through Harwood and McMahon's exclusionary discourses (Harwood & McMahon, 2014) which align with not being valued. The decisions around TA support allocation prioritised behavioural control over educational access for these students, further diminished by the restrictions on special educational referral. In addition to behavioural responses, students sought to hide their difference (and lack of value) through passing, masking or complying with ableist classroom practices.

A sense of disabled students not being valued is confirmed by the experiences here through the impact of normative standards they cannot meet, as noted elsewhere (Alexander, 2010; Marks, 2012; Greenstein, 2014). The challenging level and pace of work in mainstream schools

experienced here (p.213) fits with earlier findings (Katz et al., 2012) which have been linked to standardisation (Taylor, 2019) across mainstream settings. The pace of mainstream academic work was volunteered as a problem by several disabled students (Bob, Elsa and Eminem), experiencing it as a relentless pressure (e.g., p.177), not being able to understand or keep pace with classwork (p.141, p.161) and repeatedly failing (p.148), reinforcing their difference from peers. These narratives confirm that the pressure put on schools by the standards agenda is experienced by disabled students in mainstream classrooms and can be internalised (e.g., p.216) impacting negatively on their self-esteem; with disabled students feeling there was something wrong with them (Bob p.141). This led these students to disengage (p.216) from social interaction (e.g., Elsa p.180) and/or classroom learning (e.g., James p.158) as occurs in response to sanctions (Payne, 2015). This is consistent with research observing that students are aware of their own level of subject ability in comparison with peers (Marks, 2013) leading to a low sense of personal value and a negative self-concept (Hargreaves, 2019; Campbell, 2021). While non-disabled peers also report "feeling pressured to 'just get it done,' rather than the focus being on learning" (Katz et al., 2012:11), for disabled students the gap between their ability and mainstream standards was impossible to bridge. The lack of access to mainstream learning experienced by Elsa with an SLD label but no TA support (p.180) and Bob with no support prior to his assessment (p.141) would support assertions that responsibility for mainstream differentiation is delegated to TAs (Webster & Blatchford, 2013), resulting in disabled students without TA support and unassessed disabled students without access to the curriculum. While alternative standards have been put forward for disabled students (Standards and Testing Agency, 2016), students did not report experiencing these in mainstream; one having sat GCSEs (p.148) while another student had no SEN statement in mainstream (p.198), indicating that alternative standards may not be universally applied.

While I came into this study aware there could be disabled students in schools who are unassessed; I was unsure how significant the barriers they experienced might be. Bob's experiences show that students with significant learning differences may be present (but unassessed and unsupported) in the mainstream classroom. Although his mainstream secondary had been aware of his visual difference and difficulty with basic life skills such as changing clothes (p.145), his learning disability had not been considered significant previously. While he was not able to read and had only limited numeracy, the Annual Review seems to indicate this had not been noticed by mainstream teachers. This student posed no immediate problem or disruption in the mainstream secondary classroom and might have been perceived to be coping with classroom learning (as noted in relation to successful masking (Cook et al., 2018)); but this would have been an inaccurate conclusion. He was only sent for Special Educational Needs assessment as a result of local councillors pushing on his parents' behalf (p.198), resulting in special education transfer. This highlights the danger in the practice of relying on TAs for differentiation (Webster & Blatchford, 2019), limiting access to the curriculum by leaving in place barriers thought to have been addressed for disabled students.

Mainstream primary SATs were a reminder of these students' perceived lack of value. One teacher noted that many of my participants would have been "disapplied" in mainstream primary (p.176), removed from the school's statistical return and not entered for the SATs in order to improve the school's results (Greenstein, 2014). During the intensive SATs preparation of peers and classmates, disabled students who are disapplied move to a separate room where "they might be taught by or with a TA, while the other kids are doing Key Stage 2 type work" (teacher interview, p.176), drawing resources away from disabled students and leaving their education deprioritised "to maximise outcomes" for the school (Marks, 2012:59) with obvious consequences for inclusion (Glazzard, 2013). This increases the attainment gap between students perceived as low and high achievers (Marks, 2014) and since students are aware of

their own and others level of achievement (Marks, 2012; 2013), emphasises their difference; bringing a "deepening of existing divisions" in the peer group (Reay & Wiliam, 1999:351). Classroom removal has been criticised as "one of the least inclusive models of support" (Butt, 2016:999), linked with attitudinal discrimination (Glazzard, 2011:56) and implying some sort of punishment as it is also used as a disciplinary intervention (Holt, 2004a); supporting a sense of not being valued due to their differences (Slee, 2019). The students here did not mention disapplication but their recollections focused on TAs rather than teachers.

Another way in which the students' lack of value was demonstrated was via their lack of access to qualifications. Statutory assessment processes in England are, as has been so effectively demonstrated by Aspis, based on normative standards which are designed to exclude students with learning disabilities (Aspis, 1998). When such students reach mainstream secondary education with their peers, this can result in a cycle of examination failure like Bella (p.148). This is prompted by standardised targets for schools of students achieving Mathematics and English GCSEs (Marks, 2012). While these are also important topics having personal importance for future work and study, non-GCSE qualifications do exist for these subjects which might be less exclusionary and result in success (as experienced by these students at Special Secondary); but are not included in the standardised targets and seem not to have been considered by Bella's mainstream secondary. Her experiences provide evidence that the barriers that Aspis identified over twenty years ago still remain; despite their exclusionary bias, and further the debate by noting the negative personal impact such practices have on students. These experiences seem to confirm that "standardized testing and curricula dehumanize both student and teacher" (Taylor, 2019:312), implying a personal lack of value in students' failure to meet these immovable but unreachable targets (Adderley, 2015:239).

In addition to their perceived lower value in the classroom, disabled students were held against normative developmental standards. They did not have the required level of cognitive or verbal skill to adapt to the social environment (p.202) nor the mental capacity to protect themselves from peer behaviour which raised safeguarding concerns (Bella p.152). The bullying experienced by two students here (Horrid Henry p.165 and Bob p.142) extended to their local community. Classroom participation appeared contingent on developmental behavioural norms they had not reached and were not yet capable of, but in the absence of which they were removed from the classroom (e.g., Bella p.148, Lydya2 p.186) and sometimes the school (Bob p.139, Eminem p.160, Thomas p.171, Lydya2 p.186). While some mainstream teachers appeared unsupportive of students' social difficulties (e.g., Bob p.140) the English educational system is social in nature with group learning environments and groupwork activities. Social isolation or marginalisation potentially restricted their peer group's willingness to work with these students, presenting barriers to participation.   The impact of social isolation and/or marginalisation compounded the disadvantage they experienced, yet the experience of being marginalised is argued to have a more significant impact on students than other forms of bullying (Benton, 2011), with teachers advised to act to address this. While Annual Reviews did mention a need for social support (e.g., p.168), there was no indication this had been put in place by mainstream schools here. Since social interventions designed to address isolation have also increased learning engagement (Mowat, 2010; 2014) it would seem to be doubly important to engage with this issue.

The impact of disabled students being devalued both by normative educational and developmental standards caused distress (p.209) which in some cases was expressed behaviourally (p.194). This was then subject to behavioural norms, resulting for some in disciplinary exclusion. Several students who were subject to behavioural discipline remembered their mainstream school experiences as extreme unhappiness rather than anger,

experiencing fear, distress, bullying and/or social isolation, feeling physically unsafe and under threat (James, Eminem and Lydya2). It therefore seemed to confirm that challenging behaviours were a response to situations which cause distress (Harwood & McMahon, 2014). This appeared gendered here, matching findings that "boys with SEN were more frequently perceived as 'rule breakers'" (Avramidis, 2010:413). This was perceived to be a problem located within the individual and (in line with Harwood and McMahon's biomedical and biopsychosocial discourses) in need of behavioural management (Harwood & McMahon, 2014). This view of disabled students influenced classroom culture, implicitly supporting peer social isolation/rejection or bullying. Marginalisation (and some bullying) can be seen as socially acceptable gatekeeping, reinforcing the existing social hierarchy and culture (Allan, 1999a), in which some teachers can be complicit (Faris & Felmlee, 2014).

Another area in which disabled students appeared to be devalued is in the absence of positive relationships with mainstream teachers. As observed earlier (p.206), the main recollection of mainstream teachers by students was that they were always "in trouble" with them (e.g., James p.154), with Bob stating only 10% of his mainstream teachers were *"alright"* (p.140); suggesting an absence of supportive relationship. This might explain the negativity of their educational experience, since student/teacher relationships are noted to underpin learning engagement (Shreeve et al., 2002). Some mainstream teachers appeared to find these students disruptive of lessons, presenting attitudinal barriers to students' classroom participation. Several students (e.g., Bob, Bella, James) felt they had been held unfairly responsibility for classroom disruptions, noting that peers took action to get them in trouble which went unnoticed by teachers. As they viewed them negatively, teachers ascribed any disruptions (whether they caused them or not) to these students; perhaps using these as a rationale to remove the unvalued student from class (e.g., to isolation or detention p.148).

This lack of perceived value was confirmed through teachers' comments in Annual Reviews, analysed here using two of the discourses identified by Harwood and McMahon. While these are explicitly linked with challenging behaviour (Harwood & McMahon, 2014), mainstream teachers appear to have retained a negative view of these students even when they were not engaging in such behaviour. The biomedical discourse (the in-actively challenging child) and biopsychosocial discourse (the pro-actively challenging child) both necessitate behaviour management be enforced on the student, and would not seem to be consistent with the student being valued. Of the three discourses, the Ecosocio model is consistent with inclusion (Harwood & McMahon, 2014) and will therefore be discussed later.

Most of the Annual Reviews listed medical terms and focused on difficulties that required external behaviour management (p.208), which seemed to indicate a **biomedical model** (where the student is perceived not to be in control of their actions) consistent with the in-actively challenging child discourse (Harwood & McMahon, 2014). Such Reviews seemed to offer little detail of students' learning or achievements; perhaps using students' labels to defend their lack of progress. This misdirection to labelling rather than achievement indicates viewing these students' progress as being less important; for example, teachers perceiving James to have "regressed" at mainstream primary nonetheless felt his needs were being met (p.158). As noted earlier, in some cases (including Eminem) attitudes varied between teachers, and James' classmates seemed more supportive than the teacher (p.208).

Although most of these documents were balanced and carefully worded, a few were less so, fitting in with the **biopsychosocial** model, pro-actively challenging child discourse (where the student chooses to challenge) (Harwood & McMahon, 2014). Some comments were surprisingly direct, with Eminem labelled "a compulsive liar" (p.163). This also seems

consistent with observations that students labelled with EBD (and displaying challenging

behaviour like this student) are disliked (Cook & Cameron, 2010); with the list of failed

strategies suggesting this student (and Lydya2 p.186) were being positioned as "beyond help"

(Sims-Schouten et al., 2019). The causes of challenging behaviour in mainstream seemed not

to be addressed; even when these had been documented as peer initiated (Eminem p.163).

Harwood and McMahon's concerns about the impact of teachers switching between

discourses are brought to fruition in the **mixed messages** of Lydya2's Annual Review (Harwood

& McMahon, 2014). It acknowledged that Lydya2's challenging behaviour was caused by

regulatory barriers to his participation:

> the Key Stage 2 curriculum does not meet [L]'s needs and he is finding the
> structure and routine of the day very difficult … finds this increasingly difficult and
> frustrating *and consequently* his behaviour has become a major concern (p.185,
> italics my own).

This perspective would seem consistent with the **ecosocio** discourse (discussed later),

acknowledging that Lydya2 was reacting to external stimuli (Harwood & McMahon, 2014).

Although this challenging behaviour was noted to result from external barriers, these were not

addressed. Instead of being withdrawn from a curriculum which did not meet his needs, this

student still participated in lessons such as Physical Education (p.185) with one-to-one

behaviour management and (despite the class structure and curriculum not being appropriate

for him) was only removed from other classes once his behaviour had become challenging

(p.186). A second discourse was apparent, the **biopsychosocial** model, suggesting he was

asserting agency through challenging behaviour, the report noting he "cannot be trusted to

keep his hands to himself … he is beginning to deal with the consequences of his actions but

this is not sustained" (p.186). A **biomedical** model perspective is indicated by the use of five

medical terms in the Annual Report, implying the in-actively challenging child who cannot help

their actions but is also limited by them (and also in need of management), again contrasting

with a view of a student who "cannot be trusted" to behave or whose behaviour is triggered by external barriers. Harwood and McMahon note that switching between discourses can lead to "undefined medicalization" (Harwood & McMahon, 2014:926); but my concerns here are with the messages received by students. As this mainstream primary had been able to note challenging behaviour was a response to barriers, then this would indicate the student being valued. However, the consequent mixed messages that perhaps this behaviour was innate, or an active choice, both of which requiring the imposition of behavioural management via a TA, would suggest a lack of value. The impact of these mixed messages on an already distressed and marginalised student might well have contributed to the worsening of their behaviour in mainstream and their aggression towards adults in the school. This could have been softened by a supportive TA; but unfortunately, this was not how the relationship was experienced.

The classroom support experienced by disabled students in mainstream education varied, further adding to the perception of not having value. As noted in Figure 11 (p.138), all the students were now labelled with Severe Learning Difficulties and had Statemented hours; yet there was no uniform pattern of these students' prior experience of TA support. It is hard to confirm which students did have TA support, as handover material was not always clear and some students had no recollections of TAs to share. Several students did not mention TAs in their recollections of mainstream schools, so if they did have the documented TA support (p.138) this relationship was not significant to them. An SEN statement can be argued to present a measure of severity of difference (Chatzitheochari et al., 2016), but the experiences here fit with evidence that different schools assess students' needs differently:

> These children would be on like – four or five in one of those schools, but because they're just normal here to be like that – so we would only statement the absolute absolutes (Holt, 2004a).

While Holt's example might reflect inclusive practice at one mainstream primary, avoiding undertaking an SEN assessment has impact beyond that school. Without an assessment of student's needs, students like Bob can enter mainstream secondary without any support and Bella's needs can be underestimated. This reflects a gatekeeping process (Ekornes, 2015; Cornish, 2017) restricting access to assessment for students with "special" (or "unmet") needs and therefore limiting support (which requires an authorised label). Increasing financial pressures mean resources are further limited in English mainstream schools (BBC, 2018; National Education Union, 2019), leaving students at the mercy of exclusionary barriers. Schools are able to use funds for alternatives to TA support such as nurture groups; classes with a smaller teacher student ratio, as experienced by Eminem (p.163) at a mainstream secondary. His experiences at that school appeared substantially more negative than his mainstream primary school experiences due to bullying (p.161), consistent with nurture groups being composed of disparate, challenging individuals and lacking the nurturing environment necessary for such students (Nash et al., 2016).

Worsening the situation, the allocation of mainstream TA support appeared to be linked with behaviour control due to risk through behaviour or safeguarding concerns (Lydya2 p.185, Thomas p.175, Bella p.152) rather than the more typical role of differentiation (Webster & Blatchford, 2019). Thomas (who had inadvertently hurt peers), James and Lydya2 (both actively distressed and sometimes violent) all had one to one TA support while others with similar needs but without challenging behaviour were unsupported. Bella (seen as vulnerable) had some TA support but was also supervised at breaks and not allowed out. Several students (including James and Lydya2, both with full time support) were recorded as having TA support but made no mention of mainstream TAs at all, indicating the relationship was not significant, and when asked directly they denied having a TA. Their Annual Reports did mention TA support but focused on challenging behaviour (p.158, p.186); which could indicate the TA was

used for behaviour management. This might also explain why these students did not recognise this as being TA support. Thomas the Tank Engine remembered sharing a desk with his mainstream primary TA, forming a support "island" (Butt, 2016; Slater & Gazeley, 2019) where physical isolation has been argued to exacerbate the "social disconnect" from peers (Baines et al., 2015:21) and teacher (Blatchford et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2010). While such working practices have been criticised for distancing students from peer and teacher interactions (Webster & Blatchford, 2013); using this arrangement for challenging students seems to suggest a deliberate decision to remove them from social aspects of learning. Despite sharing his history of interpersonal conflict in the interviews, Thomas spent some time talking about his later TAs, with whom he clearly had good relationships. Thomas' own narrative and the Annual Review from his (third) mainstream primary school assertion that there were "no behavioural problems once he is in school" (p.175) might indicate that TA support had initially been provided for behavioural management (earlier TA relationships evoking fewer positive memories for Thomas), but this had changed over time (perhaps due to the establishment of a supportive relationship). The parallel between isolation for support and disciplinary isolation here (Power & Taylor, 2020) is hard to avoid and appears to be reflected in the disengagement from mainstream learning seen in James and Lydya2 (p.158 and p.185). Following an Ecosocio discourse (Harwood & McMahon, 2014), we might ask whether choosing to isolate these students from peers and teacher may have produced a stricter environment and (perhaps unintentionally) escalated behaviour (Way, 2011; Nash et al., 2016). In particular, the rewards system put in place with Lydya2 in mainstream primary (p.186) would have been unsuccessful without a good student-teacher relationship as a foundation for this (Shreeve et al., 2002; Armstrong, 2021); and the complete absence of this teacher (and TA) in his account of mainstream life indicates a lack of such relationship. Given the current crisis in funding for SEN in schools (National Education Union, 2019) and the wider current school funding crisis in general (Andrews & Lawrence, 2018) limitations on TA support are likely to increase. Conversely, it has been argued that TA support for pupils labelled with SEN precipitated the

school funding crisis (Halliday, 2018; National Education Union, 2019). I would counter that if disabled students' educational needs were built into mainstream provision, there would be no need for additional funding. If TA resources are routinely unavailable, alternative ways to access the curriculum must be evaluated. Restrictions to special educational places have compounded this, resulting in disabled students having no access to normative mainstream learning but not meeting eligibility criteria for special education.

In contrast with earlier studies noting the use of special educational referral as a "pressure valve" to remove students perceived as problematic from the mainstream educational system (Tomlinson, 1982; 2017) or from teachers' workload (rationalised as helping students gain additional support) (Pijl et al., 1999), mainstream schools in this part of England appeared to be experiencing pressure not to refer students even though they were unable to access the mainstream curriculum. When discussing the criteria for entry to Special Secondary, the Head had underlined the restrictions, noting that due to the limited availability of special education places, it was not sufficient to have only one diagnostic label. Students who attended the school also had at least one complicating factor, if not more; including speech differences (e.g., Bob, Horrid Henry, Lydya2), autism (Thomas the Tank Engine and potentially Elsa), physical health issues (Elsa, Bella and Horrid Henry) and sensory differences (Bob). As with TA support, it seemed that increased risk (e.g., Eminem and Lydya2 p.194) or safeguarding (e.g., Bella) raised the priority of students, enabling them to meet the restrictive criteria of a sought-after special education placement. A label of SLD seemed to be instrumental, in line with findings that students with this label are placed in special education even when suitable mainstream provision exists (Shaw, 2017). While Bella's behaviour in class sometimes led to time in isolation (p.148), the request for more supervision outside the classroom resulted in the school declining to offer her a continued place; mirroring the comment that "if a child … needed support at lunch times, then they would be in a special school" (Lindsay et al., 2005:92). This

narrative, culminating in Bella's transfer to special education against her and her parents' wishes, echoes a similar incident from an Australian school, used as the focus of an ethical debate over whether actions which make society less inclusive can ever be in the interests of the many (Lewin, 2014); which would be equally true here. This would seem to further support an underlying discourse of disabled students not being valued. Having explored presence within teacher and school narratives of Harwood and McMahon's exclusionary discourses, next I will briefly explore the passing or masking behaviour these discourses have prompted in disabled students.

Within this study, students have reflected on their experiences of their previous mainstream schools as well as their current school, giving an indication of behavioural responses these produced. In addition to challenging behaviour, students also expressed themselves by seeking to fit in with the normative/neurotypical culture; "passing" by not drawing attention to their difference/lack of access (Goffman, 1963; Lehane, 2016) and "masking" or "camouflaging" by adopting a different social persona (Moyse & Porter, 2015; Cook et al., 2018). Some students tried (with varying degrees of success) to "pass", with some teachers seemingly unaware of the barriers faced by students who did not disrupt classroom work but were going through the motions in order to fit in (Bob p.145, Elsa p.177). Peers were more cognizant of differences ignored by teachers (Bob p.140), leading to bullying (e.g., Bob p.139). Elsa in particular seems to have withdrawn (in common with some of Allan's more peripheral students some of whom also had learning difficulty labels) Allan arguing that this was not a social role so much as an attempt to become invisible (Allan, 1999a), this also fits with the perspective that "[c]hildren with learning difficulties … easily ended up in stereotypical roles: the most withdrawn or worst behaved at school" (Ytterhus, 2012:211). While Bob and Elsa might be viewed as engaging in "passing" (Goffman, 1963), Bob's copywriting to conform to classroom practice although he could not read (Bob p.145;146) might fit better with an ableist

discourse since someone must have encouraged this to prioritise the "illusion of normalcy" in classroom activity (Ashby, 2010:350). This is not to say that appropriate adjustments are unproblematic, with perceived different treatment causing resentment in peers (Broomhead, 2013c), deepening social divides (Reay & Wiliam, 1999) leaving disabled students vulnerable to bullying. Bella and Horrid Henry both seemed to have engaged in masking (Cook et al., 2018), adopting outgoing, sociable identities; with Bella vulnerable to peers and Horrid Henry often alone. Another possible masker was Eminem; who adopted the other persona identified by Ytterhus, the "worst behaved" (Ytterhus, 2012) to entertain a mainstream peer group (who were simultaneously bullying him) by deliberately bending the rules. This expression of agency does not conform to those identified as resulted in social inclusion (Allan, 1999a; 1999b). The lack of success in gaining social agency by these students in mainstream does highlight the need for external intervention (by school staff) to facilitate their social inclusion.

This sense of not being valued carries throughout these students' experiences. Mainstream schools cannot benefit from their presence as they cannot meet standardised academic targets or the behavioural requirements of mainstream school settings. As noted, this discourse can pervade the entire mainstream school experience for some disabled students and can have serious consequences for them. For many of the students here, their experience of mainstream education can be summarised as rejection (Page, 2017:390). These students were not equipped to manage the level of social, behavioural and cognitive skill that was being expected of them in mainstream education (e.g., Bob p.146). At every turn, they were being informed that they were "less of a person" (Hargreaves, 2019) than their peers; not just academically, but in terms of their developmental level, reinforced by behaviour management support. We now move to explore the opposite experience: that of being valued.

6.2   Supportive relationships and being valued

Student/educator relationships had the biggest impact on students' experiences; able to enhance barriers experienced in mainstream settings but also to reduce them. Although such relationships are considered to be an important aspect of teaching (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017) and were present in special educational settings; in mainstream settings, these relationships were instead with TAs (where these were allocated and focused on learning, not behavioural management) and Head Teachers, who had the power to withdraw students from class for one-to-one work (p.182) or make alternative provision. Although such provision has been criticised as a form of exclusion (Contact a Family, 2013; Power & Taylor, 2020), here this supported unmet needs, resulting in a positive impact for students (p.172). While the use of TAs to act as proxy mainstream teachers is contentious (Butt, 2016; Webster & Blatchford, 2019) as is TA caring in relationships (Clarke, 2021); supportive TA relationships produced classroom learning engagement and a positive school experience for these students.

While mainstream teachers were not able to provide a consistent relationship at times, one area where they were particularly successful was in supporting students facing bullying. Bullying is sometimes treated as a separate problem outside school (MENCAP, 2008) the impact of which can be altered by peers (Frederickson, 2010) and families (Chiu et al., 2017), but this study goes further to assert that teachers have an essential role to play in asserting an inclusive mainstream school culture (Faris & Felmlee, 2014). The attitudes and actions of teacher to such situations made a vital difference. These students' experiences confirm that bullying remains a key issue for students labelled with learning disabilities (Norwich & Kelly, 2004; MENCAP, 2008) and where teachers took steps to address bullying this altered the class culture, resulting in a significant change in student experience. Some mainstream teachers were not willing to address bullying (Bob p.140), but those who did had a significantly positive impact on students' experience of school. When students felt teachers were taking concerns

seriously and took prompt action against bullying incidents, students nevertheless reported

feeling "safe" at the mainstream and special schools involved (James p.180; HH p.191): even

when bullying was still (at times) present in the setting (James). Such actions asserted an

inclusive discourse, with students feeling valued as part of the community. This represents a

new, positive insight which might reflect an area for further research. It also indicates that

bullying intervention does not have to be perfect but "good-enough" (Winnicott, 1965) to have

a positive impact on students. The impact of teachers in setting and maintaining an inclusive

class culture (Faris & Felmlee, 2014) influenced how students' peers viewed them and

interacted with them in mainstream primary and special education but not in mainstream

secondary experiences; perhaps mitigated by a stronger peer influence on school culture.

The key to positive student/teacher or student/TA relationships seemed to be inherent within

the idea of professional love. In special educational settings, without the external pressures of

normative standards, teachers were able to express their "professional love" (Page, 2017;

2018) for students, accepting them for who they were. While the term professional love more

usually relates to an early childhood setting, its use here is relevant for several reasons. Firstly,

the developmental stage of these students was not always consistent with their chronological

age. Secondly, these students experiences of being devalued in mainstream educational

settings could be described as traumatic with some students in need of a "holding"

environment where they could be supported while this damage was repaired (Winnicott,

1965). This might be a strong statement, but consider the narratives of teachers, detailing the

process of one student's transfer:

> it took a long time, in that first term, to build a relationship with him whereby he
> came to understand that a) we wouldn't accept that [behaviour], but b) we'd still
> love him and nurture him (Lydya2's teacher p.187).

This account does not swerve from asserting love, although some practitioners have found using the word challenging and in need of qualification if used at all (Page, 2017; Morris, 2021). This special school and its teachers understood that this student, expressing himself at that time through very challenging behaviour, needed to be loved before change could happen. This seems consistent with both a holding environment and the concept of professional love. Teachers at Special Secondary mentioned in this context that they were working with "stage not age"; meaning that the students' developmental stage was considered in their practice and responded to, rather than expecting the student to operate beyond this level (as had been expected in mainstream education).

For mainstream teachers in England, in the face of a strong discourse imposed by regulatory standards and rewarded through school funding and teacher pay, accepting a disabled student for themselves and valuing them as an equal member of the community is not an easy choice. It required personal strength, commitment to a challenging path and a willingness to continue to assert an opposing narrative in the face of "ethical boundaries reflecting dominant discourses" (Morris, 2021:124) present within exclusionary educational structures. Such action is consistent with Morris' term ethical subversion. In the same way as the childcare providers in Morris' work, the mainstream teachers who have been able to subvert these boundaries cannot do so throughout their school day; but are able to bend the rules at times when it is important for the student and it is possible for them to do so. There is a difference in the expression of these practices here, though; in that the practitioners in Morris' study were prepared to break boundaries for their young students in relation to an existing bond between them, perhaps in relation to a 'key person' role as encouraged by early childcare regulation. For example, "Maria" states "it's just nice to have that little special link with a child … I feel just so warm and needed" (Morris, 2021:135) while "Anna" confirms "boundaries can sometimes be crossed when [practitioners] are attached to the child … I have been in that situation

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myself" (Morris, 2021:133). The nature of the students' differences here (such as communication differences), complicated the development of such attachment. These required adults to adapt, with teachers not always able or willing to do so (Ashby, 2010).

Mainstream patterns were varied, with one (Bob) being excluded from nursery while he "*did pretty well*" at mainstream primary (p.139); while another (Lydya2) enjoyed nursery but struggled with mainstream primary. Nonetheless, when mainstream teachers were able to assert (even isolated) ethical subversion, it was a significant experience for students. It encouraged teachers to assess and address barriers (including regulatory barriers) for their students, consistent with the Ecosocio model (Harwood & McMahon, 2014).

> The teacher may question if the physical environment, classroom routine, relationships, lesson design, timing, pacing, content and resources are supportive. They may be encouraged to query if lessons are engaging, or whether the teachers are culturally sensitive to their students' lives. Education texts using these discourses reminded teachers to constantly reflect on curriculum and pedagogy (Harwood & McMahon, 2014:924)

This position seems consistent with students being valued in prioritising the student over educational structures, and is able to identify such structures as potentially causing harm. Yet in England regulatory barriers are embedded within outcome measures and teacher pay; and are difficult to address from within a mainstream school which must conform with targets produced by these structures. This backdrop complicates student/teacher relationships.

Despite this, some comments in Annual Reviews (particularly for Thomas the Tank Engine) reflected elements of this model, giving a holistic account of the student activity in the classroom without using any labels, reflecting progress as well as challenges (p.175). The ability of educators to see beyond behaviour, and grasp "the connection between unmet learning needs and challenging behaviour" (Shevlin et al., 2013) or "open to the limits of knowledge and … poised towards depth, dissatisfied with prevailing illusions" (Veck, 2012:270), seemed apparent here. Modelling positive relationships with students seemed to produce positive behaviour from students in turn. Students chose to have positive classroom interactions with Special Secondary peers (as discussed on p.237), saying kind and supportive

things to classmates (Lydya2 p.184), initiating conversation (Bella p.150) and praising their

classmates' work (Horrid Henry p.167) or just making physical contact with students who were

having a bad day (p.156). They were also able to ask peers for help (Lydya2 and Bob

respectively during the Focus Group) and help others in return (Lydya2 p.184). Given the

difficulties expressed by their previous schools, it is worth reinforcing that these are the same

students; now developing their own skills within the context of the nurturing relationship

required for child development (Armstrong, 2021).

For two students the absence of a student/teacher relationship had been filled by a supportive

TA acting as a proxy. In some cases, this could offer a new start and a supportive relationship.

Thomas and Bella had particularly good relationships with their mainstream Teaching

Assistants, both students having made educational progress and with positive memories of

their respective schools (Bella p.147 and Thomas p.171). While there have been concerns

about the use of TAs, with a lower level of qualification than teachers, being responsible for

teaching those with the greatest need (Giangreco et al., 2005; Marks, 2012; Webster &

Blatchford, 2019) this did not appear to be the case here. Through supportive relationships

with a TA (e.g., p.148, p.172) these students adjusted to the pace of mainstream work and

could access the curriculum. This research seems to disprove the assertion that if TAs are seen

as "mother or friend", it indicates a need for support provision to be reassessed (Broer et al.,

2005:426), providing an opportunity for re-engagement of students who may be isolated

and/or disengaged. Such school relationships correlate with students having a "sense of

belonging", which "appears to make an important contribution toward the way in which they

[students] engage with education" (Hope, 2012:741). The data here instead support Clarke's

concern that downplaying the importance of a genuine rapport with a TA seeks to devalue

"motherly inferences inherent in TAs' role", making "TAs' work 'invisible' and 'peripheral'"

(Clarke, 2021:5), giving stronger support for such relationships as an essential part of working

with vulnerable students. Given Thomas' altercations with peers and Bella's vulnerability to social pressure, relationships with teaching assistants seem to have been one of the few consistent interpersonal relationships in their school day. This kind of support is referred to as "a supported ego" role, undertaken by Norwegian TAs, modelling social interaction and coaching students in interactional skills for social play outside the classroom (Dolva et al., 2011). While some schools had identified students' need for this kind of approach (for example, Horrid Henry p.168), it did not appear to have been put in place. While Broer would no doubt regard this with concern, these mainstream TA relationships seemed to have a reciprocal element, TAs making a leaving gift for Thomas and inviting Bella over for tea. In the absence of being valued by teachers at their respective schools, the decision for a TA to offer a supportive, valuing role concords with the argument that TAs, despite low status and pay, take action to improve social justice for disabled students (Rutherford, 2011). TAs also have the opportunity to mediate with teachers and educational decision making for their students. Although the importance of gatekeepers cannot be underestimated (Swartz, 2009; Cornish, 2017), adults labelled with learning difficulties have previously highlighted the importance of "interpersonal mediation" (Nind & Seale, 2009:278) on their behalf; helping gatekeepers better understand them. In a school setting, TAs have inside access to educational gatekeepers, with mediation being noted as an issue where TAs "could make a big difference" (Nind & Seale, 2009:281), which seems to have been the case here. As discussed earlier, students working with a TA but with a disciplinary rather than supportive relationship (e.g., Lydya2, James) had not experienced this as being with a TA, nor had that made any educational progress. In the case of Lydya2, the relationship he had with his Head Teacher was the most supportive he experienced at his mainstream primary school.

Lydya2 spoke of his Head Teacher at mainstream primary with great respect, marking this as qualitatively different from other relationships there. Lydya2's headmaster was an isolated

positive factor in his mainstream primary experience (p.182), which was particularly significant

given his social isolation otherwise. Although within-school barriers to presence such as illegal

exclusions and within-school segregation have been criticised as a form of exclusion (Contact a

Family, 2013; Power & Taylor, 2020), these were not perceived in this way by these students.

While Thomas was taken out of class at predetermined times, the alternative activities he

undertook (authorised by his Head Teacher) supported unmet needs like social skills

development (as discussed on p.226). The time and energy invested in thinking about what

Thomas enjoyed, working out a plan to develop his skills and giving him a role in the

community (comparable with that deliberately engineered by Special Secondary teachers

discussed later) was particularly noteworthy. It was significant in his positive engagement

(p.172), enjoyment and feeling of accomplishment at this mainstream primary. Head Teachers

seemed to take a personal interest in students where parents were actively involved.

For several students, the support of their parents on their schooling was crucial. For James

and Elsa, their parents became involved due to their concern about the distress they were

experiencing. For James, Thomas and Bob, their parents tried to resolve the issues with the

school before requesting a move to special education (James p.158); Thomas' mother taking a

job at a mainstream primary he attended. Bob's parents gained support to get him assessed

and transferred from their local councillors (who would have had the necessary skills to

mediate on his behalf as well as the power to act); getting him transferred despite Special

Secondary having no vacant places (p.140). While elsewhere this has been described as

"parental pressure" on admissions (as noted for language units) (Lindsay et al., 2005:91); this

misrepresents parental concern. Mediation requires a certain level of communication and

negotiation skills, coupled with an understanding of how things operate which might be seen

to be more prevalent in middle class parents (Ball, 2006), but all parents would (I hope) try and

help their child get the resources they need. From a social model viewpoint, I would argue

that the lack of support for language is the problem and that rather than parents having to

mediate to gain a scarce but essential resource (such as speech and language support), we

should be exploring innovative ways to meet existing needs. While both parents were

mentioned by some students, it was the mothers specifically who ensured that their child's

needs were met, in line with findings noting they:

> shoulder the majority of the caring role and take on the job of advocating for their
> child in meetings with health and education professionals (Runswick-Cole, 2007).

In such cases, mothers are challenging gatekeepers who restrict spending on resources for

SEN(D) (Runswick-Cole, 2007; Gentleman, 2016). This is not unproblematic, with funding to

schools increasingly limited (Andrews & Lawrence, 2018; BBC, 2018; Richardson, 2018);

indicating barriers to gaining funded TA support have increased since these students were in

mainstream education. For some students, friends had a positive impact on their experience.

Pre-existing friendships seemed to play a significant role in Thomas and Bella's previous

positive experiences of mainstream school. Thomas already knew mainstream peers from

attending a pre-school play group, while Bella had been part of a stable friendship group since

primary school; matching the long-standing friendship networks of non-disabled students

(Adderley, 2015). These students' experiences confirm the argument that "time and repeated

encounters helped forge meaningful friendships" (Holt et al., 2017:1368). These relationships

were not unproblematic, with both students uncertain why some former friends were no

longer speaking to them (e.g., p.173), but provided them with some social stability. Horrid

Henry also reported a best friend at mainstream primary; but due to a lack of detail, this

relationship has not been discussed here. While these students had both recounted negative

experiences at mainstream (negative interpersonal interactions for Thomas (p.173), and not

being picked/paired up with during sports activities for Bella (p.147)) these were viewed by

those students as isolated incidents within a more positive setting. Neither student mentioned

bullying or described their experiences in this way, which could concur with the finding that social support from friends (and to some extent family) can lessen the impact of bullying incidents (Rothon et al., 2011). Although ability grouping does affect self and peer perceptions of capability (Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Marks, 2013), it is notable that this does not impact on existing friendships (Adderley, 2015): underlining the importance of such networks in mainstream schools. The impact of pre-existing friendships appears to be underexplored in the literature; although Thomas' experience would suggest that such friendships might be deliberately generated for disabled students by taking advantage of pre-school groups. Students with friends in mainstream school appeared to have better engagement overall and more positive memories of mainstream, suggesting that peer networks can support the presence, participation, and achievement of SLD labelled students in mainstream settings. For autistic students, who did not perceive what others saw as their marginalisation, this appeared to act as a protective factor, although it did not support them in making friends or dealing with relationship challenges. Students also appeared to experience greater belonging from being part of a cohort of peers at Special Secondary with whom they can keep up academically, but only in special education due to the impact of the standards agenda.

In terms of positive peer attitudes, disability studies-led interventions have focused on raising awareness around disability with non-disabled peers (Beckett, 2009; Beckett & Buckner, 2012; Beckett, 2014), or focusing on disabled role models in a similar way to Black history month (Shah et al., 2015). There is a range of literature on interventions to support the development of interpersonal skills among disabled students, but this tends to be medical model and very little has focused on student voice. One notable exception is a long term project working with support groups for disabled students who might be at risk of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) (but were not necessarily labelled as such), which seems to have been particularly effective (Mowat, 2010; 2014). While Mowat acknowledges the potential for

othering, in that students had felt stigmatised by being identified for support group (SG) involvement (and which in turn had implications for their voluntary attendance), a focus group of support group members were "unanimous in agreeing that participation within the SG had been worthwhile for them and had made a difference to their lives" (Mowat, 2014:166). The small group setting of the Support Group produced a series of variables which were effective in students' development. The growth of "trusting, respectful relationships" within these groups and wider implications for "[f]ostering inclusive values and behaviour within the wider school community" (Mowat, 2014:167) seem in line with the experience of being valued and does reflect the importance of being valued within supportive relationships found here. Unlike their mainstream peers, participants here managed to achieve the scarce resource of a special education place, removing them from mainstream school and the exclusionary discourse which limited their agency. While the role of agency in students' inclusion within the school community has been noted (Allan, 1999a; 1999b), many of these students were unable to assert their agency in positive ways in mainstream schools. Although the ability to express agency appears to be intrinsic, successful communication of agency depends on others listening and understanding such actions (Davis & Watson, 2000). The key to this here seemed to be the quality of relationship with teachers and TAs and their role in supporting agency.

In contrast with the isolated good relationships experienced by students at mainstream, all the students talked about the relationships they had with a variety of teachers and TAs at Special Secondary. Most mentioned one or more of their current teachers, but some also mentioned previous teachers at the school, with whom they had developed a strong bond. The impact of positive student-teacher relationships was confirmed by these students. Teachers at Special Secondary played a key role in establishing community and welcoming these students within it. They did so by seeing the value in disabled students (as some teachers and TAs within their mainstream schools had also demonstrated), actively giving roles and responsibilities to

students to formalise their community membership, rewarding positive engagement and recognising all forms of achievement. This resulted in students expressing confidence in their subject skills, which boosted their ability to engage with learning. While other research has emphasised the agency of young disabled people (Allan, 1999a; Goodley & Rapley, 2002; Ytterhus, 2012); something new emerged from the stories of these students, in that their inclusion (and re-engagement with learning) was actively supported by teachers and TAs in Special Secondary (as it had been by some head teachers in mainstream primaries). These teachers gave students' roles and responsibilities, set individual targets and celebrated achievement. While such strategies have been used elsewhere, here they seemed to have a significant impact on the student's experience of belonging and ability to participate.

One aspect that students valued was the experience of being entrusted with a role or task. While Bella had been a prefect at her previous school, these responsibilities were more universal at Special Secondary; with most students being asked to undertake tasks. In particular, Lydya2's teacher noticed that he had responded positively to being asked to do something for her (p.185). She now regularly asked him to undertake tasks during class, such as going to pick up printing, or taking a message to the receptionist. During class observations, I saw several students being asked to undertake class roles such as change the date on the class board, tidy up after activities or make drinks for everyone. Some students had specific responsibilities (Horrid Henry cleaned the fish tank, for example p.167) appreciation for which was expressed by teachers in front of peers, and the school seemed to value collaboration rather than competition as would be more usual in mainstream (Reay & Wiliam, 1999). Special Secondary also organised a range of after-school and lunchtime activities for students, one student noting: "*[i]t's good for the staff to do that, 'cos it's getting [students] out [of] the house*"; of importance to him due to his social isolation at home (p.142).

Several of the students here either were or had been members of the Student Board of the school (e.g., Lydya2, Bella and Bob), and the school had deliberately begun to expand this work with a range of sub-committees on topics such as environmental awareness to allow more students to take part. The literature does explore the role of student councils, with at least one special school (Case, 1978; Fielding, 2011) where every student and teacher had the right to make points and vote on issues at the school meeting (Fielding, 2011; 2013), to which I would refer the reader for more information. I have not explored the role of students in school decision making here; but the use of such techniques by Special Secondary in order to support the inclusion of students is interesting. Several of these students had expressed themselves in negatively perceived ways in school, and would for that reason not have been considered appropriate for such a role (Thomson, 2011). The benefits of such work for disabled students has been argued to be substantially greater for their interpersonal skill development (Thomson, 2011), which does seem to be supported by these students experiences at Special Secondary.

Teachers noted that behavioural change was achieved with much work by both students and teachers over a long time. Yet what we do not know here is how these negative patterns of behaviour came about. With some students, we know that this may have been produced through the bullying or social exclusion they experienced; but other students have indicated no such cause for their actions. Regardless, there must have been a trigger in the students' environment. It is puzzling that some students have not indicated a trigger, although this might indicate the behavioural development work they undertook; indicated in supporting data from teachers (e.g., p.187); through working with students to develop a greater sense of responsibility for actions, they may no longer view these as having been prompted by an external situation or person. There is an inference in the data here that part of this process of change also involved undoing learned behavioural responses, which could still be triggered in

the wrong circumstances. Given the hard, consistent work necessary at Special Secondary to undo these patterns, the development of such patterns (and presence of triggers) in mainstream primary and secondary schools is an issue for concern. Having established the exclusionary nature of regulatory barriers and the pattern of teachers holding negative attitudes to these disabled students (in addition to peer social exclusion and/or bullying), it might not be unreasonable to suggest there might be a link here. Further work would be needed to evaluate this; but this would have to take place at the mainstream schools in which such patterns might form.

Most of the students felt part of the school community at Special Secondary. During the focus group, several of them recounted the experience of taking part in a regional sports competition for special schools, and of the coach trip to the event and back. They expressed pride in their school and supporting their school team (p.142). Many of the students visibly brightened when talking about Special Secondary during the interviews, with the exception of Thomas, who initially said he wanted to return to mainstream, and Bob, who while not enthusiastic admitted "*staff are a bit better*" at Special Secondary (p.173, p.142). At Special Secondary, students seemed to be more able to make friends, with Bella noting that a local Learning Difficulty-specific training centre was "*one of our schools*" and that students in special educational schools were "*the same*" (p.149), confirming experiences reported elsewhere (Holt et al., 2017). While Holt *et al*. observe that their students have no uniformity, I would suggest that their difference is their sameness; their lack of normalcy (Davis, 1997; Davis & Watson, 2001) tentatively suggesting a disabled identity. The students' sense of ease about their perceived sameness fits in with observations that within "special needs contexts … young people learned to feel 'equal' and appreciated and to make their first friends" (Moriña Diez, 2010). Students at Special Secondary routinely helped each other and asked for help, suggesting interdependency (Shakespeare, 2000), contrasting with mainstream competition,

with students internalisation of their grade-based position and the value judgement that runs alongside this (Marks, 2013). Conversely, at Special Secondary every student I spoke to identified subjects they were good at. James, like others, was good at Mathematics (p.156), adding that he took after his dad in this. Achievement in Mathematics in particular is argued to be strongly correlated with self-esteem (Booth & Gerard, 2011). Given James' prior difficulty engaging with learning in mainstream school and that ability grouping (indicated by the process of disapplication at the students' primary schools) can have a negative impact on future subject engagement (Marks, 2012), this confidence in subject skills seemed to run counter to what might be expected.

Having established the role that Special Secondary teachers have played through valuing students, we will look at the work Special Secondary undertook in relation to student's personal development. A good example is that of Lydya2, who had transferred to a special primary where some Special Secondary staff had previously taught. On arrival, this distressed and challenging student was welcomed and valued, staff undertaking a holistic review of the challenges he faced (in line with Harwood and McMahon's Ecosocio model). In the case of this specific student; his difficulty in being understood had affected all areas of mainstream school experience; but it was not until he transferred to special education that his teachers looked into the issue. Having taken the time to explore this, they discovered that he should have been receiving in-school support throughout mainstream primary with a speech and language programme which had been written for him (p.187). This gives an effective demonstration of what might otherwise be hidden work by special educational teachers and which, it should be stressed, had not been explored by his mainstream primary. It might be that, due to his challenging behaviour, it was not considered possible; but without it his ability to communicate left him functionally excluded from social interaction. If this had been instituted

earlier (perhaps with some of the TA time which had been instead allocated for behaviour management), this might have changed his mainstream primary experience.

In addition to the speech and language work, Special Secondary undertook work with this student on behavioural targets but ensuring an effective attachment relationship was part of this (p.187). Behavioural targets were valued as much as curriculum-based learning, with behavioural improvement celebrated on an equal footing with academic success. While not every student came with challenging behaviour (although several more had), all students were holistically valued in this way. Hearing teacher's narratives, they all had a good sense of who their students were as individuals; their strengths as well as their challenges (e.g., p.164, 180). This approach is consistent with both an Ecosocio model and being valued. They celebrated how students had grown and developed, coming out of themselves and becoming more social, making friends and helping others. While this might be viewed as a social curriculum, a "holding" environment (Winnicott, 1965) was being put in place through the expression of "professional love" (Page, 2018), enabling the trauma of their social and educational exclusion to be repaired. The quality of a student's relationships with educators has been asserted to have positive impact on "participation and attendance" (Grimm, 2009), which seemed evident in the educational and social engagement shown by these previously disengaged students. Special Secondary gave students access to a whole range of alternative qualifications, including pre-GCSE level Mathematics. During assembly, students were presented with certificates in such subjects in front of the whole school but also for meeting discrete behavioural targets covering particular interactions. This and other factors seemed to result in an increased confidence in learning observed here (p.232); contrasting with their lack of confidence and disengagement in mainstream settings (p.216) in line with other research (Marks, 2014). This led me to produce certificates marking students' research engagement (Appendix D p.373).

Although there has been discussion of a second set of assessment targets to more successfully adapt to learners with a different level of ability, it is hard to know if this would prove effective or simply create a second set of issues, with those learners who they fail to meet these new targets struggling in the same ways as previously. I would suggest that individualised learning plans personalised to the student would be the most effective way to tackle the current problems, as demonstrated here, with social and interactional targets as important as lesson-based goals. As is often the way with disability-led adjustments, such an approach would also benefit other students who may struggle with some areas of development and/or learning.

6.3 Summary

In this chapter I have looked at the information that has arisen from the research here, as expressed views from students, observational data from classroom and additional observations, data from interviews with teachers or teaching assistants as nominated by the students to talk about them, and with some reflections from the perspective of the students' previous schools. In relation to these, I have identified the aspects where the data concords with the literature and those areas where I feel some new information has been gained, in terms of a new perspective on the issue from the point of view of disabled students. Having explored all this information, the next chapter, Conclusions, will reflect on the strengths and limitation of the current study in terms of its evidence base, identify what this new information may suggest to enhance inclusion within schools and outline areas for further study.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

In this conclusion, I will first explore the strengths and limitations of the research in terms of how strong an evidence claim it can make for its findings. I will identify what the new information may suggest for potential improvements to inclusion in schools, placing the findings within the context of the research questions for this study. Suggestions for changes which could enhance existing inclusion practice will be made, to reduce existing barriers. The factors which impacted inclusion will be explored for ideas on how these factors might be encouraged or increased by people wishing to support the education of young disabled people. Patterns of student voice expression will be probed for their implications for identifying issues which might be either invisible to educators, or misinterpreted as indicative of other issues. Areas for further study will be pulled out for consideration. Finally, the knowledge gained from this research will be summarised and final statements made. While this study is not a blueprint for improving all inclusion for disabled students across England, it has accessed qualitative information about disabled students' experiences which has potential benefits for improving inclusion in schools.

7.1   Research questions

This research was focused on the school experiences of disabled students in England. In focusing on the experiences of students who had moved from mainstream educational settings to special educational settings, it was hoped this would shed light on the barriers they experienced to educational inclusion. The research used participatory methods to allow disabled students other ways to communicate to capture the perspectives of students themselves rather than teachers' perspectives to contribute to the student voice literature on this subject. While research with students labelled with SEMH/SEBD is present in the literature and a smaller amount on students labelled with dyslexia (specific learning difficulties in the UK; learning difficulties in the USA), less work has been undertaken with those students

labelled with SLD whose voices are present here. The research used open research questions to prompt students to share all types of experiences across mainstream and special educational settings, which were grouped into themes and analysed at length after the interviews; these research questions follow below.

The research questions posed were:

1   What barriers to inclusion have been experienced by disabled students in schools?

2   What factors have influenced disabled students' experiences of inclusion?

3   In what ways have disabled students used their 'voice' in school?

As indicated in Figure 12 (p.193), students experiences of barriers in mainstream settings were interlinked. The barriers presented by issues such as inaccessible curricula and the standards agenda were grouped here as regulatory barriers (having been imposed externally), and these impacted on disabled students throughout their school experiences. These were experienced most keenly in terms of barriers to achievement, but the exclusionary discourse within regulatory barriers was reflected in attitudinal and social barriers to participation. Their consequent experiences of social and educational exclusion caused distress to disabled students which, if expressed through challenging behaviour, resulted in barriers to presence through disciplinary exclusion. This distress (whether expressed through their actions and behaviour or identified by a concerned parent) appeared to be behind their eventual transfer to special educational settings. The absence of regulatory barriers and an inclusive attitude among teachers meant the discourse behind regulatory barriers did not exist in Special Secondary, the special educational setting the students currently studied in. Supportive relationships with both mainstream and special education teachers enabled students to

overcome some barriers. Once at Special Secondary (away from an exclusionary discourse) students could be supported to undo affective barriers to engagement, change previously embedded patterns of behaviour, and re-evaluate internalised barriers to achievement.

The same categories of factor appeared in the data as for barriers, suggesting they could be both positive and negative. In mainstream settings, relationships with TAs were particularly significant for some students, replacing relationships with mainstream teachers who were absent in students' narratives. Mainstream head teachers could have a positive impact on students. In special education, teachers returned to the most significant relationship.

7.2   Contribution to knowledge in relation to student voice

This study used two separate approaches to student voice, listening to not only what these students had to say about their experiences of barriers but also how they had expressed themselves in schools and their insights about this. This was a particularly useful approach, resulting in students choosing to share their previous experiences of bullying and social exclusion while their mainstream school Annual Review for the same period had focused on challenging behaviour. For some students, a negative spiral of exclusion and distress led to students trying to make themselves heard through challenging behaviour. For others, the same spiral led them to withdraw socially and/or attempt to pass or mask their difference. While this enabled teachers to deliver content without differentiating to the level required for learning engagement by these students, peers were more observant of students' differences, leading such students to be targeted for bullying and manipulation by peers.

Through student voice, we saw that it is not just social isolation or educational disengagement which drives the transfer to disabled students to special educational settings but a combination of exclusionary factors deriving from a discourse formed by regulatory barriers which then cause distress. Through the conceptual framework to this study, encompassing behaviour, we found that distress voiced through challenging behaviour could be viewed as a source of information about barriers to learning and a measure of the disaffection of students; potentially diagnosing ill health in the school or class culture. Engaging with such voices can indicate a need for cultural change.

These students' willingness to be open about their experiences gave us an insight into their world. While the system allocates TAs to support access to classroom learning, the necessity of an authorised label to have this support means unlabelled students are not eligible and cannot access learning. Rather than (as the support system in place for disabled students might suggest) just presenting barriers to classroom learning, through the eyes of these students we can see that barriers have been present across their mainstream school experience, revealing this as an exclusionary discourse. The student voice here also demonstrates the danger of a tick box approach to student voice in improvement. If these students are not asked about the boundaries of learning, then by simply focusing on how we make the existing structures more inclusive we are just moving deckchairs on the Titanic. The inclusion of students labelled with SLD needs to challenge the 'box' the educational environment is based; the standards agenda-based educational system. Without the removal of this system, schools and teachers are not supported to value these students or their educational engagement. While external pressure pushes teachers to focus on students who can achieve normative expectations (whether at primary SATs or GCSE level qualifications), the education of these students will inevitably be deprioritised in order to maintain school funding. Despite the amount of research undertaken on inclusion (to the extent that work with disabled

students is perceived not to be inclusive (Messiou, 2017)), this research shows that not only are barriers to the inclusion of disabled students are still present in mainstream education, but new barriers have been introduced through the National Curriculum and the subsequent standards agenda. From these data I would assert that not only is disability different from other protected categories, but that if we follow Messiou and do not engage with disabled students voices (Messiou, 2017) then we are missing vital information about the fitness to practice of the English educational system.

7.3   Contribution to knowledge in relation to the social model of disability

In terms of the social model of disability, this study confirms that this approach still has much to offer the field of education. While students without labels might appear to benefit from not having a recognised difference by which to be discriminated against, a label is not necessary for disabled people to be different from normative expectations and therefore experience the social barriers to inclusion which create disability according to the social model. Although the use of the social model limited any focus on the embodied experience of difference, this research has not suffered from its loss since this was not felt to be the key issue for these students. Conversely, a focus on barriers and factors gave these students a framework to describe their experiences and allowed me to group and analyse these more effectively. The issue of who is a disabled student (p.18) was also problematised in this research. These data have identified the presence in mainstream schools of disabled students with significant mind/body differences who had not previously been assessed. This relates to the issue of gatekeeping (p.69); with assessments being limited as identification of such students then necessitates the provision of support which, in the current financial crisis, is not readily available. Given financial constraints on schools, this might suggest that differentiation via TA support is not an effective strategy for inclusion since not all disabled students have access to this. This situation might explain Dessent's school leavers without qualifications; given these

data, it is possible these students are in fact disabled but unassessed (Dessent, 1987). These students also problematise alternative standards being recommended, as these would not help if disabled students are not identified; and this evidence suggests they are not.

To return to Rieser's unpicking of the situation of disabled students within a normative educational system, this research would indicate that the English mainstream educational system is not currently mirroring a social model position but is better reflected in his medical model layers. In these, Medical 1 describes a situation where students who cannot adapt to mainstream teaching are referred elsewhere and Medical 2 encompasses separate lessons and integration in some areas of school. In both layers, the structure and content of education system does not change. The experiences of these students and their mainstream teachers' perspectives would seem to indicate that despite the provision for adjustments in the educational framework, students who have not been assessed may be struggling with the normative mainstream curriculum without differentiation. This complicates Rieser's model. While Medical 1 would reflect the situation of these students, the option to transfer to special educational settings is severely restricted; even when students are perceived to be negatively impacted by mainstream educational settings. For all the students in this study (except Bella), special educational settings were not viewed as an exclusionary device (Tomlinson, 1982; Coard, 2005) but a release from a stigmatizing system (Warnock, 2005; 2010a). It seems that in order to gain access to this scarce resource, students' expressions of distress are a key factor which enables this transfer, through an increase in their perceived risk to themselves or others; which requires that damage be done to these students in order for their needs to be of a high enough priority to merit a place.

While additional pressure on mainstream schools to cater to disabled students might appear to promote inclusion, the presence of external standards means any progress which cannot meet normative standards is deprioritised. The use of the Fox position (Norwich, 2013) to explore special educational experiences and the decision to use the social model as an heuristic device support each other, but also encourage a perspective which is less black and white. The social model is linked with a black and white position on mainstreaming (UPIAS, 1975), yet the experience of these SLD students in mainstream education has been problematic, supporting the argument that to mainstream these students is to subject them to abuse (as argued by MacBeath in BBC, 2006) – or as I would argue, to structural discrimination. The standards agenda has been toxic for many of these students. This links back to the history of inclusive education, in that the education system has not been designed to prioritise learning, but to establish external standards, which limited which students were permitted to access the educational system. It is not designed to ask how people can learn, but how can people meet these standards (which are not designed to be inclusive of all students). This brings to mind Bauman's note that binary systems generate ambivalence – pass/fail – rather than (as we would hope) a learning experience. As the educational system has been noted to reproduce social class and discrimination; I would argue from these data that it also produces disability. Not all these students encountered barriers to learning initially (for example, Lydya2) but the social exclusion they experienced caused trauma to them, finally resulting in a label of severe learning difficulty to support their removal from the system.

7.4   Contribution to knowledge in relation to methodology

In order to investigate these, a portrait methodology approach (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Bottery et al., 2009) was used with eight students currently labelled with Severe Learning Difficulties who began their education in different mainstream schools but now attend the same special educational setting, here called Special Secondary. Their views were sought via a

sequence of three interviews (Schuman, 1982; Seidman, 2013) to gain an overview of their

experiences (Portraits chapter). Portrait methodology studies have looked at the experiences

of disabled students elsewhere (Connor, 2006; Dembouski, 2010) but not so far in the UK,

where the method has been used mainly to assess educational leadership (Bottery, 2007;

Bottery et al., 2008; Bottery et al., 2013) and more recently classroom culture (Hargreaves &

Affouneh, 2017). Participative methods were used within interviews to try and assist students

with verbal communication differences. In addition to the three short interviews, observations

were made of classroom activity (Appendix C, p.356 (developed from Messiou et al., 2014)) to

add immediacy (Robson, 2002) to students' narratives. These elements formed the student

portraits. Ethical permission was gained (Appendix B p.336) for interviews with teachers

nominated by students, to speak about how they had changed since started in special

education, and to access transfer notes from their previous mainstream school; both subject

to students' consent. These last data contributed some missing details (such as the point of

transfer) to the portraits, were analysed alongside other elements and contributed to findings.

The focus group was conducted at the beginning of the research, as a way to be introduced to

the students, and get some basic information about their attitudes. This was a useful

intervention, helping me to understand the students better, and suggesting lines of enquiry to

follow up in the interviews. I could have made better use of the Focus Group data produced,

as only extracts from this were incorporated in relation to specific students.

In terms of participant diversity, I had not initially anticipated that all my students would fall

within the category of White British, however it seemed that those students at Special

Secondary who came from a more diverse background had all started off in special education.

This limited the data available. My signing is not good enough to have included a British Sign

Language speaking participant, although some Deaf students did attend the school. While I had been concerned that the diversity in mind/body experiences of students would be limited by the specific target groups attracted to individual special educational schools; this turned out to be less of a problem than I had anticipated. Although linked by one common label, these students had a variety of mind/body differences and were/are very different in their approaches, temperament and attitudes.

7.5   What would I have done differently in retrospect?

This was my first time interviewing young people as opposed to adults. In retrospect, I sometimes missed the opportunity to follow up a comment with questions to confirm their meaning or to probe further, but I maintained an open, receptive presence, and students were happy to see me. Where students appeared to be struggling with responses, I offered alternatives (Booth & Booth, 1996), for example: "so how do you feel about that – were you happy or unhappy?" While, as Booth and Booth (1996) note, it risked putting words into their mouths, I hoped that students would feel a spectrum of answers would be accepted. These alternatives seemed to open up further conversation on these topics. To ensure authenticity, where possible I avoided including any words I had suggested in the resulting portraits.

In terms of the limitations of the research, this is a small-scale study of a group of students from one locality. While flagging up issues for further study, it cannot be used to surmise that all disabled students, or all students labelled with SLD, feel the way these students do or have had the experience these students have had. It does highlight different factors that hinder or support learning for disabled students. Some of the data here supports findings of other research or recommendations, which have been known about for some time but remain unresolved (e.g. Alexander, 2010). In reiterating these points, it is hoped that this can renew

the call for change. Given the current resource limitations for SEND students, this could be a

timely reminder that funding decisions and educational guidance have a deep impact on the

experiences (and the lives) of students. Having established those areas which could indicate

new knowledge, next I will consider what the implications of these experiences may indicate

for the larger issue of mainstream inclusion for students labelled with SLD.

7.6   Mainstream inclusion for SLD labelled students

I think given these data here, the mainstream inclusion of not only SLD labelled students, but

also of their unassessed peers with significant learning differences has been demonstrated to

be problematic. The influence of the standards agenda on schools, teaching practice and the

time and energy of teachers to engage in differentiation has acted to produce a setting which

is not conducive to the learning of such students. This study supports concern that

mainstreaming such students in environments not suitable for them may constitute "a form of

abuse" (MacBeath interview, quoted in 2006). Given educational funding issues (Andrews &

Lawrence, 2018) and the reduction in special educational places, with more students perceived

to have challenging behaviour in mainstream education (Broomhead, 2013c), this is an

ongoing problem which needs to be addressed. There has been a call to liberate schools and

teaching from the bureaucracy linked to the standards agenda in order to focus on teaching

(Armstrong, 2021); and these data would support that call. Without disentangling the

education system from normative standards, it can never include students labelled with SLD or

promote disability equality. While examinations have started to become more accessible

(Autism Education Trust, 2018) there is a long way to go, and without certain qualifications

being valorised (e.g., GCSE Mathematics) at the expense of all others, some students may fail

to gain any mathematics qualification (even though a range exist).

7.7   Change in personal perspectives

When I first approached this study, I was embedded in the social model of disability on a less critical basis, and carried negative views of special education as being "segregated" (UPIAS, 1974). As noted earlier, I felt this value-based assessment could hinder my view of the study group, and so I consciously put it to one side before approaching the research. As the research became underway, I learned from the students about their own experiences, which changed my own understandings. While there are aspects of special education that could be better (as is true of mainstream education), the benefits of special educational settings became clear to me as I saw these through the eyes of the students. I have many friends with autistic children, and before this research would have advised them against moving their children into special education; but now have a fuller appreciation of how transformational special schools can be for the student. Listening to the students changed my own beliefs about the value and place of special education. I still hold that mainstream schools need to become more inclusive (of all students), but now see how the legislation and guidance which inform their operation acts to undermine this inclusivity.   Special educational schools play an important and valuable role for disabled students, operating outside of the set standards implied by the National Curriculum. This allows each student to be valued for their skills and abilities rather than being measured against these standards and found wanting. It seems to me that greater inclusion in mainstream schools requires these standards to be set aside to allow all students to be celebrated for their unique skills and abilities, of which only a small amount is measured and valued by the National Curriculum. I am not sure this will happen in my lifetime, however. There are schools which have set these aside (or addressed them as just one measure in a range of priorities) in order to nurture the individual, and I hope that more schools will.

7.8   What areas for future study does this research suggest?

The issue of being valued by teachers is a sensitive and difficult issue which deserves more attention. While this study is an early exploration of this area, there is room for more work.

The allocation of TA support has been indicated here to be in relation to classroom disruption by students rather than according to need. This needs further attention given the resource implications. Alternatives to TA support for learning need to be evaluated as part of an expansion of mainstream education for the needs of learners labelled with SLD.

During the research, I made a direct observation of the impact of bullying on a student's ability to access learning in a classroom environment where no bullying is present. This was not a situation I had sought, and occurred by accident due to the circumstances. This was an interesting (although unsurprising) finding, given the literature; but this may be the first direct observation of such a situation. Due to its distressing nature, it is not a circumstance that a researcher would replicate due to ethical concerns. While unexpected, these data might pinpoint an area for better understanding of the barriers to classroom learning as experienced by bullied students.

The experience of disabled students being bullied by peers who claim to be friends (Connors & Stalker, 2003) has been discussed, but disablist bullying where victims are encouraged to engage in rule breaking behaviour has not received a great deal of attention.   The response of one student's mainstream secondary (p.163) indicates an ethical challenge, with the bullied student being held responsible; in this case resolved by his transfer to special education. This

highlights an area for further research, and where alternative ways of tackling such incidents may be indicated.

While disapplication due to government targets has been noted, students' views on being disapplied (or alternatively, on not being disapplied) have rarely been sought. This experience for students labelled with SLD is worthy of further study, in terms of not only the impact on their educational engagement but for friendship networks and peer group bonding.

The limited friendship networks of disabled children have been noted, but here students with pre-existing friendships seemed to experience a protective factor. Further study could explore how to support the development of such networks.

7.9   Recommendations

Following the research, I would make the following recommendations to improve the inclusion of disabled students in schools.

In order to address existing barriers, I would state that, as has been said before, the standards agenda presents barriers to inclusion. The use of universal standards is particularly problematic for the inclusion of students labelled with SLD, who cannot meet these and are therefore deprioritised for strategic and funding reasons by schools. I would recommend further consideration of how personalised standards could be linked to school performance targets to improve the mainstream inclusion of SLD-labelled students.

I would recommend that schools consider how they respond to disablist bullying, given the high risk of bullying faced by these students. The issue of students who are bullied into breaking rules is one that needs some care and further research, with the evidence here indicating that punishing disabled victims does not solve the problem.

To support those factors which have been beneficial here for the inclusion of disabled students, I would recommend that young disabled people be encouraged to attend pre-school playgroups, to establish social networks in advance of attending school.

7.10 Summary

In this Conclusion, I have outlined the strengths and limitations of the research described here, in order to clarify how much of a mandate its findings have for the future. I have put forward that the use of multiple research methods allowed unanticipated perspectives to come forward, helping students to think about education in creative ways and bring new perspectives to their experience. While this was a small-scale study and the students involved were not ethnically diverse, it presented a range of experiences from different students labelled with SLD. I felt that the students' views were reflected authentically by the use of their own words in the portraits and confirmed by the students' own edits to their portraits, supporting the validity of these experiences. In terms of voice, students' distress has been expressed through behavioural challenge and also through social withdrawal and passing/masking. The key barrier to accessing learning appeared to be an exclusionary discourse initially derived from the impact of regulatory barriers but which emerged in all areas of disabled students' mainstream experiences. The key factor which influenced inclusion was teacher relationships which could lead classroom culture, enhancing or diminishing the student's place in the social group. Some mainstream TAs substituted for absent teacher

contact through their relationship. I have identified areas for further research and made some

recommendations to improve inclusion.

I will leave the final word to Bob, summing up how important he felt education was.

> *"Quite important, 'cos you wouldn't do it – wouldn't be able to learn, would you? … wouldn't be able to spell your name, wouldn't be able to read. Wouldn't get a job … nowt. You'd … just be on the benefits for the rest of your life. And what life would that be?"* Bob (p.143).

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Appendix A: Timeline of the process towards inclusion

c.600   First Grammar schools in England (late 500s/early 600s)

1764   First special school in the UK established, a Deaf school in Edinburgh (Borsay, 2011).

1800s   Religious schools (which accepted disabled pupils) became common (Reay, 2017).

1861   *Royal (Newcastle) Commission* into school provision published, noting an absence of strategic oversight in education.

1870   *The 1870 Education Act*. This and subsequent funding made **primary education for most young people** possible (Reay, 2017); but did not include disabled children (Borsay, 2011).

1893   Local Education Authorities were made responsible for special education for **blind and/or deaf children** (Borsay, 2011).

1899   *The Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act 1899* **extended mandatory education** to more disabled children.

1913   *The Mental Deficiency Act 1913* required that children and adults viewed to be "**mentally deficient**" be reported to the **Local Authority**, now responsible for their care and education or training.

1918   "schooling for mentally *and* physically 'defective' [sic] children" becomes mandatory (Borsay, 2011:9)

1944   *The Education Act 1944* sought to widen existing access to mainstream and special education to the **majority of children, excluding those labelled as "ineducable"** (Ainscow, 2007; Rieser, 2011) potentially including challenging behaviour:

> also if they [the nature and extent of disability] are such as to make it inexpedient that he [sic] should be educated in association with other children either in his own interests or in theirs (Education Act, 1944:46 Part II 57(4)).

The introductory speech asked for "an extension of the present inadequate provision of special schools" (Hansard, 1944).

1948   The United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

> Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. (UN, 1948: Article 26 (1))

1966   Publication of the book *No Child is Ineducable* by Stanley Segal, teacher and "champion of the rights of people with learning difficulties" (Mittler, 1994).

1970   *The Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970* ended "the classification of handicapped children as unsuitable for education at school" (HMSO, 1970:1), finally giving **all children the right to education**. This shifted responsibility for education from the health service to local education authorities (Barton, 1986) but expanded the special school system (Thomas and Vaughan, 2004).

1971   Publication of the booklet *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System* by Bernard Coard, pointing out the disproportionate number of Afro-Caribbean students in special education (reprinted as Coard, 2005).

1974   The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) publishes its *Policy Statement*, repudiating special facilities (including special schools) in favour of full integration in society.

1978   *Special Educational Needs: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (also known as the Warnock Report). This marked a "radical" change (Clough and Corbett, 2000:3) from classification of young people from impairment group to **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**, under a formal process leading to a **Statement of Educational Needs (Statement)**. It also gave disabled children **the right to be educated in mainstream schools**, under certain conditions.

1981   *The Education Act 1981* formalised much of the Warnock Report's guidance into law (Clough and Corbett, 2000) but the intended impact on educational practice and policy was limited (Oliver, 2000) by issues such as insufficient funding (Warnock and Norwich, 2010).

1982   Sally Tomlinson's *A Sociology of Special Education* highlighted the use of special education to reduce pressure on mainstream schools, by providing **a means to remove students** whose learning needs presented challenges for mainstream resources.

1988   The *Education Reform Act* 1988

        In setting out a national curriculum for all students, the Act presented a "**standards agenda**" (Alexander, 2010:129), prioritising one set of measurable learning objectives, which made the inclusion of disabled learners problematic.

1990   The *World Declaration of Education for All* (Jomtien, Thailand) recognised that education was still not in place for everyone.

        Steps need to be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system (UNESCO, 1990:158).

1994   The *Framework for Action* and *Conference Statement* (Salamanca, Spain), also known as the Salamanca Statement. The *Framework for Action* specified that "ordinary schools should accommodate all children", while the *Statement* expanded on this:

> those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools
> which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable
> of meeting these needs (UNESCO, 1994)

1995   Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) enshrined disabled peoples' right not to be discriminated against. It expected education providers to respond to requests for **reasonable adjustments** by disabled people.

2001   The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 was an amendment to the 1995 DDA, which turned from disabled students having the right to be educated in mainstream schools, to **the assumption that disabled students will be educated in mainstream**, unless this is contrary to parental wishes or "the provision of efficient education for other children" (SENDA, 2001: Section 1.3)

2004   Ofsted Report *Special Educational Needs and Disability: Towards Inclusive Schools* highlighted mainstream schools' unequal progress to inclusion, and that "social and behavioural difficulties continue to test the inclusion policy" (Ofsted, 2004: 5).

2005   Baroness Warnock published *Special Educational Needs: A New Look*, regretting the impact of *The Warnock Report* (1978) and describing inclusion as a "disastrous legacy" (Warnock and Norwich, 2010:19).

2005   Disability Amendment Act. This legislation carried the provisions of the DDA (1995) forward, with guidance for education and training providers specifically. This moved the responsibility for reasonable adjustments to the provider, requiring them to make **anticipatory adjustments** for future students.

2007   The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)* (sometimes listed in the UK as 'of Disabled People') states that disabled children must be able to:

> access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live … within the general education system (UN 2008:17).

The UK Government ratified this in 2009 with a Reservation.

> The General Education System in the United Kingdom includes mainstream, and special schools, which the UK Government understands is allowed under the Convention (UN 2013 [online]).

2010   Equality Act 2010

Combined disability with other "protected characteristics" such as gender. Replaced the DDA 1995 and DAA 2005.

2014   Children and Families Act 2014

This act moved from the assessment of SEN and the Statement to **education, health and care (EHC) plan**. This covered activity outside school, assessing an individual's need for community-based support outside of education as well as within school.

2016   *Educational Excellence Everywhere* White Paper published. This intended to compel some schools to become Academies and encourage the growth of grammar schools, both of which would have had implications for disabled students; but was withdrawn.

Appendix B: Ethical Approval documentation

Some documents in this Appendix have had phone numbers and email addresses redacted for privacy. Ethics Committee contact details may no longer be the same.

1. First Ethical Approval – student data

UNIVERSITY OF Hull

Centre for Educational
Studies
T 01482 465988
E j.lison@hull.ac.uk

ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING
IN THE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH RESEARCH: ETHICAL APPROVAL

Reference Number:	13/343
Name:	Elizabeth Walker
Student No:	201201487
Programme of Study:	PhD
Research Area/Title:	Giving a voice to disabled students in schools
Image Permission Form	N/A
Name of Supervisor:	Dr Max Hope
Date Approved by Supervisor:	15 May 2014
Date Approved by Ethics Committee:	30 May 2014

University of Hull
Hull HU6 7RX
United Kingdom
+44(0) 1482 346311
www.hull.ac.uk

2. Letter to approach schools

Centre for Educational Studies
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX

Date

Name
School address

Dear _____,

Request for Research Partner Schools

My name is Elizabeth Walker, and I am studying for a PhD in Education at the University of Hull.

I will be carrying out research with students at a mainstream secondary and a special school in Hull during September to December 2014. I am getting in touch with you to explore whether your school would be willing to take part in my study.

The research will focus on students with a special educational need and/or disability and their experiences in mainstream education, and what factors influenced these experiences. It will also look at how students take part in the school community, in their classroom interactions and school decision making. The research will take around 6 weeks at each school.

Only a small number of students (around 8) will be recruited at each school to take part, initially as part of a focus group. Half of these students will be invited to take part in interviews, and a small number of classroom observations will be carried out for these students.

The school and students will be anonymous in any published work. The research will be supervised by staff at the Centre for Educational Studies at the University of Hull, and has undergone ethical approval (ref:13/343, 30 May 2014).

I would be happy to answer any questions at a time convenient to you. My email address and mobile number are below. I will be in touch again in about a week to follow this letter up.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth Walker

Email: (redacted)
Mobile: (redacted)

3. Head Teacher Consent form

I, _____ (Name) _____ (Position)

Of _____ (School Name and Address)

_____

Give permission for the above named school and selected students to be involved in a research study by Elizabeth Walker, student at the University of Hull, during Autumn term 2014/5.

I understand that the research will explore students' experiences of education.

I confirm that:

    a.   the aims, methods, anticipated benefits and any possible risks or hazards of the research study have been explained to me

    b.   I voluntarily and freely give my consent for the school to take part in the study

    c.   I am free to withdraw my consent at any time. If this happens after the study has started, any information that has been collected through the school will not be used if I so request.

    d.   I understand that the results from the study will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic books, journals, conference papers, and in a doctoral (PhD) thesis

I agree that:

    e.   The school and students will not be named in any research publications or publicity

    f.   I will be given an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of any sections relating to the school

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Contact details for the researcher:
Elizabeth Walker, Postgraduate student, Faculty of Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

This research has been approved by the Faculty Ethics Committee (ref:13/343, 30 May 2014). They can be contacted via Mrs J. Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

4. Letter to students

Faculty of Education
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX

Date

(Written version of verbal script, for students to keep)

Dear student,

Research project at _____ School

I am an education student at Hull University and am carrying out a research study at your school. I am looking for students to take part, and hope that you might be interested.

The first part of the research involves talking about your experiences of education with a small group of students. Some students will also take part in interviews, and I will sit in on two or three of their classes, with their permission. The whole process will only take around 6 or 7 weeks during September – December 2014.

Only a small number of students will take part in the project at this school, along with a similar number at a different school. The discussions we have during the research are private and will not be shared with anyone. Conversations we have had during the research will be written up, but anonymously, using a name that you will choose.

If you have any questions about the research, please do ask me. I will be in the reception area for the rest of today. If you think of anything after I've left, you can leave me a message at the school office, or contact me by email if you prefer.

If you would like to take part, please take this letter home for your parents to fill in. If they agree, you will also have a consent form to fill in later.

Best wishes,

Elizabeth Walker
Email:(redacted)

5. Letter to parents

<div style="text-align: right">

Faculty of Education
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX

Date

</div>

Dear parent/guardian,

Research project at _____ School

I am an education student at Hull University and am about to carry out a research study at _____ School. I am looking for students to take part, and hope that your son or daughter might be interested.

Only a small number of students will take part in the project at this school, along with a similar number at a different school.

Your son/daughter will first be invited to a small group of students, to talk about their experiences of education. Some students from this group will be invited to take part in interviews, and two or three of these students' classes will be observed. The process will take around 6 or 7 weeks during September – December 2014.

The research is confidential, and no details will be shared with anyone. Any recordings made of discussions will be kept private, and deleted once the research is over.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research. You can contact me by email, or leave me a message at the school office.

Students will need your permission to take part. If your son/daughter would like to take part, please fill out the consent form attached, and return this to the school office.

Best wishes,

Elizabeth Walker
Email: (redacted)

6. Parent Consent form

I, _____ (please write your name here)

am the parent or legal guardian of

_____ (write your son/daughter's name here)

and agree they can take part in a research study at (school name) in the Autumn term of 2014.

I understand that the research will explore students' experiences of education.

I confirm that:

a. I am happy with any explanations I have been given about the aims, methods, benefits and any possible risks of the research study

b. I give permission freely for my son/daughter to take part in this study

c. I understand that the results from the study will be used for research purposes, and may be reported in books or academic papers

d. My son/daughter will not be identified in any books or papers, and any words they say will be printed under a different name

e. What my son/daughter says in any interviews is private, and will not be released to any person including medical practitioners and teachers

f. I can take my son/daughter out of the study at any time. If this happens after the study has started, any information they have already shared will not be used.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Contact details for the researcher:

Elizabeth Walker, Postgraduate student, Faculty of Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

This research has been approved by the Faculty Ethics Committee (ref:13/343, 30 May 2014). They can be contacted via Mrs J. Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

7. Student Consent form

I, _____ (please write your name here)

agree to take part in a research study at (school name) in the Autumn term of 2014.

I understand that the research will explore students' experiences of education.

I confirm that:

a. I am happy with any explanations I have been given about the aims, methods, benefits and any possible risks of the research study

b. I want to take part in this study

c. I understand that the results from the study will be used for research purposes, and may be reported in books or academic papers

d. I will not be identified in any papers or books, and any words I say will be printed under a different name

e. What I say in any interviews is private, and will not be released to any person including medical practitioners and teachers

f. I am free to change my mind about taking part in the research at any time. If I change my mind after the study has started, any information I have already shared will not be used

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Contact details for the researcher:

Elizabeth Walker, Postgraduate student, Faculty of Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

This research has been approved by the Faculty Ethics Committee (ref:13/343, 30 May 2014). They can be contacted via Mrs J. Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

8. Second Ethical Approval - supporting data

Centre for Educational Studies
T 01482 465031
E c.m.mckinlay@hull.ac.uk

**ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING
IN THE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

FORMAL NOTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Reference Number:	**FoE 14/1508**
Name:	**Elizabeth Walker**
Programme of Study:	**Doctor of Philosophy**
Research Area/Title: AMENDMENT	**Giving a voice to disabled students in schools –**
Image Permission Form	**N/A**
Name of Supervisor:	**Kiki Messiou**
Date Approved by Supervisor:	**27/11/14**
Date Approved by Ethics Committee:	**22/02/15**

UNIVERSITY OF **Hull**

Faculty of Education Ethics Committee

9. Second letter for students

Faculty of Education
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX

Date

Dear _____,

Research project at [Special Secondary].

Thank you for taking part in my interviews.

As you might remember, we were talking about your experiences of previous schools, and what you think about school now.

I would like your permission to talk to a teacher to find out a little more about what you were like when you first came to this school, and in what ways you have changed since then. I would like to ask you to pick the teacher I should talk to. This should be someone who knew you when you started at this school.

I would also like to look at a report from your previous school (this is called an 'Annual Review'), which will tell me a little more about your experiences at that school.

I really do appreciate the time you have spent talking to me already, so you can say no if you don't want me to do this.

I am nearly at the end of my research here, but when I have finished my work, I will come back and talk to you about it. I am writing a short piece about you and your experiences of school, and I would like to ask you to look at this, and make sure there are no mistakes in it.

Thanks for your time,

Elizabeth Walker
Email: (redacted)

10.Student Consent form (supporting data)

My name is: _____

I have been taking part in a research study about students' experiences of education.

Interviewing a teacher

You can ask a teacher what I was like   Yes   No
when I first came to this school,
and how I have changed since then.

The name of the teacher I would like you to speak to is:

_____

This teacher is someone that knew me well when I first started at this school.

Looking at information

You can look at the 'Annual Review' from my last school   Yes   No

Signed: _____**Date:** _____

11. Letter for teachers

Faculty of Education
University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX

Date

Dear teacher,

Research project at [Special Secondary]

As you know, I am an education student at Hull University carrying out a research study at [Special Secondary]. I have been speaking to eight students here. The students were asked to identify someone who knew them well when they first started at this school. The following student has given me their permission, and suggested I talk to you:

-

You don't have to take part, but I would very much appreciate your perspective on this student.

There are only five questions I would like to ask you. These are on the attached sheet. The interview will be recorded, so that I can write up notes of our discussion. After the project is finished, the recording will be deleted.

Conversations we have had during the research will be written up, but you will not be named in the study. Comments may appear, but as 'a teacher said'. You will be given the opportunity to see these and make any corrections before they are published. If you would like to take part, you will also have a consent form to fill in before the interview, which gives you the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

If you have any questions about the research, please do ask me. If you think of anything after I've left, you are welcome to email me.

Best wishes,

Elizabeth Walker
Email: (redacted)

12.Questions for the Teacher Interview

Questions for the Teacher Interview

1. What opportunities do you offer your students for 'student voice' in general?
2. Are there any opportunities you offer this particular student in class?
3. This student came from a different school. Can you tell me what challenges they experienced as a student there?
4. Can you tell me how this student behaved in school when they first came here?
5. In what ways has this student's behaviour in school changed since then?

13.Teacher Interview Consent Form

_____ (please write your name here)

I agree to take part in a research study at [Special Secondary]. in the Autumn term of 2014.

I understand that the research will explore students' experiences of education.

I confirm that:

a.   I am happy with any explanations I have been given about the aims, methods, benefits and any possible risks of the research study

b.   I want to take part in this study

c.   I understand that the results from the study will be used for research purposes, and may be reported in books or academic papers

d.   I will not be identified in any papers or books, and any words I say will be printed under a different name

e.   What I say in any interviews is private, and will not be released to any person including other teachers

f.   I will have the opportunity to check quotes taken from my interview before they are printed

g.   I am free to change my mind about taking part in the research at any time. If I change my mind after the study has started, any information I have already shared will not be used

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Contact details for the researcher:

Elizabeth Walker, Postgraduate student, Faculty of Education, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

This research has been approved by the Faculty Ethics Committee (ref:13/343, 30 May 2014). They can be contacted via Mrs J. Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull HU6 7RX. Email: (redacted) Tel: (redacted)

14. Form to collect sensitive data from students' previous school

Name:
Key topics highlighted by the previous school
• Issues relating to working alone*
• Issues relating to working with the teacher/TA*
• Issues relating to working/socialising with peers*
• Other issues

* These categories have been used on the classroom observations. These are used here to facilitate comparison with the student's current observed behaviour.

Appendix C: Project documentation

Focus group post-pilot

Focus Group record sheet

Interview one

Interview two

Interview three

Classroom Observation record sheet (p1)

Classroom Observation record sheet (p2)

15. Focus group post-pilot

(Tape starts) This is Lizzie Walker, and this focus group is taking place on (date) at (time). Can I ask you to say the name you have chosen for the tape? (pause) Thank you.

Introduction exercise - Based on 'Moody corners' participation exercise (YS p68) (10 mins)
As you can see, there are posters with different emotions in different parts of the room. These are 'Happy', 'Sad', 'Excited', 'Worried', 'Angry', 'Bored' and 'Proud'. I'm going to ask you some questions, and I'd like you to give your answer by standing next to the sign that says how <u>you</u> feel. Don't worry if you're not stood in the same place as your friends – you might all have different answers, and that's okay.

If you feel more than one emotion, or none of these fit what you feel, can you stand in the middle and you can tell me why.

- (general questions)
1 Just as a practice, I'd like to ask how you would feel about eating a big bowl of ice-cream.
2 And how would you feel if your teacher told you there was extra homework?
- (feelings about focus group)
3 How did you feel when you were getting ready for school this morning?
4 When you have been thinking about this focus group today, how did you feel?
5 How are you feeling now?
- (gentle school related questions) – subject related; friends in class;
6 How do you feel when you are at school with your friends?
7 How do you feel during classes?
8 How do you feel when you are part of a school team that wins a trophy?
8b How do you feel when a school team you are not part of wins a trophy?
9 When you think about the Student Council for the school, how do you feel?
10 If you have to miss school because you are ill, how do you feel?
11 Does anyone know someone who is educated at home? Being educated at home, you still have lessons, but you wouldn't spend breaks and lunchtime with friends like you do at school. If you had to be educated at home tomorrow instead of coming to school, how do you think you would feel?

Weighing Scales exercise (30 mins)
I'd like to find out how included in school you feel. As you can see, I've got a set of weighing scales here drawn on a flipchart. This side is for weighing things that help you feel part of what's going on at school, and the other side is for weighing things that make you feel left out at school. Can anyone give me an example for each side of the scales? Some items might be on both sides of the scale. Can you pick a pen you'd like to use for the session? You can write or draw the things that you would put on the scales. There are no right or wrong answers – I'm interested in what you really think, so it's okay if you don't all agree on every item on the scales, and more than one person can put the same answer down.

Which items are the heaviest? (If time allows)

16.Focus Group record sheet (1 for each question)

Happy	Sad
Excited	Worried
Angry	Bored
Proud	other

17.Interview One

(Tape starts) This is Lizzie Walker. I'm here with (name), and this interview is taking place on (date) at (time).

Thank you for coming along today. I know we've been through the consent form already, but can I *check you are still happy* to take part in this interview today? (Pause for consent) Thank you.

In this first interview, I would like to find out more about your experience of education in the past. Is that okay with you?

When needed
I appreciate that being interviewed can be quite hard work. I am asking you to think hard about your experiences, and to remember things that happened years ago. It's also difficult because what you experience is obvious to you, and it's quite hard to explain things that are obvious to someone who doesn't understand. I have never been to this school before, and so the things you do, and the people you know, are new to me, and I might have to ask you to repeat words or explain things when I don't understand. I would like to thank you for being patient with me.

Quasi Timeline

I have some sheets of A4 paper here. I would like to find out what schools you have been to, and what you remember about being a student at them. I would also like to find out about any times you may have been *away from school due to illness or excluded from school*, and what happened to your education during those times – if you had lessons, and how you felt about your education.

Focus group chart revisited

Now, I've brought with me the 'weighing scales' you helped make during the Focus Group. Can you tell me which of these items are most relevant to your experience of schools?

When you think about feeling left out at school, is there a time or an event that comes to mind? What stands out about that time?

When you think about feeling part of activities at school, is there a time or an event that comes to mind? *Has there been a particular occasion you remember feeling part of the school community?* What made that time special for you?

Thanks for your time.

18.Interview Two

(Tape starts) This is Lizzie Walker. I'm here with (name), and this interview is taking place on (date) at (time).

Thank you for coming along today. In this interview, I would like to find out about your experiences of education at the moment. Is that okay with you?

Classroom cartoons (10 mins)

I'd like you to draw me a cartoon strip about your experiences in the classroom, with speech bubbles to tell me what is happening and thought bubbles to tell me what people are thinking. Is that okay with you?
(If not then suggest doing this as a role-playing exercise).

How often does this happen? What happens the rest of your time in your classroom? Do you have any other experiences you could make a cartoon of?

Education in context

Now I'd like to find out more about how education fits into the other things in your life. I have a sheet of flipchart paper here and some coloured pens. I'd like you to start by putting yourself in the middle of this sheet. I'd like to ask you to show me all the different activities you do, and the groups of people you spend your time with, like a spider diagram or a mind map, if you have used those. You are in the centre. From your name in the centre, you can draw a line out to each new group of people or activity. Can I give you a few minutes to do that?

(When finished) – That looks really interesting. Can you tell me more about this?

Where does education fit into your life?
How important is it compared to the other things in your life?

Thank you very much for this. Would it be okay to take this away with me? Would you like to keep a copy?

19.Interview Three

(Tape starts) This is Lizzie Walker. I'm here with (name), and this interview is taking place on (date) at (time).

Thank you for coming along today. In this interview, I would like to give you a chance to look back at your experiences of school now and in the past, and to try and think about school in different ways. Is that okay with you?

Happy school meal (Tait and Wosu 2013 Direct Work with Vulnerable Children p.122)
I want to know more about what you think of school, and I've come across a creative way we can talk about school and have fun too. I'd like to compare school to a fast-food meal. School will be made up of lots of different experiences for you, just like a burger meal is made up of lots of different things. So, I've got a burger making kit here, and I'd like you to pick what you would want in it first. Then we'll go through each item of the meal, and work out what school experiences the item might stand for.

If this meal stands for different experiences of school, then tell me some of the things you experience at school. Is that experience something that happens every day or not very often? So, would that be a big meal item or a small one? (Go through each item at a time – label with the 'new' content).

'Extra time' question

Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience of schools now or in the past?

That's the last question. I really appreciate the time you have spent helping me understand your experience of school. Thank you very much for your help.

20.Classroom Observation record sheet (p1)

Student		Session (of 3)	
Date		Time	

Lesson observed	
People present	

Activity general notes Layout? Formal/relaxed? Other activity during session.

21.Classroom Observation record sheet (p2)

Observations grid:

Student alone

Student/teacher interaction

Student/peer interaction

Appendix D: Colour Materials and Student Participative Responses

22.Focus Group Activity A: Moody Responses

Colour posters representing emotions were produced for this exercise using Microsoft Word Clip Art, in A4 landscape orientation and font size 48 text. These have been reduced in size for easy inclusion here. The questions asked during this activity are in Appendix C, 15 (p.351).

Happy

Sad

Excited

Worried

Angry

Bored
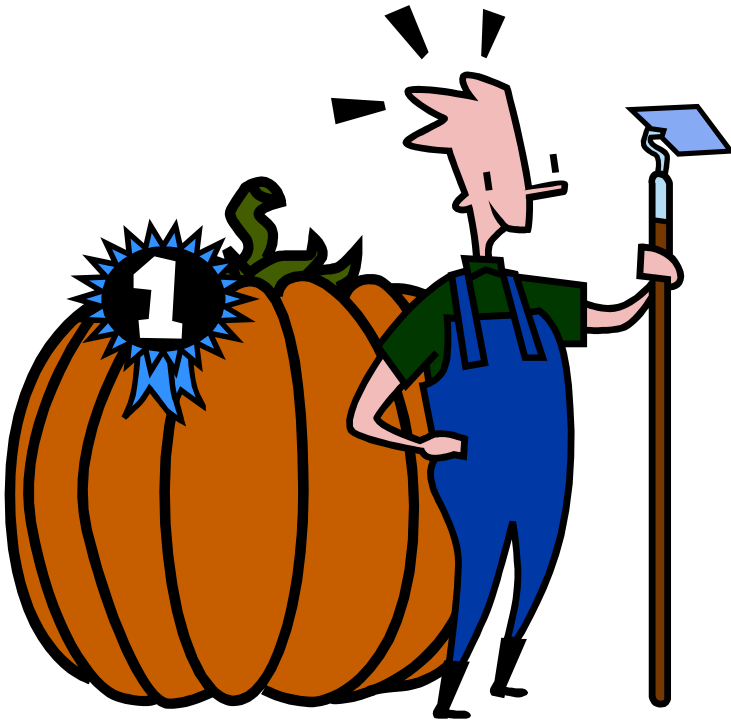
Proud

23. Focus Group Activity B: School Experience Weighing Scales

Flipchart paper was used to draw a set of weighing scales for this exercise. The text spoken to introduce this exercise can be found in Appendix C, item 15.

Weighing scales (blank)

FEELING PART OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

FEELING LEFT OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES
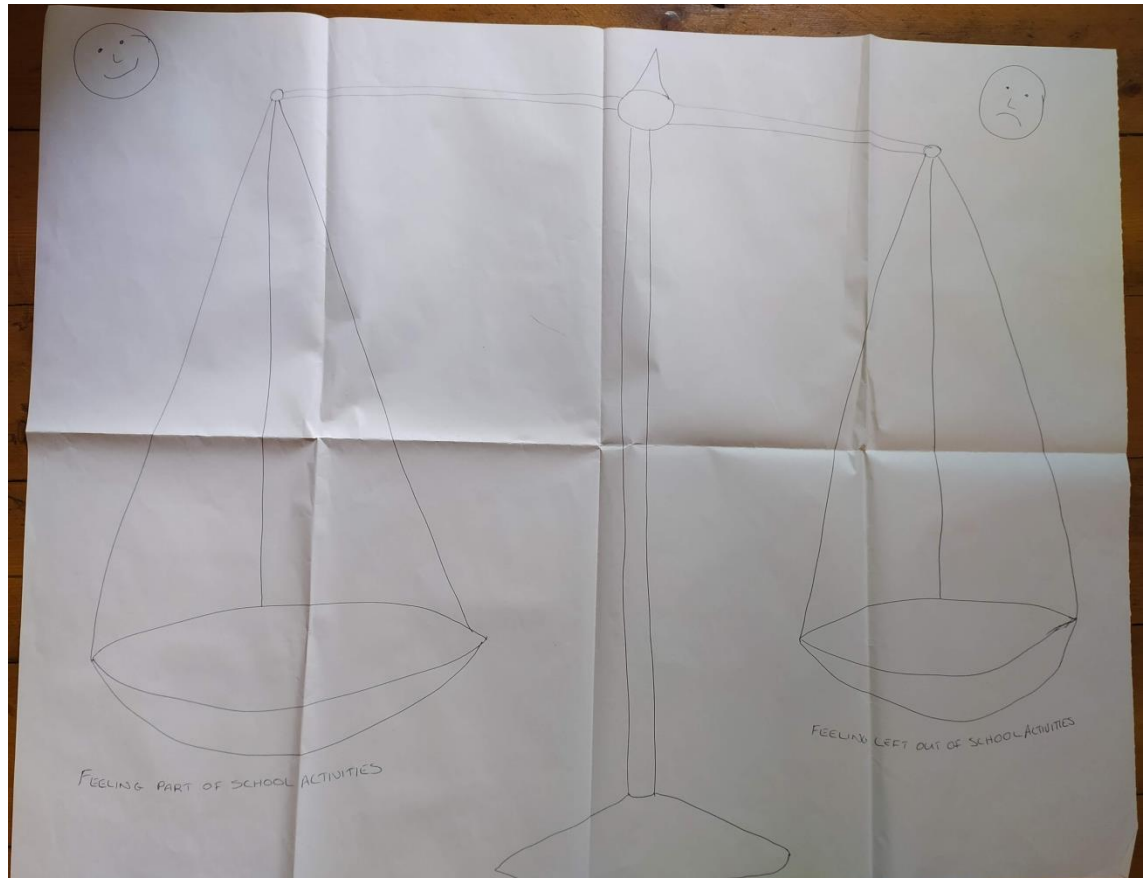
Completed weighing scales, with sticky notes reorientated for easy reading
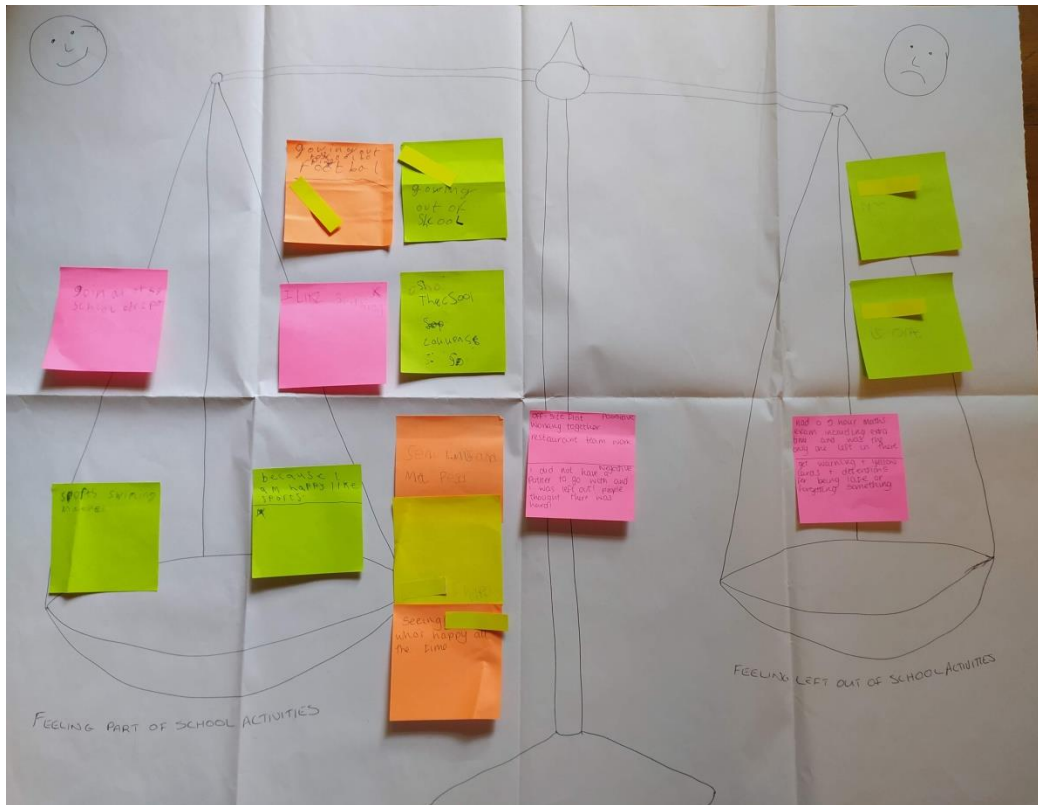
24.Interview Activity 1: School Timeline (examples)

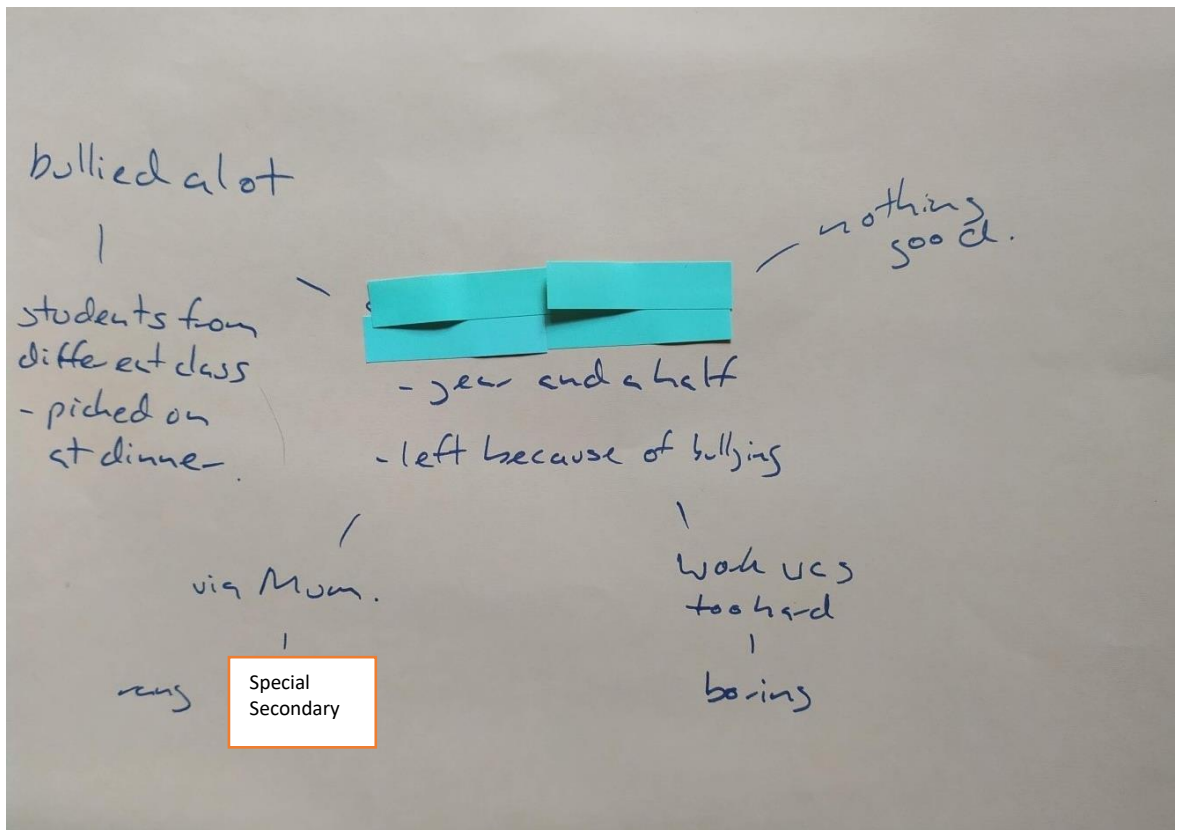Bella, mainstream secondary (written by Bella)
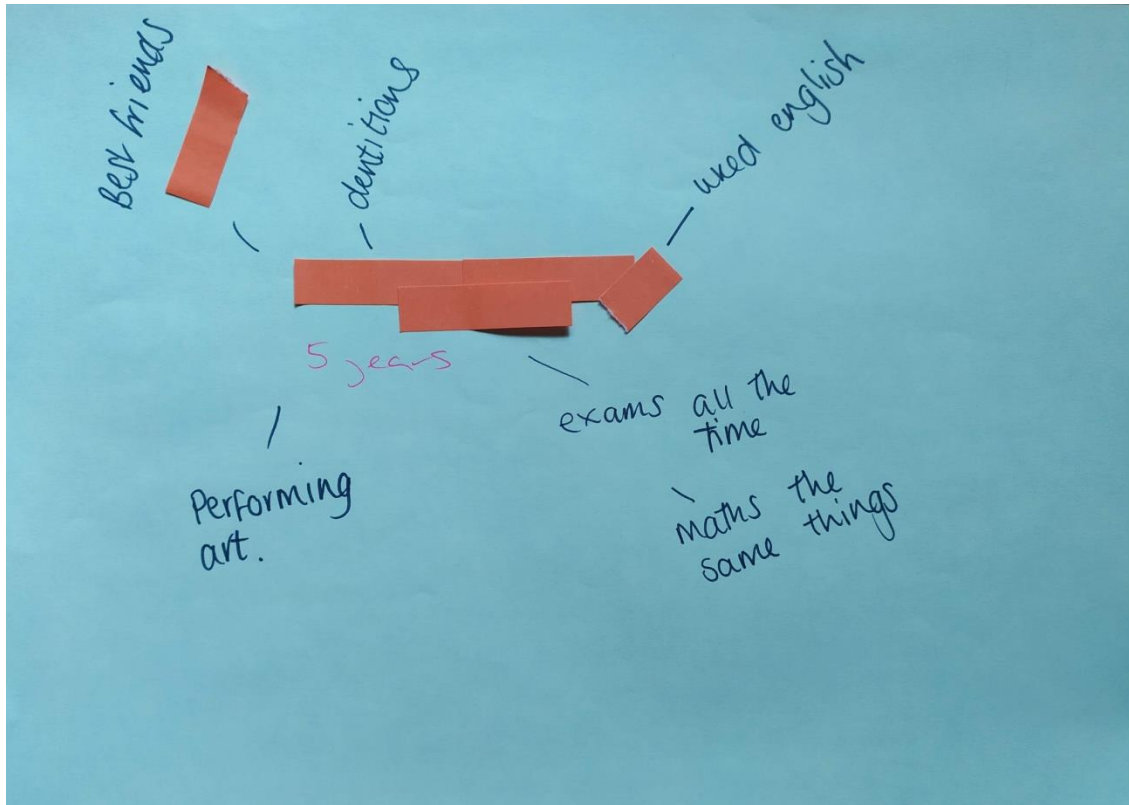
Elsa, Time off, Mainstream primary (written by researcher)
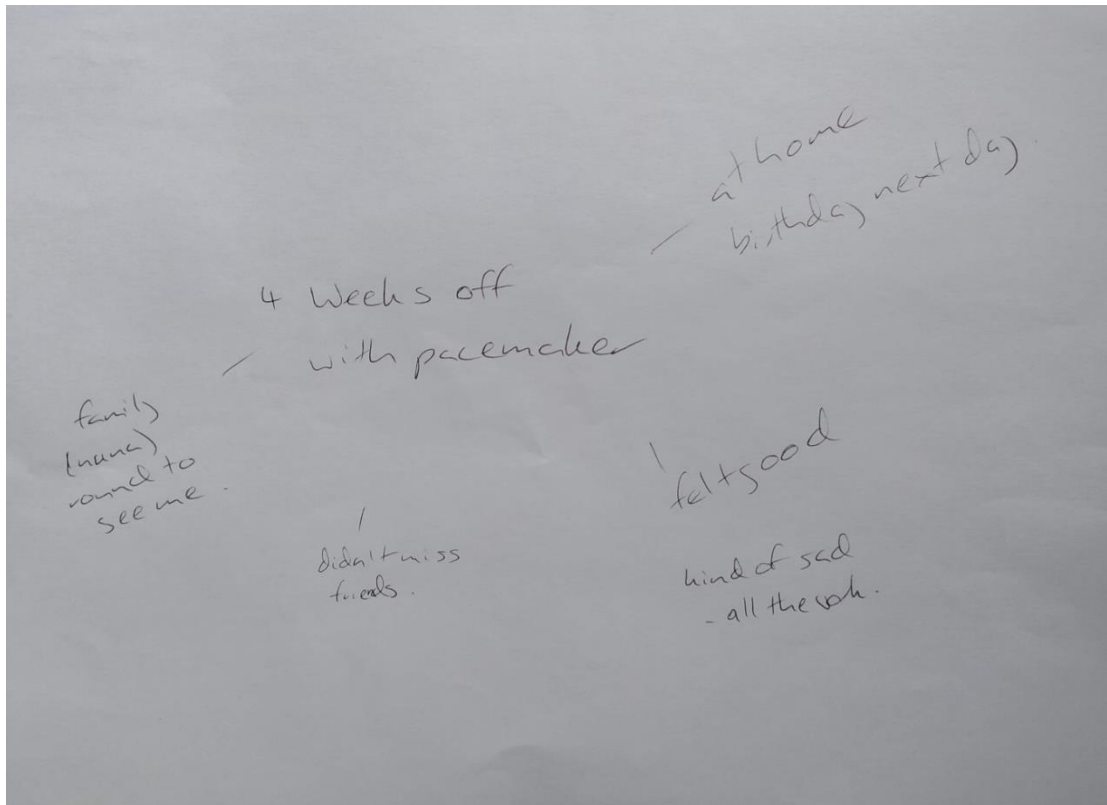
Thomas the Tank Engine, Mainstream Primary 2 (written by researcher)
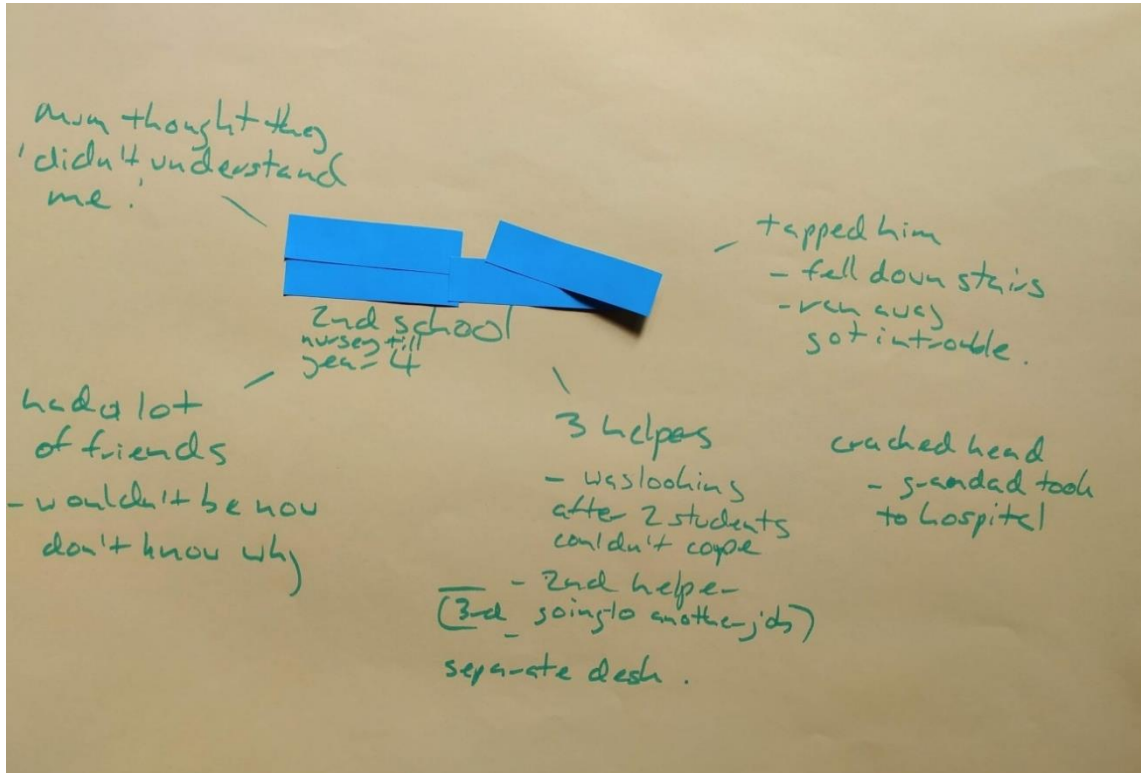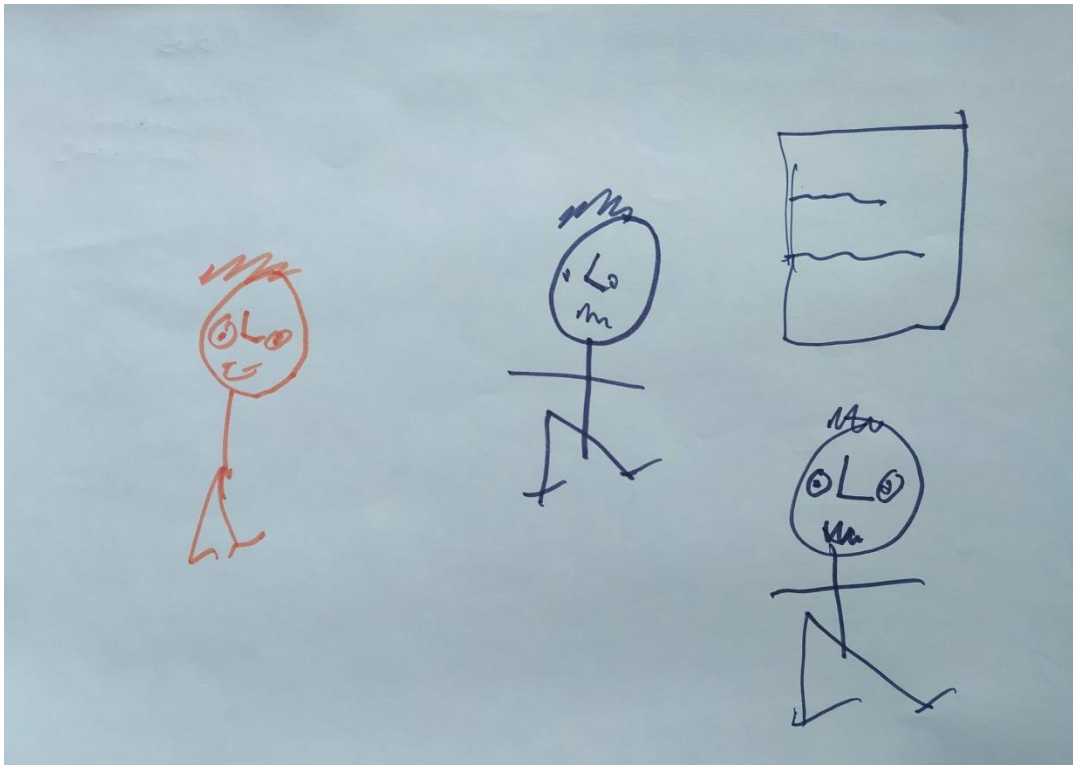

Eminem, Mainstream Secondary (written by researcher)

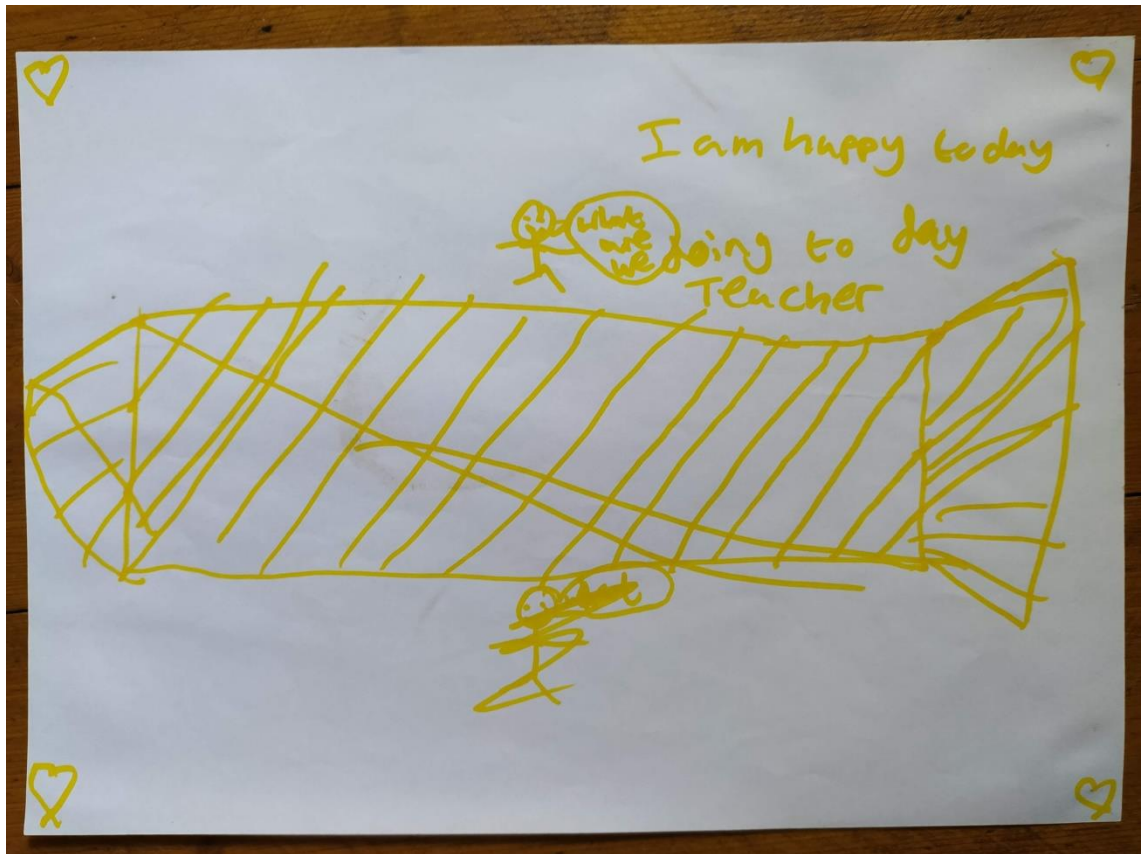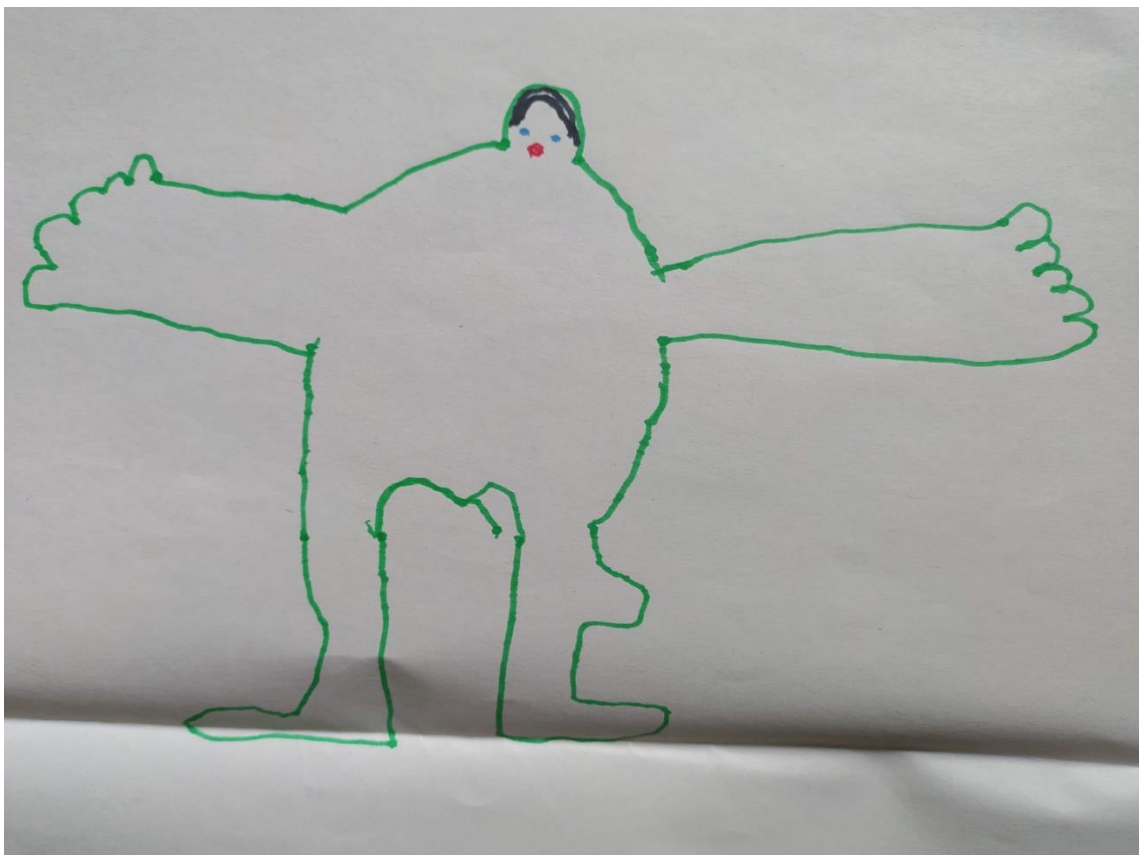## 25.Interview Activity 3: Classroom Cartoons (all)

Bob

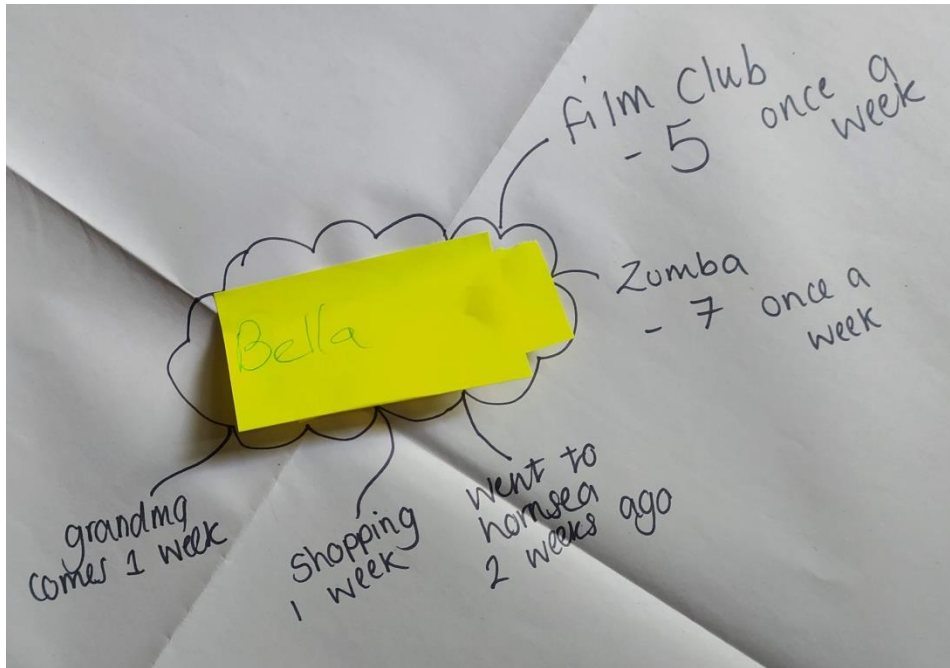Elsa "stressing" (on left)

Horrid Henry being happy in Art class
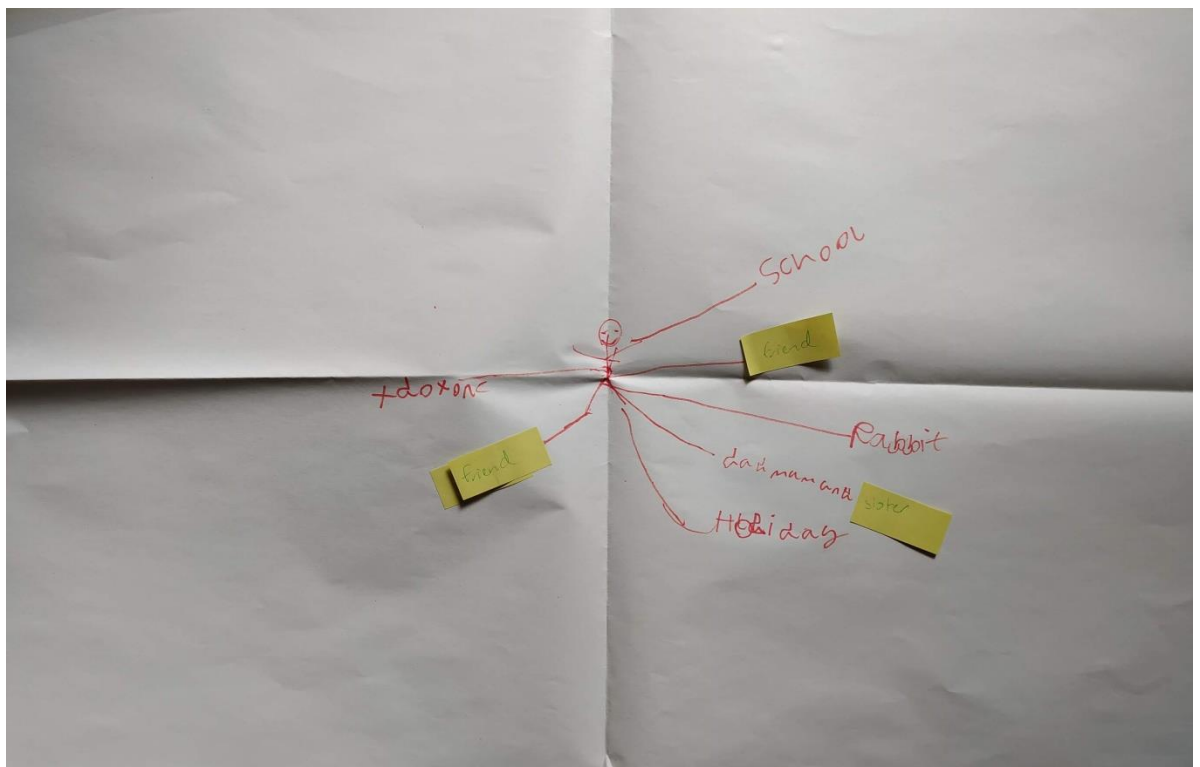

Lydya2 as The Hulk, to impress a girl

26.Interview Activity 4: Education in Context maps

School map - Bella (written by Bella)

School map - Thomas the Tank Engine (written by Thomas)

27.Interview Activity 5: School Meal activity

Photos of one student's creation and extracts from their interviews to support these

Horrid Henry (two burgers, one for herself and one for her boyfriend)

Horrid Henry extract during activity

"Onions? … they let you cry when they peel 'em."   [So, onions are … things that make you feel sad?] "Oh! When people bully. And … (sigh) 'cos of me and [friend] always falls out, 'cos of [classmate]."

"Tomatoes are so yummy! I love 'em!" [Yeah? So, what do you love about school?] "I love coming to school, and learning. Seeing friends." "Chips? … real soft, and nice to eat … I like learning because, when I go to college, I'll know what everything [is] then."

[Are there other good things about school?]   "Seeing my boyfriend. … Nothing else. … Except staffs. Staffs is alright." [Anyone particular?] "Everybody!"

[What might the lettuce stand for?] "It's a healthy school. … 'Cos they said if we not allowed to eat yummy stuff. We have to eat salad. With everything. Yuck!"

[You said the juice was apple.] "Yeah. It's real nice." [Can you think of something that's real nice about school?] "The drinks." [Oh, that's right, you make the hot chocolate.] "Every day"

"the worst bit of school, is at the dinner time … the dinners! Are horrible. They're cold. They cook 'em about half an hour before. … [TA] orders me a … jacket potato, for every day. … But every time I go, and get one, there weren't any. So, I always have to have the 'orrible … things."

"… I'm going to [local theatre], that's what I like. [On-site drama lessons]. … And working with [TA] and [drama teacher]." [What's good about [TA] and [teacher]?] "Well … every time I go to work with erm, [teacher], she sings! … And [TA] - just funny … keeps forgetting things."

28. Transcript coding examples – Eminem and Bella

Transcript coding extract - Eminem

| Time	Speaker	Text
04.42	E	Mmm
	L	(writes) Okay. How long have you been here?
04.47	E	(sigh) ... (04.49) Three year
	L	Three years? (writes) Okay. Where were you before [mainstream secondary], then?
05.01	E	[Mainstream primary].
	L	(writes) Yeah. So were those the ... Did you go to any other schools?
05.17	E	No, just them
	L	Just those
	E	I went to one up in Sunderland.
	L	Oh, right
05.21	E	But I can't remember the name! (laugh)
	L	Right. Was that before ... this one?
05.26	E	Before all of them
	L	Right, okay. (writes) School in Sunderland. So how old were you when you moved down?
05.45	E	Five
	L	Five. (writes) Right (makes mistake) Oh! No, five. So must have been a very long time ago, that school. ... Yeah. Okay? ... Okay. How about erm any periods off school?
06.08	E	No (quietly)
	L	No? [Thinking: hasn't he just returned from a fixed-term exclusion?] ... Okay. Right. (06.13) Okay, which school did you want to start with?
	E	That one (taps paper)
	L	That one. Okay (moves paper). Right. Tell me about [mainstream secondary], then.
06.27	E	... I used to get bullied a lot.
	L	Bullied a lot. ... Ah. (writes) Yeah ... (long pause) Was it erm ... Was it a particular group of people? Used to pick on you.
	E	Yeah
	L	Yeah. So was it the same people every time? Yeah. Were they, like, in your class, or ...
06.57	E	They was in different class. Break time and dinner time they used to pick on me.
	L	(writes) (long pause) That's rough. ... (sigh) How long were you at [mainstream secondary] for?
07.30	E	... (07.36) A year and a half.
	L	Year and a half. (writes) So did you leave, like, half way through the school year?
	E	Yeah
	L	Right, gosh. Was that why you left, because of the bullying?
	E	Yeah
	L	Yeah (writes) ... Okay. Erm okay. Was there anything good about your time at

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		then I got (not sure), got out. Pathetic.
05.51	L	Yeah
	B	Cos it's so easy in that school, to get a warning.
	L	Right
	B	So strict there.
	L	Yeah
	B	I did like it. … I liked doing Performing Arts the most.
	L	Oh! (surprised) Yeah?
	B	I loved doing that. That – that has to be the best one.
	L	Yeah
	B	But I enjoyed Performing Arts a lot.
	L	Yeah
	B	So did - firstly, we were – had our options, on a piece of paper like this, and it said all our options but it was like in a book.
	L	Right
	B	So we had three options to pick, one was our main one and the second was like thingy but had to take away, so I picked Performing Arts as my main, and I picked Drama and Dance, and I had to take one of them away, for ALP. Adult Literacy Programme.
	L	Oh, right.
	B	Yeah. So I took Dance away. (sadly)
	L	You would have preferred to do Dance. … Yeah.
06.55	B	But I enjoyed Performing Arts the most.
	L	Cool
	B	(writing) I got a merit in it, which is a B, I think.
	L	Oh right! So that's good. So you came away with some qualifications.
	B	But, point is, I 'ad (strongly) … didn't go back to school to get my grades. (more softly)
	L	Oh, right
	B	So, I don't know what my grades were in Maths or English or anything.
	L	Aww
	B	But the last one I think I got was an F.
	L	Right
	B	(laughing) Which is bad! At least I didn't come out with a U, or a G!
	L	Yeah (uncertain how to respond)
	B	You know Bella – in thingy
	L	Mm?
	B	I didn't get the main part in that. I was Chip! Oh my god. And then we – we was doing – you know Shakespeare?
	L	Mm
	B	And we like – we like had to go to romance, comedy, the favourite one that we liked. And I went to comedy, and there was three groups, and they . So one was Comedy of Errors, one was Hamlet and one was a Midsummer Night's Dream.
	L	Right
	B	It was good. I got the main part in that!
	L	Did you?
	B	Yeah (laughs). I was real happy!
	L	Excellent. Did you have to learn lots of lines?
	B	I did! And they all stood there for about 2 minutes, but [drama teacher] said it was fine, for 2 minutes, and I was like – what's my line? What's my line? And they was

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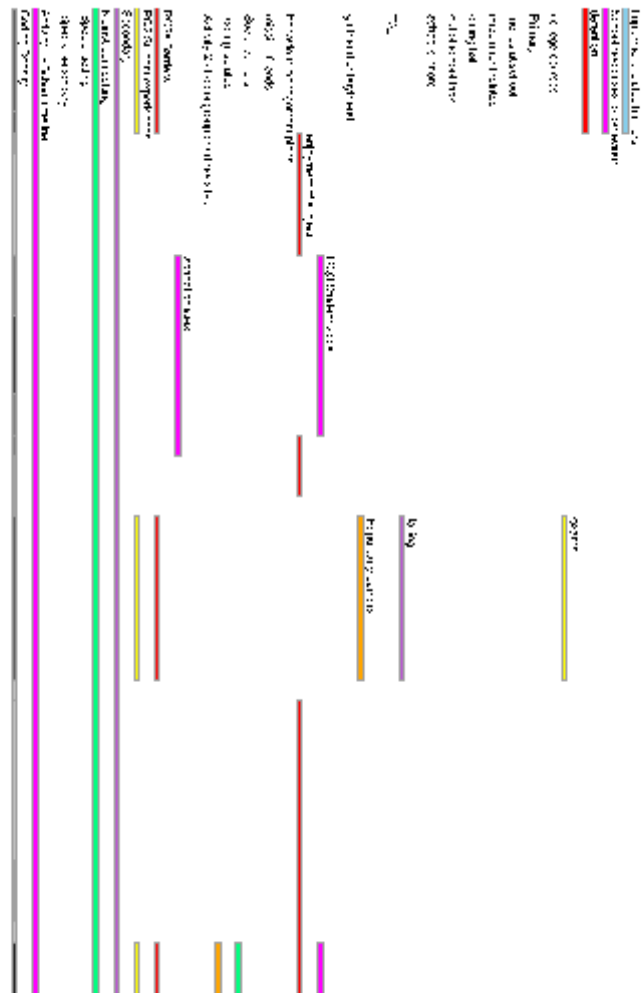
29. Evidence of third-party copyright permission

Re: Request for third party copyright permission (PhD thesis)
Samantha McMahon <samantha.mcmahon@sydney.edu.au>
Mon 06/01/2020 22:11
To:

- ELIZABETH WALKER <E.A.Walker-2012@hull.ac.uk>

Cc:

- Valerie Harwood <valerie.harwood@sydney.edu.au>

Dear Lizzie,

Thank you for your email. Your study seems really interesting and I'm happy to you to use the table and have it referenced as described in the email below.

Sounds like your PhD is close to being finished, congratulations! Your study sounds super interesting and I'm looking forward to seeing publications from this.

Best wishes,
Sam.

> On 4 Jan 2020, at 3:37 am, ELIZABETH WALKER <E.A.Walker@2012.hull.ac.uk> wrote:
>
> Dear Professor Harwood and Dr McMahon,
>
> I was hoping to use a table from your chapter, Medicalisation in Schools, from the SAGE Handbook of Special Education, in my PhD thesis. It's Table 53.2: Naming the three discourses of challenging behaviour, p922. You have been kind enough to share this table online (I think I obtained my copy from Academia.edu?), so I hope this will not present a problem.

30. Final certificate example (reduced here from A4 size)

Certificate

To: [Bob]

For being kind and patient, and helping me understand your experience of schools.

_____

'Giving a Voice to Disabled Students'   Lizzie Walker, PhD student
Research project 2014/2015   University of Hull