Northumbria Research Link

Making meaning with teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Reflecting on identity and knowledge

Phyllis Jones

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Abstract

This thesis analyses a complex process of meaning making. It centres upon the meaning making of a group of fourteen teachers who teach pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities (pmld). The nature of the meaning making changed as the research progressed. It moved from my meaning making *of* the teachers to my meaning making *with* the teachers. Integral to this was a process of personal meaning making and critical self reflection. The qualitative paradigm of research methodology offered a framework that informed my methodological decisions. The influence of symbolic interaction, critical theory and grounded theory was instrumental in the initial stages of the research process. Latterly, the role of social construction became important in my meaning making. The contribution of questionnaires, individual and group interviews to the process of meaning making, in the context of this work while necessary, has proved to be problematic, particularly in relation to the organic nature of the research, my personal role in it, and the role of ethics. I argue for an ongoing ethical debate within the research that develops as the research progresses and changes. The research has highlighted the integral role of teacher identity and notions of specialist knowledge in the development, sustenance and challenging of the teachers' understandings about the pupils they teach who have pmld. Inherent in these understandings are the personal experiences the teachers have encountered throughout their lives. These understandings have been analysed and the dominant influences of particular theories and models of disability are made explicit. The influence of labelling, categorising and the professional discourse has also been shown to be an integral element of the study. As a teacher educator, I have gained some insights which may improve the support I offer to teachers in their professional development. These insights relate to the importance of acknowledging the role of teacher identity, and engaging teachers in a process of analysis that encourages them to appreciate the impact of teacher identity on their understandings. An important element of this would be reflection on their personal experiences. In relation to specialist knowledge, a critical analysis of pedagogy is argued for: a process that engages teachers in wider notions of pedagogy for all learners, but which supports them in translating this pedagogy to effective teaching and learning for pupils with pmld.

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Chapter One

Introduction: the search for the Holy Grail

This thesis presents a story of a process of meaning making. The focus of the research is a group of teachers who teach pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), it was their meaning making that was to be central to the study. My initial title for the research was 'Teachers' theories of how pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties learn, and how these theories are developed, sustained and challenged". Naively, in the heady days of 1997 when I embarked on the research it was envisioned that the research process would enable me to 'go out and find' the range of theories teachers held about pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. I imagined the 'Holy Grail' to be the espoused theories of the teachers; the theories they subscribed to through their talk. There was an implicit assumption that there was 'knowledge' out there to obtain. Rather like an Indiana Jones escapade, I would embark on a journey, knowing it was going to be an adventure with many challenges to overcome, but one that would be successful in finding the Holy Grail. At this point, the contribution of symbolic interaction was viewed as potentially helpful to my analysis with its emphasis on the intricacies of meaning making. I intended to apply this to the meaning making of the group of teachers in my study.

Through the process of the research, these personal fundamental assumptions were challenged. The research has in fact been personally revelationary. This happened in many ways, both personal and academic. I came to realise that the 'Holy Grail' was not out there to be obtained, the understandings that became central to my thesis developed in a continuous and interactive way with myself being a major factor in the organic process of meaning making. This process was itself complex and problematic. I had begun to explore issues that were highly personal and potentially challenging to the teachers, and to myself. These issues transcended theories of pupil learning. Issues of personal and social identities, life experiences and raisons d'etre became important elements of the research. These are highly complex issues and I found myself, at points in the research, needing to make sense of such issues before, and whilst I interpreted the perspectives of the teachers themselves. The nature of the research evolved to one where I was not trying to make sense 'of' the teachers meaning

making but I was engaged in meaning making with the teachers. This meaning making was being done as I analysed the data. Critical theory, with its emphasis on posing the question why, and approaching issues from various perspectives, helped with this process. It is in the interactive cutting edge between my own personal meaning making and my analysis of the teachers' meaning making that I felt the study really began to engage with a process that could possibly lead to a greater understanding of the group of teachers. The full realisation of this did not actually occur until the final stages of the research.

The contribution of social construction theory became increasingly influential in helping me to understand more fully some of the nuances and influences of the teachers' beliefs and understandings. The various stages and dimensions of the research process (literature reviews, data collection and analysis) created a process of progressive self reflection and interpretation, where meanings were made relative to a particular point or stage of the study. This thesis tells the story of this dynamic process of meaning making. It analyses the methods of inquiry that tapped into this process and ultimately asks questions related to the value of the study, for the teachers, for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and for myself.

Rationale for the Research

Why this study?

I came into higher education after being a deputy head teacher of a local special school. Immediately I was thrust into a role of 'expert' and 'consultant' and although I had been involved in substantial professional development at school level the teaching at the University was of a different scale and nature. The LEA I had worked for was in its second round of reorganisation of special educational needs provision and I left staff in school who were swept up in a process of change. The staff room talk echoed feelings of a 'forgotten population' of special school teachers who felt they were indeed a 'politically incorrect' part of the teaching profession. I had been very excited by the doctoral research of Ware (1996) that had analysed a process of staff development for adults working with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. I knew a teacher who had been part of the research and spoke very highly of the experience. There was a personal drive to engage in a study with this group of teachers forming a central focus. I believed by doing this I would ultimately improve my understanding of how to support the professional development of the teachers, and through this, influence the quality of teaching and learning experiences for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. I wanted the process to be an ultimately positive one for the teachers involved. I wanted them, (like the teacher in the Ware research), to get something from the research process. I wanted engagement in the actual research process to be developmental and beneficial like the developmental research processes highlighted in the work of Cheliminsky and Shadish (1997). I was aware that the literature relating to teaching pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties was small, with a number of seminal works (Porter 1986, Tilstone 1991, Uzgris and Hunt 1978) continuing to be core texts with little or no current perspectives.

Formulation of research questions

I had always wanted to engage in doctoral research. I know I would have done so even if I had remained teaching in a school context. I had for a couple of years been waiting for a research project to identify itself. I put the above issues together and

came up with the research focus for my PhD. I felt that in exploring the theories that this group of teachers held about how their pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties learn I would metaphorically speaking 'kill two (or more) birds with one stone'. I would engage in some research that had as its central focus a group of teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. I would contribute some greater understanding about the current theories of how this group of children learn, and, because these two relate directly to the teachers' work, I felt the participation in the process of research would be beneficial to the teachers themselves. The research questions at the outset of the research were:

- What are the ranges of current understandings of a group of teachers towards the pupils they are working with who have profound and multiple learning difficulties?
- Are there important milestone events with individual teacher's pedagological development, and if so, what is the nature of these?
- Are there other factors that the group identify as influential in their professional life experiences?
- How do the teachers perceive 'good' practice within professional teacher development?
- What are the perceived future professional development needs/ desires of this group of teachers?

Through the process of research, it was realised that these initial directions, whilst providing a beginning focus for the research, evolved to represent more fully the complex nature of the research process. In exploring the theories the teachers had about how pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties learn and their understandings and beliefs related to their own professional development I became increasingly fascinated by the actual process of meaning making that the teachers engaged in. The issues and themes that emerged were highly personal, complex and problematic. An integral part of this inquiry was the analysis of the possible influences on the process of meaning making at the micro and macro level. Micro in the personal life experiences and drives of the teachers themselves and macro in the way society perceives them and the pupils they teach.

In the Ware research (1996) the researcher went into school and was involved in the staff development process. She became integral to the findings and conclusions of the research. I too found myself to be an active element in the process of meaning making: the interpretations I made relating to both research design and analysis I engaged in were inextricably linked to my personal interaction with the meaning making process. The research moved from a project that 'researched others' to one where my personal reflections and analysis were inherently part of the organic whole of the study. The study was to challenge my own understandings and assumptions. I came to realise some of the personal drives that influenced my work with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and also my work with teachers. Through the process of the research I also had to confront my assumptions about the group of teachers involved in the research and through this challenge the teachers themselves. This was a difficult process for me to engage with because of the 'personal baggage' I brought to the study. I knew a great many of the teachers personally. They all knew me and of the work I had done in school. I came to realise we had a shared identity. Retrospectively, I'm aware that I was initially reluctant to problematise that shared identity and I struggled with the process. However, particularly in the latter stages of the research, I became convinced of the crucial value of problematising these shared identities (and also notions of specialist knowledge), and came to realise the distinction between problematising and criticizing. This was helped by the fundamental principles of critical theory, which encouraged me to become more critical in my approach. I was not engaged in a process of criticism of the teachers. I was engaged in a process of trying to understand more about the reasons why they may have particular assumptions and beliefs and the internal and external drives for these.

Formulation of my conceptual framework

A framework of some current conceptual understandings about pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties formed an inherent structure for the first part of the research process. This framework was adopted in order to try to develop a greater understanding of the beliefs and perceptions of the teachers in this study. This was done in a generic and specific way: generic from the perspective of all teachers who

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work with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and specific in relation to the teachers in this study. Owing to the developmental and evolving nature of the research, the conceptual framework I used to help me in my meaning making developed as the research process progressed.

Ouvry (1987) presents an historical perspective of the quest to define and clarify perceptions, policy and provision in relation to severe and profound learning difficulties. It is apparent that this process, whilst being complex and intricate, is also concerned with the way society perceives the teaching and learning of all children. The inherent drives that form the roots of the range of understandings currently held in society are influenced by social, political and philosophical schools of thought (Davenport 1994, Oates 1996). Increasingly, the perspectives of disabled theorists have also influenced our knowledge base (Finkelstein 1993, Oliver 1990). Analysis of these provided a conceptual frame of reference that contributed to the understandings of teachers. The education of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties involves many different participants including parents, carers, siblings, a range of professionals from health and education, teachers, nursery nurses, classroom assistants and other significant people in the pupil's life. Across a pupil's school career a picture is created where different people contribute in distinct and varying degrees of intensity and continuity. An exploration of past and current social, political and theoretical philosophy relating to concepts of education offers a structure by which we can analyse the developments of policy and provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and consider the impact these have on the teachers meaning making.

The course and issues related to teacher education and development involve both initial teacher training and continued professional development. These issues permeate this study. They are examples of some of the influences on a teacher's development of understanding and beliefs, and they help explain the way teachers talk about their training experiences. Mittler (1993) reminds us that in 1985, the DES publication Better Schools:

" Without consultation ...abolished all specialist I.T.T. for teachers of children with severe learning difficulties"

The Warnock Report (1978) recommended that all teacher training courses should include a general special educational needs element. A major change of emphasis in the training opportunities for teachers of severe and profound learning difficulty took place. There was a shift from focused and dedicated courses at the initial teacher training level to a generic special education element at undergraduate level leading to higher level academic courses at post graduate level. The nature of the teacher education experiences the teachers in this study have experienced are used to support an analysis of the influences on the understandings and beliefs of the teachers.

The theoretical underpinnings of the process of research

Along with a conceptual framework that was helping me to understand the substantive issues that emerged through the study, it was also important to me at the outset to find a theoretical framework that would help me to understand the process of research I was engaged with. The process of inquiry and the fundamental theoretical framework of this clearly play a major influence on the course of meaning making. At the outset the underlying theoretical framework was taken from three schools of thought. Symbolic interactionism with its emphasis on social action in real situations, enables the process of meaning making to emerge through the exploration and analysis of the teachers' professional life histories. Goodson (1995) highlights the potential of this approach in developing an understanding, not only of innovations within education, but also their value in opening a window to the formulation and reformation of the social contexts of schooling. Critical theory not only encouraged me to stand back and adopt a more analytical perspective, but it was key to supporting the analysis of myself in the research. Mezirow (1981) provided a range of levels for professional teacher reflection, ranging from affective reflectivity where teachers become aware of how they feel about what they do, to critical reflectivity where they examine the conceptual and psychological underpinnings of their work. It is through this range of levels that research becomes truly developmental in the way that Cheliminsky's (1997) work advocates. It is also through this that personal struggles and challenges take place. It was envisioned that the context for the research was to be as sensitive,

non-threatening and positive as possible for the teachers themselves. It was intended to create a research climate that helped to:

"Reveal the hidden value orientations of group members in a form, which enables them to be talked about'

Mezirow (1981) p 276

The contribution of grounded theory, in the course of the inquiry was fundamental to the nature of the meaning making made. Its emphasis on:

"The human dimension of society and the importance of meaning in people's lives"

Laydler 1993 p 5

helped me to give:

"Systematic attention to theory building, thus allowing a cumulative development of empirical and theoretical findings."

Laydler 1993 p 51

As the study progressed the increasing contribution of social construction assisted me in making sense of the influences of individual teachers' meaning making. For me, social construction presented a way through the academic and personal struggles I was encountering. Through the consideration of social construction I was able to realise how meaning making is dependent on struggles related to interpretation and definition (Kincheloe and McClaren 1994:144).

Formulation of research design

The decisions I made throughout the course of the research process influences the course of the research and provide a focus for this thesis. This analysis involves the course I embarked upon at the beginning of the study, the developmental insights that occurred throughout the path of the research process and my retrospective reflections. The struggles and challenges inherent in such a complex area of focus provide the story line for the analysis of the research design. At the outset, in the spirit of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks I was engaging with, the decisions I made about my research methodology were such as to enable an analysis and understanding of the values, perceptions and knowledge of the group of teachers in the research. Methodology within the qualitative paradigm offered strategies that promised to

enable the understandings and beliefs of the teachers to be expressed in a range of ways. Grounded theory provided the main driving force in setting up and analysing the research strategies; supplying the impetus to continually check my interpretations with the generated data and the teachers themselves. In the beginning, my own personal involvement in the research process was clearly indicated, the depth and the intensity if this involvement grew as the study progressed. This was encouraged through critical theory and contributed to the organic nature of the progression of the research. Interviewing, both individual and group, was adopted as the main process of data collection to help me to engage with the teachers' meaning making and to analyse and make sense of this. The first individual interview had an initial focus of a completed questionnaire and included detailed, and often highly personal, reflections by the teachers. Group interviews occurred twice, Marshall & Sossman (1993) offer a clear rationale for focus group interviewing:

"Individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum: people often listen to others' opinions and understandings in order to form their own"

(Marshall & Sossman 1993:84)

One of the group interviews asks the teachers to reflect upon and discuss video vignettes of children. This is a methodology not evident in the literature and in this study was intended to inspire the teachers to talk about their understandings of profound and multiple learning difficulties and the nature of teaching and learning contexts for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The final interview included a synopsis of the analysis to date and asked the teachers to go one stage further in their reflections. At the end of one of these it was commented that the group had very much enjoyed being part of the discussions and felt it offered opportunities to discuss issues that transcended day to day school business and touched the heart of their professionalism. At this point, in the final stages of the data collection process, I felt that the study had succeeded in engaging the teachers in the spirit of the work of Cheliminsky (1999), in a developmental way. Also, to some extent had like the work of Ware (1996) been beneficial to the teachers themselves.

Structure of the thesis

The intricate nature of the research, and the unfolding challenges leads my story of meaning making to be complex. This thesis is organised in a personally developmental way telling my story as my meaning making evolved. This does mean that discussion of some issues and concepts occur at a later stage of the thesis, as their relevance becomes more pertinent to my meaning making.

Chapter One
Introduction

This chapter discusses the rationale for the research and my initial research aims. I set out my approach to the formulation of my conceptual framework and my discussion of social theory and research design that together form the theoretical underpinnings for my research process. The construction of the thesis is also described.

Chapter Two
Towards a conceptual framework: notions of categorisation and the dominance of the 'professional' discourse

This chapter examines some of the key understandings of pmld that could possibly impact on the understanding of teachers. It forms the initial conceptual framework for my own meaning making. Understandings from other perspectives are employed to serve, as a critique by which the understanding of the teachers may be further understood. An analysis of current definitions of pmld is the starting point for the chapter and provides a foundation for the development of further insights about the context and historical way this group of pupils appears to be perceived and understood. A wider perspective is gained through the exploration of issues arising from key research and policy documents; from parents of disabled children; from disabled and non disabled pupils themselves. This initial conceptual map that I have engaged with highlights the problematic nature of this area of study. It emerges that the understandings of teachers may be influenced by a plethora of factors and the chapter poses a number of questions that may help in my consequent meaning

making. However, through this chapter there emerge two major issues that are fundamental to my initial conceptual framework. These are the potential influence of notions of categorization and the dominating influence of professional knowledge on the understandings of teachers of pupils with pmld. Categorisation emerges as an historical legacy of how this group of pupils are defined and labelled. The professionalisation of the knowledge base emerges through the domination of professional perspectives to the detriment of the contribution of parents, carers and children.

Chapter Three
The theoretical underpinnings of the process of the research

At the outset of the research I had identified a set of questions in which my research was going to engage. While developing my initial conceptual framework, many more questions were raised. I began, during this chapter, to explore social theory in the hope of finding an approach that would support my meaning making. This was a difficult process. I was concerned to move beyond simplistic interpretations and engage with the concepts in a way that allowed me to appreciate the nuances of the theories. Initially I set out to find one paradigmatic framework that would provide the major driving force for my work, which would ultimately influence my decision and meaning making. However, the more personal meaning making I made within social theory, the more I felt the need to be eclectic and adopt elements from different approaches to help me in my research. I found elements from symbolic interaction, critical theory and grounded theory as potentially helpful to my process of meaning making. In exploring these theories, it became increasingly apparent that I needed to analyse notions of 'knowledge' and the role of knowledge in the process of meaning making.

Chapter Four
My research design: the major influences that impacted on my methodological decision making

This chapter analyses the research design of my study and explains the process and stages of research. The qualitative paradigm of research underpins the overarching philosophical stance of the study and will form a thread in the discussion. So far, my meaning making relating to some of the substantive issues had generated some questions that I now wished to explore further. These questions influence the decisions along with my growing exploration into social theory. I needed a methodological process that would enable me to engage the group of teachers in the research and allow the intricacies of meaning making to emerge. While engaging in my methodological decision making, I continued to build on my own meaning making by developing a greater understanding of the potential and dilemmas of

questioning and its contribution to my research. The chapter begins with a discussion of the paradigmatic location of the methodology, and develops to a discussion of data collection, questioning, ethics, reliability and validity and analysis.

Chapter Five
Analysis of questionnaires: issues of professional experiences

This chapter begins the process of data analysis and meaning making with the teachers in the study. The questionnaire helped me to begin to develop my understanding of the teachers as a whole sample group as well as building up a picture of individual teachers. It was essential, if I was to attempt to make meaning of what the teachers were telling me, to try to understand the context and background of their experience to date. The professional experiences of the teachers, including the nature of specialist training opportunities, emerged as issues that might help me to develop a greater understanding of how and why the teachers develop their understandings and beliefs. These became the themes by which the questionnaires were analysed and formed the initial process of meaning making on my part. For the purpose of the structure of this chapter I posed questions related to my developing meaning making. Throughout this process, in the spirit of grounded theory research there were issues that would need to be fed back to teachers for their reflection.

Chapter Six
Professional understandings, key influences and personal reflection

This chapter extends my meaning making into a discussion of my interpretations of the individual teacher interviews. The analysis of the interviews took place in two stages. The first stage adopted a thematic analysis, which is what this chapter discusses. The second stage involves a return to the individual interview transcripts, which is discussed in the next chapter. Following the principles, strategies and sub processes discussed by Huberman and Miles (1994a) relating to data analysis, I began to make sense of the data generated through data display, and then through a process of conclusion and verification. The meaning making I have already engaged in provided a basis for analysing the individual interviews. Diversity and similarity emerged from this process of analysis. The issues raised in this chapter relate to

definitions of pmld, and the different teaching and learning processes the teachers believe their pupils' need. The discussion develops into an analysis of the teachers' responses to professional training experiences, which appears to support notions of a specialist teacher. The chapter concludes with a reflection of my personal and professional understanding and some of possible key influences on my own meaning making.

Chapter Seven
Teacher identity and key influences

The influence of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994), with the importance of raw data, helped me to decide that, once I had carried out this structured and organised thematic analysis, I would return to the whole transcript of each interview. This would help me to appreciate the raw data in the context of the whole interview and also help me to develop my process of analysis. This level of analysis would help to focus back on individual teacher perspectives in an holistic way that might highlight a second level of analysis. The process of returning to whole interviews was enlightening. The issues that emerged in strength had also emerged during the thematic analysis, only to a lesser degree. During this stage of analysis I seemed to be drawn instinctively to what the teachers were telling me about their identity and the influences that impacted on this. Identity was a new area of understanding for me and to enable me to analyse the generated data I needed to make some initial meaning of the concept of identity. The chapter begins with this and includes a discussion of identity related to occupation. I then progress to making sense of identity as it emerges through the teacher interviews. The discussion moves to an analysis of the professional and then personal experiences that I have interpreted as being influential to the development of the teachers' identities.

Chapter Eight

Issues of pedagogy emerging from the analysis of the first group interviews

The first group interviews centering on three video vignettes of pupils with pmld contributed to my meaning making, particularly in relation to the teachers' apparent understandings related to pedagogy. I had become increasingly interested in how this group of teachers appeared to understand the knowledge base needed to teach this group of pupils and possible influences on this. This stage of analysis shed light on some of the understandings of the teachers in this area. Through this chapter I formulate some further assumptions about the teachers' apparent meaning making in two areas. Firstly, concerning the teachers' apparent understandings relating to teaching and learning issues for this group of pupils, which is intricately related to their understandings of their pupils. Secondly, related to what the teachers appear to be saying in relation to the knowledge base they believe is needed in order to teach this group of pupils. Issues of teacher identity again surface through the first group interview and are discussed accordingly. During the interviews the teachers began by discussing the pupils on the video, but then moved the discussion to reflections on themselves and their own practice.

Chapter Nine

Teacher reflections on my meaning making; the influence of society's knowledge

This chapter focusses upon the analysis of the second group interviews. These final group interviews offered an important opportunity for the teachers to discuss the interpretations made in the research and to extend the discussion of these further. This was the final opportunity to verify these interpretations with the teachers themselves. This chapter is concerned with the meaning making of teachers in the context of their understandings of the social, historical and personal context in which they operate. The three themes of teacher identity, specialist knowledge, and society's knowledge were a central focus of these discussions. There is also a discussion of the possible epistemology of the understandings and knowledge of the teachers.

Chapter Ten

Notions of specialist knowledge and analysis of key influences

Notions of specialist knowledge has emerged, both from the literature and from the teachers in my study, as a central issue in the process of meaning making I have engaged in. This chapter extends the discussion of specialist knowledge, integrating the expressed views of the teachers in this study with key literature some of this I have already discussed, and some is added in order to further my personal meaning making. The notion of specialist knowledge is discussed as problematic and its relationship to the teachers' ideas of identity is examined. Through my interpretation and analysis in the research the importance of the process of knowledge building, proved to be much more helpful in the meaning making I became involved in. An analysis of the influences on this process of knowledge building also became of great interest. A concern of this chapter is what the teachers do not say, as well as what they do say. The chapter begins with an analysis of notions of specialist knowledge, and develops to a discussion of specialist knowledge for pupils with pmld. There follows a discussion of notions of specialist knowledge for teachers of pupils with pmld, and progresses to an analysis of some of the key influences that impact on the development of specialist knowledge, including the professional training experiences and the role of society's knowledge. The chapter concludes with a reflection of the issues raised in relation to my own professional understandings.

Chapter Eleven

Reflecting on the process of research: discoveries and complexities

This chapter analyses the decision making processes I engaged with during the study relating to the process of research. It highlights the revelations and complexities emerging through this process. The study has been highly personal in nature, both from the perspective of the teachers, where they became involved in discussions relating to their personal experiences and beliefs and from the perspective of my own meaning making. The problematic character of the process of the research is related to the complexity of meaning making. Meanings are highly personal to individuals. They are a product of social interaction and the process of meaning making is developed through personal interpretation. This presents difficulties and dilemmas,

some of which I did not fully appreciate until the later stages of the research. Central to the complexity was my role within the research process and this chapter begins with a reflection of issues related to this. I then proceed to reflect on issues of social theory and the methodological decisions I have made.

Chapter Twelve
Concluding analysis

This final chapter sets out to draw the main conclusions of my thesis, and to return to the initial rationale, and reflect on how worthwhile this research has been. The first part of the chapter relates to the findings of the research. These specifically concern teacher identity and notions of knowledge including reflections upon how these developed, were sustained and challenged. Conclusions relating to the process of research that I engaged with are then drawn together including the role and process of self reflection. The second part of the chapter critically reflects on the initial intentions of the research and poses some difficult questions relating to its fundamental successes and challenges.

Chapter Two

Towards a conceptual framework: notions of categorisation and the dominance of the professional discourse

Introduction

This chapter examines some of the key understandings of pmld that could possibly impact on the understanding of teachers. It forms the initial conceptual framework for my own meaning making. It is the framework I have chosen to focus upon and is personal to my own interpretation and meaning making. Understandings from other perspectives are employed to serve as a critique by which the understanding of the teachers may be further understood. An analysis of current definitions of pmld is the starting point for the chapter that provides a foundation for the development of further insights about the context and historical way this group of pupils appears to be perceived and understood. A wider perspective is gained through the exploration of issues arising from key research and policy documents; from parents of disabled children; and from disabled and non disabled pupils themselves. It provides the initial critical analysis of substantive issues that will be further developed and analysed through the course of the research. It draws on research from special educational needs literature and also from the disability movement. This initial conceptual map that I have engaged with has highlighted the problematic nature of this area of study. It emerges that the understandings of teachers may be influenced by a plethora of factors and the chapter poses a number of questions that may help in my consequent meaning making. However, through this chapter there emerge two major issues that are fundamental to my initial conceptual framework. These are the potential influence of notions of categorization and the dominating influence of professional knowledge on the understandings of teachers of pupils with pmld. These two issues permeate the discussion throughout this chapter. Categorisation emerges as an historical legacy of how this group of pupils are defined and labelled. The professionalisation of the knowledge base emerges through the domination of professional perspectives to the detriment of the contribution of parents, carers and children.

Finkelstein (1997) suggests that there is a dogma of vulnerability in institutionalized discourses relating to disability, and the work of Ball (1994) supports this when he says that the keys of power and language dominate any discourse:

"Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when where and with what authority"

Ball (1994) p21

A discourse is much more than a discussion. It is about the process of social relationships, the way people are able to influence definitions and actions that relate to their lives; language becomes the communicating and reproducing factor. This offers immediate challenges. This initial exploration of some of the current understandings and notions of pmld highlighted the dominance of the professional discourse. Not only is there no research relating to the views of pupils with pmld, but also the groundbreaking research by, and with people with disabilities has not, as yet, covered this perspective. It is also very clear that people with pmld constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in society who do not hold either key of language or power. From the perspective of Finkelstein, it may be assumed that most of the research and literature carried out in the field of pmld has the vulnerability of the people with pmld as its bedrock. This chapter deals with literature and research by those who, by the fact of successful publication, hold some power. The perspectives of parents with disabled children (some with pmld), young people and theorists, both of whom have disabilities, contribute to the analysis, thus increasing depth of understanding. We have much to learn from the disability research that in the words of Corbett (1994) offers personal narrative as a form of political autobiography. Through this the voices of disabled people are emerging and challenging the earlier 'dogma of vulnerability' and moving the ethos of disability research to a civil rights agenda linking disability politics to protest. Although the perspectives of parents, disabled theorists and pupils offer what may be seen as a viewpoint closer to the life experiences of young people with pmld, it would be wrong to assume that these are the perspectives of the young people themselves. To increase the potential and involvement of disabled young people in the research process there needs to be a paradigmatic shift in the way this group are understood and engaged in the process of that research.

The chapter is structured into sections that together create a more holistic perspective of some of the ways teachers may understand their pupils with pmld. It begins with an analysis of definitions of pmld, moves to teacher understandings, then to understandings of notions of disability, progresses to an examination of issues inherent in key legislation and policy, moves onto parental contributions to the knowledge base and finally to children themselves. The conclusion draws together the emerging issues that form the fundamental aspects of my initial conceptual framework.

Definitions of profound and multiple learning disabilities

This section analyses the way people with pmld are defined. The dominating influence of categories and labelling is critically explored and illustrates that, although it is important to understand the nature of pmld in order effectively to create an enabling environment, these categories and labels, based mainly on notions of normalization, serve to uphold an administrative status quo of segregated services. This helps to appreciate some of the issues that influence and shape the way teachers define and understand this group of pupils. Norwich (1999) warns of the paradox of labelling for appropriate and particular resources and the stigma that may follow. Along with this specific categorisation and labelling comes segregated services that serve to perceive continually this group of people as extremely vulnerable and passive recipients of specialist provision. Through the perspectives offered in this section it may be seen that the labelling of the children spills over to the parents and teachers. The process of labelling for resources does indeed appear to offer a double-edged sword to this group of pupils and their parents, families and teachers. However, there are examples of individuals with pmld, through a particular set of circumstances, challenging the notion of passivity and being enabled to exert their rights as individual people (Fitton 1994). Although these examples are few and far between at present they do represent a different perspective of understanding that presents a challenge to an historical perspective dominated by labels and categories.

An analysis of legislation passed in the 19th and 20th centuries reveals the way categories have been used to define this group of people. The names and labels may have changed but the categorization remained. For example, the terms 'moron',

'imbecile' and 'idiot' advocated in the 1959 Mental Health Act were replaced in the 1970 Education Act (Handicapped Children) by 'educational subnormal' and 'severely subnormal'. The World Health Organisation (1980) defined pupils with pmld as those who have an IQ under 20; it describes a range of impairments including a range of cognitive functions, perception, attention, memory and thinking. There is also a notion of deterioration of these functions in people with pmld and also implications for personal and social skills (Ouvry 1987). Intellectual impairment forms a central focus of definitions that appear to continue to be influential. Orelove and Sobsey (1996) offer a definition that is based on pupils presenting two or more of a list of impairments and deformities including restriction of movement; skeletal deformities; sensory disorders; seizure disorders; lung and breathing control, and other associated medical problems. These categories are dominated by physical and medical characteristics but the authors include intellectual characteristics too:

> "These individuals typically acquire skills slowly, tend to forget skills they do not practice, have trouble generalizing from one situation to another, and find it difficult to synthesize."
>
> Orelove and Sobsey (1996) p 3

There are definitions that are based on comparative perspectives. The research of Ouvry (1987) talks about pupils with pmld having additional and different needs to peers with severe learning difficulties who, in the eighties, attended special schools. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001) emphasises the notion of 'difference and additional' as a way of defining all children with special educational needs. The Warnock Report (1979) talked about the notion of a continuum of learning difficulties with pupils with pmld being a small part of the 2% of pupils requiring specialist provision normally in a special school. This Report could be said to have clarified the framework for classification thus furthering the use of categories and labels. For pupils with pmld it did serve to highlight the extreme difference from other pupils. In Warnock's graph of frequency distribution of intelligence, pupils with pmld (IQ below 20) can be seen to be at one extreme, with pupils with an IQ of 190 plus sharing their extremity at the other polarity. The QCA guidelines (2001) on Planning, Teaching and Assessing the Curriculum for Pupils with Learning Difficulties refer to pupils with pmld as unlikely to achieve higher than level two of the National Curriculum at key stage 4. One can see here that pupils with pmld are again being

categorized through a comparison with other disabled and non disabled peers. Pupils with pmld are then labelled as failing to progress in the way the latter group does.

There are definitions that are based on intensity and extremity of individual needs. Clark (1993) discusses notions of profound and multiple learning disabilities that stress the mammoth challenge to our understanding that these pupils present. This challenge is highlighted by Ware (1994) who talks about children with pmld having several disabilities in an extreme degree including profound intellectual impairment. Lacey and Ouvry (1998) offer a definition that emphasises the complex nature of the multiplicity of disabilities:

> "Profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) indicates two of the most important facets of the difficulties faced by these people; that is, they have more than one disability and that one of these is profound intellectual impairment."

> Lacey and Ouvry (1998) p ix

The definition offered by SCAA (1996) as the focus of their planning guidelines document appears to synthesize the categorization of this group of pupils by criteria of need and intensity of difficulty:

> "Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties who, in some respects appear to be functioning at the earliest levels of development and who, additionally have physical or sensory impairments. Some of these pupils may be ambulant and may behave in ways that either challenge staff and other pupils or result in their isolation making it difficult to involve them in positive educational experiences. Most experience difficulties with communication."

> SCAA 1996 p 8

These definitions offer a view of this group of pupils that influences the way teachers understand and perceive their pupils. The SCAA definition, as a culmination of a categorical perspective, appears to have been generally well received by teachers as an accurate description of the pupils they teach (Ouvry and Saunders 1996). The recent work of Aird (2001) attempts to develop a definition of pmld that becomes contextual to a particular school and tries to move away from models of stereotypical understandings. However, it can be seen that the categories of disability types that his work advocates, are in fact different types of categories. The school system, with its

infrastructure based on categories and labels, may need to be radically changed in order to challenge the current way of viewing this group of pupils in categories. Lacey and Ouvry (1998) offer an approach to defining pmld that reflects the views of parents, carers and professional staff. This approach looks at the abilities of the young people as well as appreciating the extensive difficulties encountered by those young people. This offers an example of a paradigmatic shift in definition towards a more holistic and positive view of this group of pupils and a move away from a view that concentrates on a range of inabilities in the young person.

There is evidence in the literature (DfE circular 3/94, Carpenter 1998) that through advances in medical science, the nature of the disabilities pupils with pmld have is changing. Many more pupils appear to require more intensive and prolonged medical support. There is also evidence (Male 1996) that there are a growing number of pupils defined as pmld currently attending special schools. This reflects a growing trend from earlier research in the area (Ouvry 1987) and suggests there are more children being categorised and labelled as pmld.

This discussion of definitions, for the most part, is dominated by an emphasis of 'can't do' rather than 'can do'. The definitions I have included in this section do little to question and challenge the assumptions and impact of such categorisation. Rather, they appear to uphold a vast range of segregated services dominated by professionals. There can be no doubt that, through these definitions, there is a view of the pupils that enables particular educational provision to be made. What has emerged, over time, are segregated and specialist services for all disabled people; people with profound and multiple learning disabilities are further labelled and categorized and have segregated services within the segregated services developed and sustained for them. An examination of these definitions of pmld offers a possible explanation of this phenomenon. It becomes clear that the pupils in question present complex and multiple issues that require adult support to maintain essential and basic personal care routines. The extremity of their needs is well represented. However, inherent in most approaches is a negative view of the pupils who appear to be the 'owners' of their disabilities. The definitions reflect an almost constant view over time of this group of pupils but, in the main, do little to challenge our understanding of the pupils themselves. There are some challenges apparent in the literature (Lacey and Ouvry

1998, Fitton 1994). The latter illustrates how a young woman with pmld was able to exercise choice and influence her life in a sheltered home she shared with a friend. Analysing the perspectives of different parties, as offered in the work of Lacey and Ouvry (1998), illustrates the impact of multi dimensional perspectives. In relation to this study, notions of how this group of pupils are defined have contributed to the development of my own meaning making, from which I can engage in an analysis of the teachers' definitions of pupils with pmld. It does pose some questions for the current research: does the domination of labelling and categorising govern their understandings too? And, how helpful are these definitions in developing understandings about the pupils that they teach?

I found the next stage of development of my own conceptual map of meaning making led me to analyse the perspectives of teachers of pupils with severe and pmld.

The perspectives of teachers

Teachers of pupils with pmld, after parents, carers and families are the people who have most contact with, and therefore most influence over, the lives of pupils with pmld. It is central to this study to gain an understanding of the key issues that develop from an analysis of their apparent understandings of the pupils they teach. Most of the literature in this area involves teachers engaged in research whilst still teaching, teachers reflecting on their experiences once they have left teaching (usually entering academia) and researchers studying teachers. This section incorporates the understandings of teachers in relation to how pupils with pmld learn and through this how they as teachers teach. This is informed by the literature on teaching and learning for this group of pupils.

The work of Corbett (1994) illustrates an example of a teacher reflecting on her work once she has left the classroom. Recollecting her early work with pupils with pmld she vividly remembers the words of other teachers in her school. She recalls the language used by other teachers to describe her teaching and the pupils she taught:

"The vocabulary being used in relation to this group was about 'care', 'nursing', 'comfort', 'respite for parents', 'occupy' and 'control'. This was the official language. The unofficial was expressed in terms such as 'dumping ground', 'sin bin', 'vegetables', 'shitty work' and 'baby minding'.

Corbett explains this was pre Warnock and it is assumed the official language was influenced by the legacy of the medical and care philosophy of the long stay hospital provision. The unofficial language recalled by Corbett tells a different story, a story of prejudice, fear and unknowing. It was usual for special care departments to be marginalized in special schools with little contact between them and the rest of the school and it is not surprising that a cloak of fear and misunderstanding pervaded. This relates to the issues discussed above about defining this group of pupils. The pupils do seem to be segregated and marginalized within the context of schools for all children with severe learning difficulties. This suggests a negative view of the pupils by the teachers, and this is further supported in the literature. It is apparent that this group of pupils is a very difficult and personally challenging group to teach. Ware (1994) talks about the difficulty teachers encounter with the apparent lack of progress that the pupils make. Pagliano (2001) discusses the perceptions of teachers of this group of pupils and it becomes clear that the child 'owns' the disability and presents problems to the teacher - problems that the teacher needs to 'deal with' and 'manage'. This is further supported in the work of Garner (1994) where again, inherent in the discussion, pupils are viewed by their teachers as problematic and owning problems. Goodley (2001) highlights the tendency of some teachers to understand and describe the pupils they teach by the medical 'syndrome' that has been attached to the child. This may indeed be an example of the legacy of the historical domination of medical and hospital provision of services. It is clear that teachers talk about pupils with pmld as having extensive and enormous needs (Downs and Craft 1996) that create the need for additional and different provision (Aird 2001). Watson (1997) describes pupils with pmld as having very severe learning difficulties. This supports the view that the teachers perceive the pupils as having extreme disabilities and suggests the teachers may be subscribing to the categorisation theory of definition highlighted in the previous section.

This group of pupils appears to be perceived very differently from their disabled peers. In relation to inclusion and integration O'Brien (2001) illustrates how, within special schools, pupils with pmld continue to be perceived as different from their peers. Reporting on an innovative integration strategy one school initiated, it became

clear that the pupils with pmld were excluded from the project. Only when the project was successfully established, were explorations made to include this group of pupils. The QCA (2001) planning guidelines, which developed from the practice of teachers, seems to continue to marginalise pupils with pmld. Vignettes of pupils with pmld offer a broad view of the intricate and varied ways different pupils may respond and progress. However, the 'P' levels (level descriptors of pupil progress) remain the same for the first three levels, showing little progression through areas of the curriculum for pupils who are 'performing' at this stage. This may not necessarily be all pupils defined as having pmld but it does, through the nature of the level descriptors, give a strong message to teachers about the nature and potential of pupil progress.

There are a few examples of different perspectives being offered. As previously mentioned Lacey and Ouvry (1998) give an example of a teacher describing a young man with pmld. His strengths and positive attributes are described in detail, painting a more constructive view of the young man. It will become apparent that this perspective is explicit and dominant in parental perceptions, but as yet appears unusual in published teacher perceptions.

The story that emerges in relation to how teachers appear to perceive and understand pupils with pmld suggests that teacher understandings and perceptions may be influenced by a negative frame of reference. The dominance of a labelling and categorisation, based on particular principles, discussed in the previous section is also apparent here. This raises more questions for the current research: could it be possible that the way research in this area has been designed and developed teachers do not get the opportunity to talk about their pupils in different ways? Or, could it indeed be a reflection of the actual nature of understanding in the teaching profession?

Understandings about teaching and learning

It is important to analyse perspectives in the literature relating to the way pupils with pmld are perceived to learn and how it is believed their teachers should teach. This offers another perspective to the understandings of the teachers in this study. Any discussion of teaching and learning will also highlight some of the underlying beliefs

and understandings held about the children. Lacey, Smith and Tilstone (1991) offer an historical analysis of the way the curriculum has been designed for children with severe learning difficulties. Although pupils with pmld are not referred to directly, it presents a clear picture of what was happening in special schools in the 70's and 80's, the environment, in which many pupils with pmld were to be found. The authors illustrate in this historical overview of curriculum development an emphasis on behavioural and skills based teaching for pupils with severe learning difficulties. We know from the work of Ouvry (1987) this approach to teaching, with an emphasis on developmental curricula, was an acknowledged and established approach to teaching with pupils with pmld. Her extensive work placed the developmental curriculum into the context of whole curriculum balance and her models of curriculum development and delivery reveal the stress on the developmental curricula for this group of pupils. This was a period of highly focused and direct teaching of each and every new skill. Teachers devised and followed extremely detailed individual learning plans. There are examples of behavioural / instructional approaches with a variety of acronyms that teachers followed (SAM as documented in Lacey, Smith and Tilstone 1991, CIM as described in Coupe and Porter 1986 and BAB as reported by Ouvry 1987) Teachers of pupils with pmld appeared to adopt methods using material from a developmentally younger period (Uzgris and Hunt 1979). What is common to all these approaches is an adherence to developmental psychology based on normal development. They perceive pupils with pmld as being developmentally very young and utilise infant and early childhood frameworks for building understandings about this group of pupils. These approaches clearly had a strong influence on how this group of pupils were perceived and understood. There was also the belief that the pupils would learn in a linear and developmental way, much slower that their able peers, but nevertheless going through each of the developmental stages. Ware (1994) had difficulty with this emphasis on developmental and linear learning for pupils with pmld as her research illustrated that:

> "One of the key aspects of what a teacher of a pupil with pmld does is to make decisions about what elements of the accumulated backlog of curriculum have priority. By doing this, s/he exposes the fallacy of conceptualizing the curriculum in terms of a linear sequence."

<div align="right">Ware 1994 p5</div>

Although Ware appears to question the linear development, it is clear that she continues to be influenced by developmental progression related to child psychology. This developmental and behaviourist approach is still in evidence today in some teaching for pupils with pmld (Aird 2001). The recent work of Staves (2001), linked to the National Numeracy Strategy supports the interpretation that it is widely accepted by practising teachers that pupils with pmld are learning at the earliest stages of development and require a highly structured developmental curriculum. This approach appears to present the teacher of pupils with pmld as a quasi-educational psychologist. However, there are examples of this approach being challenged by teachers.

In the reflections Byers (1996) makes about his teaching in a 'special care class', it appears that he perceived himself to be a maverick figure for moving away from strict behavioural approaches in his more interactive approach to teaching and learning. More interactive approaches to teaching and learning for pupils with pmld have received growing attention in recent years, with their emphasis on the process of learning rather than the product of learning (Collis and Lacey 1996, Nind and Hewettt 1998). Here the learners adopt a more active role in the learning with the key issues being related to control, communication (particularly communicative intent) and simple problem solving. The growing understanding of the role and contribution of ICT to the teaching and learning of pupils with pmld began to have an impact in classroom management and there followed developments in augmentative communication systems that allowed greater interaction by pupils (Detheridge 1998). These interactive approaches appear to challenge the fundamental processes advocated in the earlier behavioural approaches. It could be concluded that the role of the teacher moved from quasi psychologist to quasi therapist. The teacher of pupils with pmld was seen to be akin to a chameleon, being able to embrace the differences of the two approaches. Indeed, Marvin (1998) suggests that the two approaches are not mutually exclusive:

"Behavioural and interactive approaches stand in contrast to one another. The complexity of the ever changing balance of curriculum content for pupils with pmld requires a variety of teaching approaches."

Marvin (1998) p 122

The place of therapeutic and sensory based interventions in the teaching and learning for pupils with pmld is also illustrated in the literature (Ouvry 1987, Lindsay, Black and Broxholme 2001, Pagliano 2001). These approaches have been referred to as 'additional curriculum' (Ouvry 1991, Sebba and Rose1992, Ouvry and Saunders 1996) that must be planned for and integrated into the teaching of pupils with pmld. Historically, therapeutic interventions have taken the form of the involvement of other professionals (e.g. speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy). There have also been contributions from particular subject disciplines (art, drama, music, MOVE and rebound therapy), which appear to be continuing to play a significant role (Cavet and Lacey 2000). In recent years there has been an increase in the use of alternative therapies including aromatherapy and massage (Lindsay, Black and Broxholme 2001). However, there is evidence in the literature (Whittaker, Gardner and Kershaw 1991) that disabled people have critisised the implementation of therapy based provision, both from an efficacy and personal choice perspective. Sensory approaches to teaching and learning as advocated by writers such as White and Telec (1998), Longhorn (1993) and Pagliano (2001) stress the importance of active physical experience and borrow a great deal from MSI (multi sensory impairment) teaching. The two main motives for adopting sensory approaches for pupils with pmld are explained by Pagliano (2001) as relaxation and education. These approaches have been seen to influence the teaching and learning for pupils with pmld specifically through the development of sensory and white rooms. This has not been without controversy with some (Hopkins and Willetts 1993) questioning the effectiveness of such approaches. Although there appears to be a variety of approaches to teaching and learning for pupils with pmld, there is a degree of questioning about how appropriate these approaches are.

This questioning becomes stronger with 'alternative' approaches that have emerged over the years. Throughout history there have been a number of alternative approaches to teaching pupils with severe and pmld. These have generally originated from abroad with promises of a 'cure' treatment and a tendency to focus upon the physical development or patterning of the pupil. These include Dolman Delacatto (for parents' perspective of this see Tilstone 1991), Bobath (discussed in Coupe and Porter 1986), Conductive Education (discussed in Lacey and Ouvry 1998) and more recently MOVE, a USA based movement programme. These approaches reflect a concern with

re programming and re patterning the brain in order to move towards normalisation. These approaches tend to be offered privately and parents and families pay enormously for them in terms of finance and physical effort. Controversially, Conductive Education was introduced in many special schools in the late eighties as an approach to teaching and learning particularly for pupils with pmld. It offered highly structured and organized classroom activities that for many classes brought the pupils together as a class group regularly. Again, the effectiveness of the approach has been questioned (Drake 1999). Also, within the literature, dissenting voices of disabled people who had personally experienced this approach emerged as a significant critique of the approaches (Oliver 1986).

The National Curriculum with its emphasis on entitlement and access along with Government initiatives related to integration and inclusion (Green Paper 1997) encouraged special schools to integrate pupils with pmld with their more able peers in the special school. Today there appears to be a variety of organisational management strategies employed in special schools and units (Lacey 1999) although many such schools remain inherently hierarchical and consequently segregationist. Increased integration, with its implications for the teaching and learning of pupils with pmld, challenged earlier notions of what constituted teaching and learning for this group of pupils. In recent years, there is evidence of changes in understanding related to the teaching and learning of this group of pupils that challenges previous notions. The work of Park (1999) is one such example where a developmental curricula was integrated with the subject curricula of the National Curriculum. Articles analysing the contribution of the work of William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens to the education of pupils with pmld were being published. The integration of this group of pupils into the National Numeracy Strategy and National Literacy Strategy appears to offer a broader paradigm for their potential learning. The increased integration of such children into the special school offered a challenge to earlier practices of segregation, and research was indicating the positive effect of this integration. An example of this in the research of Ware (1994) who found that, in carefully planned integrated sessions, there were significant increases in social interaction between pupils with pmld and their more able peers, particularly touching and vocalizing. This change is not without dispute with many in the profession struggling to manage a scenario that indeed challenges the status quo of segregation and hierarchy that prevails in school

(Aird 2001). The QCA guidelines (QCA 2001) advocate an eclectic approach that has developmental psychological principles intertwined with interactive and therapeutic approaches. It appears to represent the pinnacle of understandings relating to teaching and learning for pupils with learning difficulties including pupils with pmld. Its representations of good practice are clearly developed out of the work of practicing teachers. However, this raises a concern about the guidelines: where is the challenge to the status quo of understanding, rather than the acceptance of a synthesis of current practice?

The value of multi professional approaches to teaching is well documented (Ouvry 1987, Ware 1994, Carpenter 1996) as playing a significant role in the teaching and learning of pupils with pmld. This notion fits in well with the idea of the teacher as an eclectic manager of many varied approaches. Terminology has changed from multi professional to a transdisciplinary collaborative approach as suggested by Ouvry and Lacey (1998). This culminates in the idea of person centered planning (PCP) where all interested parties, including the pupils themselves or their advocates, participate in the planning process. This approach has been endorsed in the Disability Discrimination Act 2001 and reflects a changing level of participation in decision making about what is to be taught. However, in the context of the school system this can be a problematic concept. Schools, as we have seen, are inherently hierarchical and depend on compliance to support their infrastructure. Active decision-making can offer a challenge to this hierarchy and may be seen as a threat to the organisation and management of the school. The examples offered in the literature where pupils with learning difficulties have been encouraged to participate in decision making (Rose 1999) relating to their learning show the choices offered to pupils to be carefully managed by teachers. Research in a related area (Swain and Jones 1999, Jones and Gilbert 2001) shows the difficulties inherent in attempting to involve parents more in decision making about the educational provision of their disabled children. It appears the school system, as it is now, welcomes only a certain level of active decision making by pupils and parents.

In this analysis of some of the key approaches to teaching and learning for pupils with pmld, it is apparent that the approaches developed for this group of pupils owe much

to approaches developed for other disabled children. The image of the teacher of this group of pupils emerges as one of chameleon and magpie, a strategic manager, borrowing and adapting from other approaches that, in themselves, have not been without controversy. An important issue is the lack of long term evaluative projects into the teaching and learning of pupils with pmld. The writings of disabled people, many of who have experienced these specialist approaches, do not appear to have influenced the understandings related to teaching and learning for pupils with pmld. There appears to be an acceptance that such specialist approaches will be appropriate for pupils with pmld if 'adapted enough'. There is evidence of changes in emphasis within particular approaches; strict adherence to behaviourist teaching appears to have been gradually challenged; therapeutic interventions (despite the criticisms from disabled people) appear to be more prominent, and highly specialist provision often developed for children with other disabilities continues to be influential. However, do these changes reflect a real sea change in provision and understanding, or are they further examples of the retention of 'specialist' and 'segregated' provision for this group of pupils?

This section paints a complex picture of current understandings towards the teaching and learning of pupils with pmld that is not without controversy. The legacy of a deficit child psychological approach continues to be influential. This, in turn, can be seen to influence decisions teachers make about the pupils they teach. Hinchcliffe (1994) explores the notion of self-advocacy for pupils with pmld. Discussing pupils with pmld participating in decision making about their lives, he suggests it is, in fact, inappropriate for this group of pupils. This may be a pragmatic and realistic view of the tremendous level of need of the pupils, or it may be an example of the danger of making assumptions about the potential of pupils with pmld. The example of the work of Fitton (1994) illustrates that, with facilitating circumstances, people with pmld are able to exercise choice and control in fundamental and life changing ways.

What becomes clearer through this analysis is the strong affiliation to specialist provision. It appears to be believed that this group of pupils requires teaching that is different from their peers and is highly specialised. What appears to be lacking is the influence of research, focussed upon the teaching and learning experiences of pupils with learning difficulties:

"Our knowledge about the psychological reality of learning difficulties is very sketchy and few of the accepted elements of teaching methodology have been empirically demonstrated to be effective."

Carpenter 2001 in Carpenter, Ashdown and Bovair p11

This is also true for the teaching and learning experiences of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. To continue in my development of an initial analysis of the substantive issues of this research and the formulation of some form of conceptual framework I went to the body of research relating to notions of disability.

Notions of disability

In order to further the analysis of the understandings of teachers of pupils with pmld it is important to appreciate the contribution of understandings of disability. These serve to influence the understandings of teachers as the notions permeate the fabric of the society the teachers engage with in all aspects of their life; personal as well as professional. The historical legacy of humanitarian and benevolent provision as the basis for the development of all special education, but particularly for pupils with pmld, is highlighted in Clark (1993). It appears from this the fundamental drives of special education were informed by a kind and caring foundation. This notion is challenged in the literature. In her analysis of the role of language in special education Corbett (1994) offers a perspective of perceptions of special needs that has a pendulum swinging between sentimentality and prejudice. Between sugar coated care and images that foster fear and hate. She maintains that:

"The emphasis upon 'special educational needs' was to make a lasting imprint upon attitudes to disability. It is the language of the status quo, the voice of the confident and complacent establishment."

Corbett (1994) p8

The humanitarian benevolence discussed in Clark (1993) is attracting increasing questioning (Sandow 1994, Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton 2000). This is in accordance with one of the leading disabled theorists, Finkelstein, who declares that special education is a social construction of the Welfare State and that, through this, it can be assumed that society has a negative and deficit model of disability (Finkelstein 1997). This is well supported in the literature and research with emphasis being on

notions of subservience (Corbett 1994), impairment (Thomas 1998), individualisation (Emerson 1992), and low expectations (Downs and Craft 1996). Caldwell (1998) highlights the difficulty we have in understanding pupils with disabilities and especially pupils with pmld. It may be our lack of knowledge that leads to the swinging of Corbett's pendulum between sentimentality and prejudice. Ware (1997) talks about pupils with pmld being 'like babies but not like babies' (Ware 1997:18). Historically, the influence of humanitarian and benevolent drives has been significant in establishing an individual needs led provision. These particular drives, inherent in the infra structure of education must influence the understanding and perceptions of teachers of pupils with pmld. It is the intention of this study to analyse some of the drives that influence the work of the teachers and to analyse critically the impact of benevolent and humanitarian practices. The work of disabled theorists (e.g. Oliver 1993, Finkelstein 1993) challenges earlier notions of disability. For these theorists the days of humanitarian benevolence are over. However, in relation to the influences on teachers of pupils with pmld, the work of Clark (1993) illustrates that, for such pupils, there has been no such challenge to historical perceptions and humanitarian benevolence prevails.

The understandings emerging related to models and theories of disability are complex. This section attempts to analyse their impact on teacher understanding but may, in the process, simplify them and not enter into the nuances of the tensions and possibilities that are inherent in the discourse. Goodley (2001) believes it is time to move beyond a personal tragedy model of disability where the child 'owns' the disability to that of a social model of disability that accepts that society, itself, can be disabling. Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2000) reflect on the growth of the disability discourse in relation to human rights and suggest that through the disabled movement, people with disabilities are beginning to challenge the humanitarian perspective:

> "The social conditions and discourses that reconstruct difference as disadvantage have been challenged along with the social relations of a professional practice which reinforces disabling identities through the ideology of 'care'".
>
> Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2000) p2

This challenge is supported in the sociological literature that discusses the vested interests of professionals in special education (Tomlinson 1982, Sandow 1994). It is

important to consider the influence these challenges may have for teachers of pupils with pmld, or whether teachers are being influenced by these challenges. These challenges can be seen to undermine the whole infrastructure of schools and provide an argument that questions the current practice of teachers of pupils with pmld. A question that arises is: is it in the interest of teachers of pupils with pmld to maintain the status quo of understandings based on humanitarian benevolence? Pupils classified as pmld can be seen to provide this group of teachers with employment, a social identity and may form the central core of their professional raison d'etre.

The current theoretical context of how disability is understood by society helps to make sense of the theoretical setting that surrounds this group of teachers. However, it has to be acknowledged that the teachers themselves may not be explicitly aware of this context. Two major paradigms of the way society at present appears to understand disability can be simply summarised into the individual and social. The individual model has an emphasis on normalisation and cure (Swain and French 1998). Disability is the direct result of individual impairment and there are notions of tragedy as perceived by the non disabled community (Swain and French 2002). Part of the individual paradigm is the medical model of disability that seems to concentrate on 'within child' factors and is associated with charity and the medical profession (Allan, Brown and Riddell 2000). There is also the holistic model (Cooper 1996). In this, a more holistic approach is adopted regarding the disability, which takes into account psycho-social factors. However, the ownership of the disability remains firmly with the individual. The social model offers a different perspective to the individual. This is a relatively new way of thinking and is encapsulated in Priestley's (1999) words as:

> "The emerging recognition that disability could be reconstructed within a social model provided the basis for an entirely new discourse of rights, citizenship and inclusion."

Priestley 1999 p.9

The location of the disability is moved from the individual to the society. Notions of barriers approach to disability relate here (Swain and French 1993). This has also been attributed to the social constructionist perspective (Allan, Brown and Riddell 1998) where disability is attributed to environmental factors including teaching approaches. There is also discussion in the literature of a perspective where disability

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is located within the institutionalised practices of society (Oliver 1990, Fulcher 1989). This is referred to as a social creationist perspective. Disability is viewed as oppression and the discourse becomes political.

In relation to the social model, tension developed around the terms 'disability' and 'impairment'. Oliver (1996) felt the social model detrimentally ignored notions of impairment and:

"An adequate social theory of disability must contain a theory of impairment."

Oliver 1996 p 50

Finkelstein (1997) offers some clarification of notions of impairment and disability when he reminds us of the UPIAS (1976) definitions. Impairment is the lacking of part or whole of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism. Disability is the disadvantage caused by organizations on physically disabled people by not including them in service provision and policy formation. The recent work of Swain and French (2002) present an affirmative model of disability developing from the social model. Here, they suggest that for some disabled people there is a desire and need to affirm their disability as an integral part of their being: their individual and social identity. The voices of disabled people emerging through the literature have had a significant impact on understandings of disability. However, the voices first heard were representative of a particular faction of disabled people. People with learning disabilities were not evident in the first wave of disabled theorists. In fact, Goodley (2000) suggests that the sociological analysis developing from the disability movement forgot 15-20% of people with learning disabilities. It is true to say that the disability movement left out people with learning disabilities (Dowse 2001). This is now changing and the voices of people with learning disabilities are becoming more evident in the literature (Atkinson et al 1997, Rose et al 1999,Goodley 2000). Unfortunately, the voices of people with pmld are not included in this discourse and they appear to be the forgotten population of the forgotten population. This is supported in the previously mentioned work of O'Brien (2001) who shows that, in relation to developing integration between special and mainstream, pupils with pmld are always the last to be included. This does not appear to be a malicious decision but is more a reflection of the way we understand (or do not understand) this group of people. The central issue of difficulty appears to stem from communication. Allen

(2001) suggests the key to any relationship that produces understanding and empathy is shared communication. The literature in the field of pmld is united in its premise that communication is a key issue that presents enormous challenges to adults when working with all pupils with pmld (Ouvry 1987, SCAA 1996, Ware 1997, Lacey and Ouvry 1998, Aird 2001). This difficulty with communication has a major impact on the possible contribution pupils with pmld can make, particularly in the light of Ball (1994) who suggests that those who hold the keys of power and language dominate any discourse. This has implications for the teachers; they find themselves working in a context where they may receive little or no evaluative feedback from their pupils.

Perspectives of some key policy milestones

Armstrong et al (2000) suggest policies represent underlying ideologies and are therefore a reflection of the ideology of the time. An analysis of some fundamental policy texts and relevant government initiatives serves to highlight some of the key issues. At one level, the policy in relation to the education of pupils with pmld has seen major changes over the past thirty years, particularly the move from Health to Education. At another level, the inherent influence of categorisation and labelling has dominated provision and contributed to the continuation of segregated and specialist provision for this group of pupils. Thirty years ago children with severe learning difficulty (of which pupils with pmld form a small part) were the sole responsibility of Health (Tilstone 1991). The classification of this group of pupils was based on the 'handicapping' problems the pupils were deemed to have. Many children and young people with pmld were in long stay hospitals. It was the 1970 Education Act that moved the responsibility of their education to the Department for Education. Junior training centers changed their names overnight to special schools. However, the practice in the special schools was seen to remain the same with an emphasis of skills training (Tilstone 1991).

The Warnock report of 1979 represented an example of enlightened modernity that posited a continuum of special educational need and provided optimism about the purposes of education for this group of pupils (Corbett 1994). This report formed the bedrock of the 1981 Education Act. What indeed it did was offer clarification about categories of special educational need but continued to classify and label and thus segregate particular groups of pupils. There was also an emphasis on matching

educational need with educational provision, which was described in a Statement of Special Educational Need - the ultimate label. These statements were legally binding contracts between parents and local education authorities and promised to set out needs and make appropriate provision through a multi professional assessment (Tilstone 1991). However, the rhetoric of intention and practice became a concern with issues being voiced about the difficulty of translating principles of the Act into practice being voiced (Goacher et al 1988). In reality the 1981 Education Act offered little to pupils with pmld, as their educational needs were deemed so great in the first place that resources had, as a matter of practical expediency and necessity, always followed them. The behavioural processes of assessment, teaching and evaluation advocated in the Act can be seen to align with the teaching practices of teachers of pupils with pmld (Ouvry and Saunders 1996) and therefore tended to confirm current practice.

The Education Reform Act (1988) heralded the National Curriculum, a curriculum that every child was entitled to, even children attending special schools. This formed the precursor for a process of curriculum change in special schools where teachers attempted to marry the National Curriculum to the individual needs of their pupils (Carpenter, Ashdown and Bovair 1996). The detailed and exhaustive programmes of study bore little resemblance to the curriculum plans of the special school (Tilstone 1991). Marvin (1999) feels the National Curriculum with its notions of entitlement did not represent the population of pupils with pmld. However, in practice, this Act had an important influence on the understanding of teachers of pupils with special educational needs, including pmld, as it served as a critique of the special school curriculum they had delivered. In attempting to marry the demands of the National Curriculum to the preconceptions held by teachers about the pupils, issues relating to breadth and balance were analysed (Carpenter, Ashdown and Bovair 1996) and it was realised that the National Curriculum, based on developmental psychology, was not so different from the developmental curriculum of the special school (Tilstone 1991). What the National Curriculum lacked was detail, and the research of Haplin and Lewis (1996) again revealed the rhetoric of policy and showed that the National Curriculum had indeed had little impact on actual school practice. However, there is evidence in the research that, in trying to cope with the demands of the National Curriculum, some teachers began to increase and extend their understandings of

teaching and learning, particularly as they apply to pupils with pmld (Rose 1991, Sebba and Rose 1993). In the main, the National Curriculum appears to have confirmed the process of classifying and labelling pupils with pmld as different. The 1994 Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs is an example of educational policy focusing directly upon the needs of disabled children, and so it did in many ways. However, in the whole of the Code there is no representation of pupils with pmld. The revised Code (DfES 2001) makes little difference to this. Teachers of pupils with pmld may be receiving a message through these Education Acts and policies: the pupils they teach are not included in them. This could be said to heighten the teachers' notions of their pupils being different and requiring segregated and specialist provision. This is not limited to teachers of pupils with pmld. Teachers of pupils with special educational needs have also experienced this notion of difference and was epitomised in the standard assessment tasks (SATs) relating to the National Curriculum:

" SATs are being piloted in selected special schools, but it appears that they are generally considered to be unsuitable, in their present form, for many pupils with special educational needs."

Tilstone 1991 p 67

The 1996 Education Act offered a slimmed down version of the National Curriculum that was intended to offer flexibility and creativity, particularly post the Dearing Report (1994) that was to allow teaching from different key stages where appropriate. For teachers of pupils with pmld this was significant. It allowed them to teach from earlier key stages, which they felt were more appropriate to the developmental and intellectual needs of their pupils. This report can be seen to support the notion of pupils with pmld progressing, in comparison to their more able peers, at a much slower rate, and emphasising the link between notions of progress and National Curriculum levels of attainment. Surely, this view of progress must influence the way teachers understand pupils with pmld?

The SCAA (Schools Council Assessment Authority) publication (1994) proved to be the first focused planning guidance for pupils with pmld and emphasised how the National Curriculum formed only a part of the whole curriculum for this group of pupils. This publication can be seen as an act of confirmation of the different notions

of curriculum balance practices in special schools as set out in the work of Ouvry (1991). However, the advent of Ofsted, the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) with their driving aim to improve standards in Numeracy and Literacy offered a challenge to the earlier notions of different curricula. They have proved to be substantial policy documents for all disabled pupils, even pupils with pmld. It was an accepted principle that all children would participate in these strategies and teachers of all pupils needed to be able to manage the strategies effectively (Berger, Morris and Portman 2000). Ofsted, as the government inspection machine, would inspect on them. Any school not effectively developing these strategies, as intrinsic elements of the National Curriculum, would be reported upon. Carpenter (2001) states that in the 2001 national Ofsted report for special schools it was acknowledged:

> "That many schools still need to make further improvements to ensure that all pupils have access to the full National Curriculum."

> Carpenter 2001 in Carpenter, Ashdown and Bovair p9

The subjects that offered most concern were science and the foundation subjects, particularly ICT and RE. This suggests that the developmental curriculum may continue to dominate teaching and learning in special schools. The late nineties and beyond brings a 'quasi commercial' world of education (Aird 2001) where the agenda is firmly about raising standards with an emphasis upon showing progress and measuring value for money through notions of value added. The machinery of all schools is designed to illustrate this with its stress on testing and the publication of results. In most recent years this is also apparent in the guidance for special schools and thus applies to pupils with pmld (QCA 2001 and Revised Target Setting Guidance 2001). It becomes clear that teachers of pupils with pmld are being influenced by these 'quasi commercial' practices. It is expected that the teachers demonstrate value for money and effective progress, against a framework that is dominated by hierarchical categories. However, this raises a potential problem: the categories, which contribute to pupils with pmld being viewed in a deficit and detrimental way, may also be seen to serve to maintain the concept of segregation.

This dominance of categories based on a developmental framework can be seen clearly in the Specialist Standards for SEN (TTA 1999) which sets out the desired

standards that specialist teachers need to possess in order to work with pupils with special educational needs. The extension standards set out the key aspects of specialist knowledge where there is a strong emphasis on developmental areas of difficulty. This represents a change from the consultation document that was based on medical classifications (Miller and Porter 2000). Although the standards acknowledge the simplistic nature of this form of categorization and suggest individual pupils may need to develop skills across different categories, there is no challenge to the fundamental principles that have shaped and formed the categories themselves. Again, another question is posed for this research: does this influence the understanding of teachers of pupils with pmld and encourage them to understand their pupils in a medical and psychological way? The very fact that the standards are called specialist and refer to specialist knowledge must support the notion that the teachers are different from other teachers and must be have a level of specialist knowledge.

The QCA project illustrates a milestone in policy development. It was developed out of a collaborative research process that had, as its central focus, the views of teachers of pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning disabilities. It attempts to provide the connective pedagogy (Corbett 2001) that allows teachers to marry the needs of individual pupils with the demands of the National Curriculum. It sets out advice and guidelines whereby teachers will be able to demonstrate progress through level descriptors of pupil performance (P levels). The guidelines can be seen as a process that will enable teachers of pupils with learning difficulties to participate more fully in the raising standards and school improvement agenda. Unfortunately, as previously highlighted, it raises issues for pupils with pmld. Teachers of such pupils may have been given a message relating to pupil progress: the pupils they teach (who are apparently operating within the first three 'P' levels) are viewed to be operating in a narrow band of attainment.

Alongside these educational policies have been other social reforms that have addressed issues of rights and entitlements for disabled people. The 1989 Children Act, with its emphasis on children in need (Russell 1996) required:

> " Local authorities to provide services for children with disabilities that are designed to minimize the effects of the children's disabilities and to give them the opportunity to lead lives which are as normal as possible."

However, in practice, the segregated educational provision for pupils with pmld again showed the dichotomy between rhetoric and practice. The implications of the White Paper, Better Services for the mentally handicapped (DHSS 1971) may be viewed as significant in that it moved many pupils with pmld, previously resident in long stay hospitals, into community homes. They then needed to attend their local special school. Schools now had access to more pupils with pmld, who had experienced institutional life, and had to provide appropriate education for them. The Disability Discrimination Act 2001 that makes it illegal not to allow parents to choose a local mainstream school for their children. On the surface this appears highly significant for pupils with pmld as it suggests that parents should be able to send their child to the local school. However, there is a clause that says if the placement is deemed adversely to affect the education of other children, the school can refuse a place. This may prove to be the clause that prevents pupils with pmld attending local mainstream schools and thus forcing changes in educational provision and practice in those schools. So, even the most radical of Acts related to disability can be seen not to impact on the practice of teachers of pupils with pmld.

There is evidence through this analysis of policy and relevant government initiatives that, although there have been a number of important milestones in the educational provision for pupils with pmld over the past thirty years, the influence of categorization and labelling remains dominant. The impact of this may be seen to confirm notions of segregated and specialist provision for the teaching of pupils with pmld. Clark (1993) suggested the humanitarian and benevolent drives for educational provision of pupils with pmld are still in evidence.

The notion of isolation and segregation of the teaching of pupils with pmld is compounded by most pieces of legislation, as pupils with pmld have clearly not been included in their structure or detail. It appears that teachers are adopting and adapting approaches to teaching that have not undergone any evaluative research process. In developing my initial conceptual framework, I was concerned with the dominating influence of the professional knowledge base, and I wished to extend my framework

to include parents and carers of disabled children and disabled children themselves. This is what I then proceeded to do.

The perspectives of parents and carers

The contribution of the perspectives of parents and carers of pupils with pmld offer this discussion another viewpoint by which to further the analysis of the understandings of teachers. Not only does this analysis add an extra perspective but also that perspective comes from the closeness and sustained contact the parents and carers have with the young people themselves. This becomes crucial in the discussion. As will be seen in the next section, the views of the pupils themselves are important but there are difficulties, both in process and content. This section goes to the 'nearest' point of contact for the pupils and, although it cannot be assumed that the parents and carers can represent the actual views of the pupils, they do offer a richness of insight that will add to my meaning making of teacher understanding. In comparison to the literature offered by 'professionals' the amount of literature by parents and carers is scant. This may be seen to relate back to the opening section of this chapter and the concerns offered by Ball (1994) with the dominance of a professional discourse. The literature analysed offered an insight into the perception and understanding of parents about their children with pmld. Fitton (1994) offers two different perspectives of her daughter who has the classification of pmld, one for professionals and one for friends. The professional perspective stresses the negative problems that her daughter so clearly had: the fits, the physical deformities, the feeding problems etc. The second perspective intended for friends stressed her daughter's positive attributes; her sense of humour, her communication strategies, her mischief, her preferences etc. On reading both descriptions it would be easy to assume that they were two different people. This shows the limitations of allowing particular frames of reference to dominate perceptions of this group of pupils. Considering what has been learnt from the perspective of the teachers it can be assumed that the former description of Fitton's daughter is the one most teachers would employ themselves. There appears to be a dichotomy of understanding emerging: one for professionals and one for friends. This dichotomy of perceptions is further supported in the poem by Penman (1996), that she wrote about her son with pmld:

"When you look at my child

What do you see
When you look at my child?
How does he make you feel?

Your words confirm what I see in your eyes
Confident words, so secure
In the assumptions that you make.

Which child are you speaking about?

What do you see
When you look at me?
How do I make you feel?

Your manner suggests the response you expect
So sure of your words, Taking
For granted the role that you choose.

Are you really talking to me?

When did I tell you I wanted him changed
That I would prefer him different
From as he is?
When did I tell you I wanted your help
To change him?
I longed for my child for such a long time
I met him and chose him
And held my breath for a while.
I was very lucky.
He decided I belonged to him too.

Why would I change him?

Don't you realise that I can feel
Your need to change him
Your need for him to be other than what he is
To be 'improved'
To be more or less or whatever
You are disturbed by?

Don't you understand that
The comments you make about my child
Tell about yourself
And not about him?

And the needs we discuss

Are yours
And not his.

When you look at my child."

Penman (1996) p4

In this poem there is clear anger at the professionals for making assumptions about her son. There is clarity of awareness when she recognises and acknowledges the professional agenda that appears to dominate the situation. This dominating influence can be seen in the analysis of teachers' understandings. One can see the emphasis on the adoption of the medical model centering the problems on the child, where the teacher is the problem solver. This does not appear to be the understanding of the parent. This parent appears to be subscribing to the affirmative model of disability (Swain and French 2002). This mother is talking proudly about her son. His profound disabilities are an intrinsic part of his being and she does not take kindly to professionals wanting to 'change' him. This poem suggests that, although parents are identifying characteristics to describe their children, they are not the deficit based characteristics they believe teachers employ. This notion of 'problems' being owned solely by the child is further supported in the literature. Over twenty years ago Brock (1976) recalled his experiences of having a child with pmld, where the family became a 'problem' family and became the focus of endless investigation and analysis. Carpenter (1996) offers an insight into the feelings and emotions of parents of children with disabilities and their possible vulnerability. Through the stories these parental experiences tell, there appears to be a divide between the perceptions and understanding of professionals and parents. Parents and professionals appear to perceive the same children differently. There are a few examples of similarities cited in the literature, namely in the work of Lacey and Ouvry (1998) who write about a teacher describing one of her pupils with pmld in the same way Fitton (1994) described her daughter to her friends and family. This may represent a change in teachers' understanding that is not yet fully prevalent in the literature or it may relate to the methodological issue raised earlier in the chapter. It may be that the process of research employed does not offer teachers the opportunity to talk about their pupils in this way.

Perspectives of pupils

The final section of this chapter attempts to draw some understandings from pupils themselves. As previously mentioned there is no body of literature or documented experiences that gives the perceptions of pupils with pmld. It is important to hear the voice of the pupil, to listen to the perspectives of those who are at the sharp end of the education services and other people's attitudes and behaviour. The ethos of listening to children is clear in the Children Act 1989, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001) establishes the principle of actively seeking the views of children themselves. So much has been learned from the first hand experiences of disabled people arising from the growing disability movement. These voices played a significant role in changing the attitudes and perceptions of society towards disability. At a conference on inclusive education one young person with learning difficulty articulated the following wise words:

"We believe that the best people to talk about having a learning difficulty and our rights are those with learning difficulties."

Souza (1994) in Murray and Penman (1996) p 55

It has already been discussed how the initial voices of the disability movement did not represent people with learning disabilities (Gillman 1997). However, there have been some subsequent developments to address this (Goodley 2001), particularly through self advocacy groups. The People First Organisation is an example of the developing practice in this area and illustrates the contribution people with learning disabilities can make when circumstances allow it. The use of life histories has proven to be a useful tool (Atkinson, Jackson and Walmsley 1997). However, history appears to be repeating itself and, in the initial developments of the movement for self-advocacy for people with learning disabilities, people with pmld were not represented. It may be that it is deemed inappropriate (Hinchcliffe 1994) or it may be that we need, as a listening community, to develop more appropriate processes for enabling people with pmld to advocate their views. Tilstone and Barry (1998) discuss self-advocacy and people with pmld:

"The ability to meet such challenges, however, relies on the individual's ability to take control of his or her life, to set and achieve individual goals, and to make selections (Ramarcharan et al 1997). People with pmld can only rise to such

challenges if self advocacy is a meaningful goal and the prerequisite skills are clearly identified."

Tilstone and Barry (1998) p177

There have been some significant developments in our understanding of enabling pupils with severe learning disabilities to participate in decision making (Rose et al 1999). However, the developments needed for pupils with pmld have yet to be made and therefore cannot be included in this section. However, additional perspectives by which to continue the analysis of the understanding of teachers can be derived from other pupil experiences and understandings and tentative interpretations drawn from these. There is a small body of research in this area (Cook and Swain 2001, Wade and Moore 1993) offer a valuable contribution to the range of perspectives that constitute this chapter.

A young man recalls a story of his friend with cerebral palsy who was being picked on at school. His friend decided to make a speech to the school about his disability and the computer he uses for augmentative communication:

"People went up to him afterwards and apologized for what they had done and said about him. I thought he was very brave to do that and he shouldn't have had to. His disability has never made any difference to us."

Morrison (1996) in Murray and Penman (1996) p 27

This short story suggests several issues that may be pertinent. Firstly, the importance and value of helping all children to understand disability: in this instance, a small increase in understanding proved very successful in changing attitudes. This is also supported in the work of Lewis (1995) who showed that preparation was the key to effective integration experiences. What are the implications for this on the understandings of teachers of pupils with pmld? It may be that they find themselves the advocate of their pupils to other pupils and may need to explain constantly the behaviour and responses of their pupils. This can contribute to teachers' notions of difference and specialism. Secondly, the story raises the issue that children may have attitudes towards disability that provoke emotional reactions, be they bullying, anger or protection, and these need to be acknowledged and addressed. Again, this has implications for the teacher of pupils with pmld. Not only does s/he need to manage these feelings in others: they may once again confirm the notion of difference.

Another young man with cerebral palsy wrote of his experiences that stress the importance of attending to attitudes:

"I have cerebral palsy. I am 14 years old. My parents treat me like a normal person. My biggest problem is other people's attitudes towards me."

Somogyvary 1986 p30 in Wade and Moore 1993 px

This offers an insight into the characteristics discussed in the earlier sections and suggests that although parents are identifying characteristics to describe their children, the children feel comfortable with them. The characteristics employed by teachers are perceived as unhelpful and cause additional difficulties for the child. He goes onto describe how other people tend to assume he is helpless, is unable to understand anything and they tend to talk to people beside him about him rather than addressing him directly. It is their pity he appears most irritated about:

"Many people feel sorry for me, which I don't think is right. I'm stuck with it and people feeling sorry for me isn't going to do anything for me or for them."

Somogyvary 1986 p30 in Wade and Moore 1993 px

Wade and Moore (1993) carried out some research with young people with disabilities to collate their views on some recent integration experience. They found that, although on one level the young people felt there had been equity of opportunity and experiences with their peers, there was evidence to suggest they were viewing themselves in a negative way:

"A substantial number appeared to view themselves negatively and felt inadequate beside their peers, while others sought to emulate them."

Wade and Moore 1993 p 101

The authors suggest that the young students felt inadequate academically to their peers. This has implications for the way the children feel the teachers perceive them and poses another question: are teachers compounding these feelings of inadequacy? Research focusing on the views of disabled pupils attending residential schools (French and Swain 1997) illustrates the detrimental effects of segregated provision. Throughout this chapter the concept of segregated and specialist provision has been shown to be influential in perceptions and understandings. However, the above research highlighted the strong and often harrowing perceptions of disabled children

towards this practice. It appears to be important to children to have a sense of belonging (Cook, Swain and French 2001) and that any potential change or challenge to this can be distressing.

The perspectives of children do suggest there are many assumptions made about disabled pupils that the pupils themselves, or their close friends, are unhappy about. These assumptions do not appear to contribute anything positive to the experiences of the young people. They tend to be negative and concentrate on the disability rather than the person. These issues have been shown to be evident in the understandings emerging from teachers, policy and some research but not from the voices of parents and disabled theorists.

Conclusion

The sections in this chapter have come together to offer an initial conceptual framework for my research. It has highlighted the complex nature of the substantive focus of the research, as well as raising some problematic questions and permeating issues. These issues emerge as being related to the dominating influence of labelling, categorisation and a 'professional' knowledge base. Through the literature review, the continued practice of labeling and categorizing disabled people has been shown to be influential in the way teachers and practitioners in the field of special educational needs understand and respond to disabled children. It has also been shown that the dominating influences on the range of understandings about disabled people emerge from the professional community. This is problematic in that some of the perspectives of parents and children have been shown to be different from those emanating form the professionals. The perspective of disabled theorists is becoming more apparent in the literature and leads the disability discourse. However, the impact of these perspectives, as yet, do not appear to be greatly influencing the literature in the field of teaching and learning for severe and profound learning difficulties. Issues related to listening to and representing the views of children with complex difficulties has been discussed as highly complex. The issues and questions raised in this chapter lead me to be interested in furthering my understanding about the epistemology of the range of understandings of the teachers in my study. I wish to analyse where the teachers' understandings appears to come from, what informs their understanding and how their

apparent understandings relate to the models and frameworks that have emerged in this chapter.

Chapter Three

The theoretical underpinnings of the process of research: the contribution of symbolic interaction, critical theory and grounded theory

Introduction

At the outset of the research I had identified a set of questions in which my research was going to engage. While developing my initial conceptual framework, many more questions were raised as potentially helpful to my meaning making. I now needed a process of inquiry that would help me engage with this. As already suggested, the process of meaning making is complex. I began exploring social theory in the hope of finding an approach that would support my meaning making. This was a difficult process. There was such a vast amount of information and it was a new area of knowledge for me to comprehend. I was concerned to move beyond simplistic interpretations and engage with the concepts in a way that allowed me to appreciate the nuances of the theories. Initially I set out to find one paradigmatic framework that would provide the major driving force for my work, which would ultimately influence my decision and meaning making. However, the more personal meaning making I made within social theory, the more I felt that I needed to be eclectic and adopt elements from different approaches to help me in my research. Due to the complexity of my substantive focus, I felt the potential contribution to the process of meaning making should be the criteria by which I examined social theory. I found elements from several schools of thought that I found potentially helpful to my research. I identified three that offered me a starting point to analyse the holistic process of meaning making.

The qualitative tradition as discussed by Atkinson, Delamont and Hammersley (1993) shows how elements of many different approaches have been adopted in British educational research including symbolic interactionism, qualitative evaluation and anthropology. The present analysis examines the possible contribution of a range of different social theory approaches to the search and understanding of meaning. The choice of which social theory applies was a very personal decision and ultimately impacted on the direction and development of the research itself. Three main approaches were drawn upon for this study because, not only do they appear to compliment each other and further the discourse of meaning, but they each contain

elements that represent my personal intentions and endeavours. The overarching philosophy of the research has its roots in symbolic interactionism and grounded theory, particularly with their concern with meaning. Critical theory was chosen because of its contribution to the analysis of 'why' teachers develop particular theories and to the analysis of the social and political influences that may impact on theory development in this context. There are significant differences between the approaches but what unites all three is the contribution they make to the study of meaning. This potential contribution needs to be explored in greater detail. In exploring these theories, it became increasingly apparent that I needed to analyse notions of 'knowledge' and the role of knowledge in the process of meaning making. This chapter is structured into sections to allow analysis of the contributions of symbolic interactionism, critical theory and grounded theory. There is also a section that sets out my initial analysis relating to notions of knowledge.

Symbolic Interactionism

Craib (1992) describes symbolic interactionism as a simple theory of social action in real situations. The valuable role of symbolic interactionism is significant to this research in the way it relates to meaning, particularly in its concern with:

"Understanding how individuals take and make meaning in interaction with others."

Marshall and Rossman 1993 p2

The role of meaning is based on three assumptions: firstly that meanings are highly personal to individuals; secondly that these meanings are a product of social interaction; and thirdly that meanings are modified and handled through personal interpretation.

The influence of symbolic interaction in qualitative research is particularly apparent in educational research (Atkinson, Delamont and Hammersly 1993). These researchers claim to see a reluctance to subscribe to the interactionism school by educational researchers, but claim to see explicit use of related traditions by those educational researchers in the field of education. (Hargreaves 1996, Lacey 1977). An

analysis of the way people relate to one another is a major characteristic of symbolic interaction research and it is documented that this is often centred upon points of conflict (Burgess 1984a). The present study did not plan to set up points of conflict but rather to emphasise the understanding of how individuals make and take meaning in their interaction with others. However, this does not mean that the research would not problematise issues. There appear to be two main schools of thought in symbolic interactionism: Chicago with its emphasis on flow of interaction and interpretation, and Iowa with its emphasis on measurable variables. This research sits more easily with the Chicago school in its quest to interpret the meaning of the theories of teachers.

Grounded theory

The potential contribution of grounded theory became apparent through the work of Laydler 1993 and his proposition that grounded theory:

"Strongly underlies the human dimension of society and the importance of meaning in people's lives."

Laydler 1993 p.5

Grounded theory offers the study a systematic and cumulative analysis of the professional and personal theories of teachers of pupils with pmld. This relates closely to one of my initial drives for engaging in the research. I was interested in placing teachers at the centre and wanted to ensure their voice was heard in the research process. With grounded theory I learnt that it comes from the ground: it unfolds from the teachers themselves. Strauss and Corbin (1994) discuss grounded theory as:

"A general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does so through continuous interplay between data collection."

<p align="right">Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.274</p>

Grounded theory was first presented to sociology in the USA in the late sixties by Glaser and Strauss. It was intended to fill a gap that had apparently developed between theory and empirical research. Central to grounded theory is the analysis of data and the relationship this has to further data collection. This offers a process to the present study that inter related data collection and analysis in a cumulative and developmental way. Thus the analysis of the initial questionnaire impacts upon the follow up interview and interpretations of the individual interviews influence the group interview. The analysis of the first questionnaire was summarised and presented back to teachers in their individual interviews. Thematic analysis of the individual interviews informed the structure of the group interviews. Theory generated through this process of research is relative to the conditions and context of the research and is perceived as developmental:

"Knowledge is, after all, linked closely with time and place. When we carefully and specifically build conditions into our theories, we eschew claims to idealistic versions of knowledge, leaving the way open for further development of our theories."

<p align="right">Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.278</p>

At this point, as I became aware of the relevance of the concept of knowledge to my meaning making, it was becoming increasingly important to me to analyse notions of knowledge.

Critical Theory

In addition to grounded theory and symbolic interactionism it became important to this study to try to understand why teachers develop their theories and to analyse possible influencing factors. Critical theory offers a process that attempts to understand these possible influences and to place the understandings of teachers in a wider social political context. From this perspective it can be seen that critical theory was drawn upon in order to offer meaning to the teachers' meanings. It seemed that critical theory would encourage me to shift the emphasis of meaning making in my research, away from meaning making of the teachers towards meaning making with

<p align="right">54</p>

the teachers. The actual realisation of this was gradual, and increased as the research developed to become a fundamental element in the latter stages of the inquiry. Critical theory is a very complex and broad ranging theory that has, over the seventy plus years of its conception in Germany, spawned many critical traditions including post modernism and feminism. Kincheloe and Mclaren (1994) talk of the difficulty of delineation within critical theory:

> "Any attempts to delineate critical theory as discrete schools of analysis will fail to capture the hybridity endemic to contemporary critical analysts."
>
> Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994 p. 140

This study draws upon the philosophical foundations of general critical theory. There are some basic assumptions that offer an insight into the philosophical stance of the theory. These include: all thought being fundamentally mediated by forms of power; this power or ideological framework constantly influencing any emerging facts; the social relations of power being constantly influenced by capitalism; the role of language in the development of subjectivity; any and every society including certain groups that are privileged; oppression having many forms; and that mainstream research practices have a tendency to replicate social and political systems that are already there. These basic assumptions offer this study a different level of analysis that is wider than symbolic interactionism and grounded theory. When reading what a researcher may receive from the critical theorist tradition there are two in particular that are valuable to my study. The first one is concerned with the need to try to be aware of all the ideological imperatives that inform the research as well as my own subjective reference claims. This enables me to consider the possible wider influences that may influence the development of the teachers' theories as well as recognising my own subjective reference points. In the context of this study this has led me to include another stage of reflection and analysis that occurs at a meta level. This is a stage where I reflect on reflections, where I attempt to analyse the analysis from a different perspective related to my own or society's ideologies. This relates specifically to what critical theory can offer me in my search for meaning:

> "Critical researchers maintain that the meaning of an experience or an observation is not self evident. The meaning of any experience will depend upon the struggle over the interpretation and definition of that experience."
>
> Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994 p. 144

The making of meaning in the context of this study will be significantly related to the process of interpretation. The contribution of grounded theory is supportive here in the cumulative way interpretation is developed, and how this interpretation is fed back to the teachers at different stages of the research design. Symbolic interaction allows me to recognise the personal experiences of the teachers, while critical theory enables me to acknowledge my own personal experiences as well as the deeper ideological influences. The co existence and influences of multiple methodological theories is not uncommon in qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin 1994). All three theories have earned their place in the study through the contribution they make to the development of my understanding of how the teachers are making meaning. Grounded theory and symbolic interactionism work well together to offer a framework for the collection and analysis of data in this study. Grounded theory offers the rigorous and systematic methodological processes, and symbolic interaction ensures the focus for the analysis and interpretation of the data generated relates to meaning. Grounded theory is based on the importance of patterns of action and interaction and the process of change. Symbolic interaction has an emphasis on meaning developing through social action and interaction. From this perspective both are methodologies that develop theory in a relative and context based way. Critical theory compliments both of these as it encourages a wider and deeper level of analysis in order to encompass the role of political and social ideologies, including the role and influence of my own ideology and experience. All three theories contribute to the search for, and the understanding of, meaning in a complimentary way that allows depth of reflection and analysis.

What is knowledge and how does this relate to the search for meaning?

It became clear in my reading and interpretation of social theory in relation to the development of meaning that it is necessary to develop my understanding of the concept of knowledge. I needed to understand what I was trying to make meaning of and to recognise how the interpretation of knowledge related to the understanding of meaning. I knew immediately that the quantitative interpretation of knowledge would not be helpful because of its predetermined nature but I needed to delve much more deeply into the notion of knowledge to enable me to understand more fully what the

teachers were making meaning about. Goldblatt 2000 offers a definition of knowledge:

> "Knowledge is an organised and systematic collection of information, argument, skills and understandings. Knowledge, in short, is a diverse, plural, multi faceted phenomenon. It can be sub divided according to: its object of study; whether it exists in the form of theoretical, abstract systematic information or whether it is tacit, unreflective embodied skills and understandings of the world; and whether it is held in the mind of the knower or exists in some objective material form."

> Goldblatt 2000 p.155

This shows how the concept of knowledge is both complex and varied, how it presents in different forms and relates directly to particular ideologies and theories. This definition helps me to be eclectic and comprehensive in the decisions I make in my research design. The approach I adopt to the research must help me remain open in my interpretation of knowledge and also afford me the opportunity to check out my interpretations with the teachers themselves. This is particularly interesting for this study. Meaning has already been shown to be a relative concept grounded in a specific context and perceived from a particular perspective. Now the concept of knowledge is also being highlighted as relative and encased in ideology. This further supports the adopted research process that is cumulative and developmental in that it enables me to validate continually my interpretations and analysis with the teachers themselves. It is also important to recognise the particular stance each of the three social theories has towards knowledge and acknowledge the influence this has for making meaning. The perspective of symbolic interactionism can be seen to perceive knowledge as a personal construct that develops out of social action and is influenced by personal interpretation of real situations. This individualistic viewpoint offers a personal and individual perspective that is important to consider in trying to understand the theories this group of teachers hold about how the pupils they teach are learning. This relative view of knowledge is also supported in grounded theory. Let us now return to the quotation from Strauss and Corbin:

> "Knowledge is, after all, linked closely with time and place. When we carefully and specifically build conditions into our theories, we eschew claims to idealistic versions of knowledge, leaving the way open for further development of our theories."

> Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.278

The knowledge discussed in this study relates specifically to the context of the group of teachers in the study and to the personal interpretation made of this perceived knowledge. Critical theory develops the discourse of knowledge significantly for this study. It helps me to try to place the perceived knowledge into some ideological context and to understand more fully some of the reasons why the teachers may have developed the knowledge they have.

The influence of one critical theory tradition outlined by Habermas (Craib 1993) is particularly helpful in its discussion of purposeful knowledge building. The contribution of Habermas to critical theory tradition is enormous and it is the relatively small element relating to knowledge building that I draw on for this research. Grounded theory had already sown the seed that the analysis of the concept of knowledge was important. As Craib states critical theory as outlined by Habermas:

"Develops knowledge for a certain purpose and this knowledge provides us with an interest"

Craib 1993 p.232

The different types of knowledge may be seen to relate to possible reasons why the teachers in this study develop their understanding. Habermas suggests three different types of knowledge: there is the technical mastery of a subject known as 'work' knowledge. Habermas classifies much of what we know as scientific knowledge within this area; the practical knowledge that has a purpose of interaction known as 'social' knowledge which Habermas has identified as knowledge emanating from the social sciences; and 'self' knowledge, the raison d'être of emancipatory knowledge, This view of knowledge building may help me in the analysis of the perceived knowledge of the group of teachers I am trying to understand more fully. This research, in the words of Gergen (1999), will try to derive knowledge from the world as it is for the teachers in this study. This is the micro world of the classroom for pupils with profound and multiple learning disability. Goodson (1995) tells us that,

"Practice is a good deal more than the technical things we do in the classroom, it relates to who we are, to our whole approach to life".

Goodson 1995; Smyth 1995 p.55

This study is concerned with an holistic view of the teacher as a person, grounded, and critical theory in particular, contribute strongly to this perspective. In order to

begin to develop some understanding of the meaning of the professional theories teachers hold, the interrelationship between personal and professional experiences and understandings need to be analysed. Goldblatt (2000) recognises the important distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge. As well as the explicit knowledge openly expressed by teachers, this study is interested in the tacit knowledge of teachers. Tacit knowledge refers to the often unspoken knowledge that teachers have, including general cultural knowledge and specific situational knowledge. Altheide and Johnson (1994) explain the relationship of tacit knowledge to the quest for meaning:

"Contextual, taken for granted knowledge, tacit knowledge plays a constitutive role in providing meaning."

Altheide and Johnson 1994 p.492

In trying to open up and explore the tacit knowledge of the teachers, a wider and more comprehensive picture of meaning is portrayed. The heart of this study is the understandings of teachers, the theories teachers' hold about how pupils with pmld learn and how these theories are developed, challenged and sustained. It is essentially about the 'espoused' theories of teachers. The study attempts to gain insight into what these espoused theories are, and in this context does not aim to test these theories in action.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the decision making dilemmas and solutions I have met when searching for an underlying social theory that would help and contribute to my research. This proved to be a complex process for me. I came to realise the need to be eclectic and I analysed three different social theories and adopted elements from each: symbolic interaction, critical theory and grounded theory. Symbolic interaction, with its central focus on the intricacies of meaning making appeals from the perspective of my engagement with meaning making, Critical theory appears to offer a critical perspective that will allow me to adopt a more analytical approach to my work, one that continually encourages me to ask the question why. Grounded theory presented me with a process by which I can practically engage in meaning making with teachers and try to ensure my research design remains sincere to their views. Through my

struggles with social theory the interrelated issues of notions of knowledge became increasingly apparent and I realised the need to further my understanding of these issues. I ended the chapter with a discussion of notions of knowledge that served to highlight the perplexing nature of the concept. I now felt able to make decisions, based on my developing conceptual framework and growing understanding of social theory, about the research design of my inquiry.

Chapter Four

My research design: the major influences that impacted on my methodological decision making

Introduction

This chapter aims to set out and analyse the research design of the study and to explain the process and stages of research. The qualitative paradigm of research underpins the overarching philosophical stance of the study and will form a thread in the discussion. So far, my meaning making of some of the substantive issues had generated some questions that I now wished to explore further. These questions influence the decisions along with my growing exploration into social theory, particularly symbolic interaction, critical theory and grounded theory. I needed a methodological process that would enable me to engage the group of teachers in the research and allow the intricacies of meaning making to emerge. It was important to me to ensure that the teachers remained central to the interpretation and analysis of the generated data. This was indeed a tall order. The following sections discusses the decisions I made and analyses the potential of the chosen methodology for contributing to my meaning making. While engaging in my methodological decision making, I came to realise the important influence of questioning on the potential nature of the generated data. I continued to build on my own meaning making by developing a greater understanding of the potential and dilemmas of questioning and its contribution to my research. The chapter begins with a discussion of the paradigmatic location of the methodology, develops to a discussion of data collection, questioning, ethics, reliability and validity and analysis.

Why the qualitative paradigm?

Concerns with the intricacies of meaning making and the contribution of social theory, particularly grounded theory, led the integral framework of the research to be qualitative. The qualitative paradigm influences the research in two ways: firstly through the philosophical stance that influences the total nature of the research, and secondly through the research design techniques that are developed to deliver the qualitative philosophy. In developing a picture of the philosophical underpinnings of

the present research it is important to ask some fundamental questions. These include, why the qualitative and not quantitative research approach? And, what is it about the qualitative paradigm that makes it particularly appropriate to this study? Both questions can be answered through an analysis of why and how the research paradigms, processes and strategies contribute to the search for 'meaning'.

There is within the research literature a divide between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. A paradigm is a set of beliefs that underpin a particular approach. In choosing which paradigm of research was more applicable to this study, with its emphasis on meaning, it was important to analyse each paradigm. The differences between the qualitative and quantitative approaches have a significant impact on the style of research adopted including philosophical underpinnings, the relationship between researcher and researched, understanding of knowledge and different forms of representation (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Quantitative research has a long history in the sciences, particularly those referred to as hard or pure science. Research in these sciences has generally been quantifiable in nature where:

> "Scientific maturity is commonly believed to emerge as the degree of quantification found within a given field increases".

> Guba and Lincoln 1994 p.105

The nature of enquiry is positivist with methodology being developed to verify or falsify a given hypothesis. There is a belief that there is a type of realism that exists that relates to 'true' knowledge, knowledge that can be measured, quantified and summarised. The researcher is viewed as an objective expert who acknowledges some pre existing knowledge, examines it, possibly manipulates it and hopefully verifies it to develop a greater amount of certainty about that knowledge base. The researcher highlights the causal relationships between particular variables with knowledge becoming accepted as facts or laws. This view of knowledge is not particularly helpful in the context of this study. Notions of knowledge have already begun to be discussed with this analysis developing in more detail later in this thesis,however, it is important to state at the outset that the positivist notion of knowledge does not appear to help me develop my understanding of the range of knowledge teachers may have. This is because in this view, knowledge is predetermined and I wish to develop a research design that is open and flexible that listens to the teachers' perspectives.

Quantitative researchers tend to adopt an impersonal style when they represent their research using mathematical models and statistical tables. From this description it is apparent that the study of meaning in a particular context would not be helped through the quantitative paradigm that concerns itself with positivist facts and observable entities. Qualitative research is a complex and multifaceted research process that has been explained as being:

> "Many things to many people. Its essence is two fold: a commitment to the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter, and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism".

> Denzin and Lincoln 1994 p.4

The nature of enquiry is interpretive with methodology being developed to explore and understand social and personal phenomenon. The nature of knowledge is much more relative, reconstructed and developmental. The researcher is viewed as a co-constructor of knowledge and the influence of the researcher's social and philosophical history being acknowledged as significant. Qualitative researchers tend to represent their findings in prose form, including ethnographic prose, life histories, and biographical accounts. In the above definition of qualitative research it is clearly viewed to be an alternative to quantitative research, something that is constantly responding to and critiquing positivist approaches. It appears to be a much more appropriate paradigm in which to search for meaning.

The contribution of qualitative research in meaning making

Qualitative research has been chosen for this study to enable insight to be gained about the understandings of a group of teachers who work with pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. It is the qualitative framework that aims to capture the social nuances of life that make it particularly appealing to this study. The thoughts, feelings and aspirations of a small group of teachers towards their pupils who have profound and multiple learning disabilities form that central focus of this research. Detheridge (1996) carried out her qualitative research with pupils with profound learning difficulty. She found that, with this extremely variable group of pupils, the qualitative paradigm allowed the complexity and differences of the children to be recognised. The teachers in this study are a very small representation of teachers as a whole and, I believe, also require the sensitive and open methodology of the qualitative framework. The history of qualitative research lies in early and colonial ethnography where history was observed and described. This has developed into approaches that acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between the researcher and the area of study. Qualitative research has become more than a passive process of observation and explanation into an active process of collaboration and emancipation. It is the element of active collaboration that particularly appeals in this study. The qualitative paradigm will help to fulfil the desire of the research to build up, and to understand, the perceptions of the group of teachers and to take these back to the teachers in a non judgemental, cumulative and developmental way. Hammersly (1999) describes this element of non-judgmental as:

"What is required for proper understanding *(then)* is tolerance of uncertainty and of transgression, and a capacity for taking pleasure in the detail of things, finding neither devils nor gods but rather the very nature of human society, a society in which we are all involved."

Hammersley 1999 p.2

Qualitative research offers an interpretative and analytical mode of enquiry. It is the search for meaning that makes the qualitative paradigm particularly relevant to this study. This study sets out to explore the way teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities make meaning of their professional life. One of the

major critiques of the quantitative approach is the exclusion of the perspectives of meaning and purpose in the research (Guba and Lincoln 1994). A natural theme for the present research is the quest for meaning. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) say,

> "The key feature of human social life, that individuals routinely interpret and make sense of their worlds, means the investigation of the social worlds must relate to these interpretations to the natural everyday situations in which people live".

Hitchcock and Hughes 1989 p.28.

The quantative research approach is not an appropriate paradigm to offer a helpful framework and methodology in the search for meaning. On the other hand, the qualitative research paradigm is steeped in the search for meaning:

> "The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined and measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially construed nature of reality…they seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning."

Denzin and Lincoln 1994 p.4

This highlights the quest of qualitative researchers to find out and understand how people develop their experiences in relation to making and understanding meaning. The determination of meaning is a relative concept that relates to individual perspectives. The exploration of meaning is not confined to action.

How the research design has helped in the search for meaning making

This section discusses the research design aspect of my research, the elements and characteristics of the different methodologies used and how these come together to enable me to engage in meaning making. Table One shows the different methods employed in the study. It can be seen that is intended for the research process to be cumulative, each stage building upon analysis and reflection upon the last. This places the research methodology very centrally in the qualitative tradition. It enables the teachers to share, to some degree, in the process of interpretation thus developing more meaningful meanings, a contribution from grounded theory. Each of the methods is discussed, particularly in the light of their contribution to meaning making. Some of the potentials and difficulties of the use of questioning are analysed, to

develop my understanding more fully of the application of questioning and the contribution these make to the quest for meaning.

Table One
Different methods employed in study

Stage one	**Pilot questionnaire**
Stage two	**first questionnaire**
Stage three	**Individual Interviews (A)**
Stage four	**Group interviews**
Stage five	**Individual interviews (B)**

The role of questioning in the process of meaning making

The formulation of questions is a factor in the process and outcome of the research. Walker (1993) suggests the very choice of words affects the process of the research:

"The very language we use creates frames within which to realise knowledge".

Walker 1993 p.74

Likewise in the interview, the language adopted has been highlighted by Fontana and Frey (1994) as being crucial:

"The use of language and specific terms is very important for creating a 'sharedness of meanings' in which both interviewer and respondent understand the contextual nature of the interview."

Fontana and Frey 1994 p.371

This reminds me of the impact of language advocated by Ball (1994) and in my research I wanted to ensure the language I adopted in the questions would enable rather than prevent teachers engaging in the discussion. It is important in this research to be aware of the influence and impact of questioning and make an informed choice in order to build up as comprehensive and valid picture as possible, of what? how?

and why? teachers develop, sustain and have challenged the theories they hold about how their pupils learn. There are different forms of questions: fixed alternatives, open-ended, scale of responses, and indirect and direct questioning. In the questionnaire, fixed alternative and direct questions were used to gather information about the professional history of teachers. In the interview direct, open ended and indirect questions were used. This was to give teachers the opportunity to develop their discussion and to attempt to try to tease out the perspectives of teachers in the most effective way. Cohen and Manion (1998) describe how and why different questioning techniques can be used:

> "Thus an interviewer could ask a teacher whether she likes teaching; this would be a direct question. Or else she could adopt an indirect approach by asking for respondent's views on education in general and the ways schools function. From the answers proffered, the interviewer could make inferences about the teachers opinions concerning her own job."

Cohen and Manion 1998 p278

An example of the direct questioning I employ in this study is the question relating to specific successful inset courses teachers had attended and why these courses were perceived as successful. By way of contrast, an indirect question asks the teachers their view of an ideal classroom for this group of pupils. This was intended to tease out their perceptions and opinions of the nature of profound and multiple learning disabilities. I utilised cross-questioning, using different question constructions around the same issue to enable a deeper level of discussion. This helps to create data that is triangulated and also serves to increase the validity of teacher responses. As already mentioned, the language adopted in the interview has been highlighted as being crucial (Fontana and Frey 1994, Walker 1993). This is particularly pertinent in this study due to the plethora of jargon and adoption of acronyms associated with the education of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Effort was made to ensure any specific language used was explained and shared by both parties in the interview. The pilot process ensured the questionnaires did not include technical jargon and language unfamiliar to teachers working with this group of pupils. One of the questions in the interview asks for the teachers' opinion of what profound and multiple learning disability is. This is an example of a strategy to share meaning and interpretation of specific terminology.

How questionnaires contribute to meaning making

Questionnaires are employed twice. First in the pilot phase to check and evaluate the main questionnaire, and secondly at the beginning of the research to collate professional (and a little personal) information from teachers. The first time offers a quality assurance and validation process, whilst the second time enables me to begin to develop a context for making meaning. Thirty years ago Davidson (1970) made some very relevant and time honoured statements about the effective and successful design of a questionnaire when he said that it possesses the same properties as a good law:

"It is clear, unambiguous and uniformly workable".

Davidson 1970 cited in Cohen and Manion 1998 p.93

My questionnaire was designed to collect information about the professional life history of individual teachers in the study. The questionnaire design was simple, structured and straightforward. The desired information regarding professional life histories along with some personal details was matched to a series of questions. Following a general information gathering introduction, teachers are asked 10 questions relating to qualifications, school experience, Inset courses, experiences outside of teaching and also if and how they felt 'qualified' to teach pupils with profound and multiple learning disability. The questionnaire was designed to be completed within 30 minutes. It was intended at the end of the questionnaire stage that there would be enough information to begin to develop some initial interpretations of factors that teachers were expressing as significant in their experience for the work they were now involved in when teaching their pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

The pilot process

The questionnaire was piloted on six teachers who work with pupils with pmld from a neighbouring local education authority. A copy of Questionnaire One can be found in Appendix one. During the pilot process the questionnaire was finely tuned, the language was checked for clarity, the timing was evaluated and teachers were asked if they thought anything was missing. As a consequence of the pilot it was decided to

include an extra question relating to employment outside of teaching. A copy of the final questionnaire can be found in Appendix two. The pilot process showed me that the timing was correct and, more importantly, the positive response of the teachers to the research in general engendered confidence in the questionnaire and the nature of the research as a whole.

How individual interviews contribute to my meaning making

Following on from the general information gathering questionnaire process came the individual and much more personal interview. It was important to move beyond the brief and general information the questionnaires afforded to a more in depth discussion. This helped to generate data that would enable some tentative meanings to be developed. In the spirit of grounded theory, it was also important to feed back to teachers the analysis of the questionnaires, to enable the cumulative nature of the research to begin. The individual interviews allow this to happen. Previous work in the area of teacher interviewing (Nias 1993) highlighted the problems and potentials of teacher interviewing. The problems included time and the subsequent analysis process, and the potentials included the high quality and in-depth information collected. It was important for this study to begin to delve deeper into the teachers' understanding and interviewing was a natural research tool for this depth. The interview is a well-established process for gathering information in the qualitative paradigm of research. Patton (1990) tells us:

"The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in someone else's mind...to access the perspective of the person being interviewed".

Patton 1990 p.278

It can be seen from this that the search for meaning is closely related to the purpose of interviewing. In the context of this study interviewing was used to develop an understanding of the perspective of teachers and to try to understand how they were making meaning in their everyday experiences. Embracing the social theory perspectives I had identified as important to me, the discussion with teachers was not limited to school. Each interview had a similar structure: there was an element of freedom for teachers to talk about their personal experiences and to include any information they felt was relevant. The structure that was adopted was intended to enable teachers to express some of their thoughts about how they felt this group of

pupils learn, their perceptions of effective training and inset and to continue to build up the background context of their experiences and philosophy. In the eyes of Mutchnick and Berg (1996) this type of interviewing would be classed as semi standardised, i.e. interviews with some guide but flexible enough to allow individual discussion and development. An aide memoir was designed to ensure that at the end of each interview particular themes for discussion had been covered (Appendix three) but it was not necessary to complete the interview in one given structure.

How group interviews contribute to my meaning making

Developing from the individual interviews are group interviews. These take place with three small groups of the teachers in their own schools. The purpose of the group interviews is to deepen the insight gained concerning the way the teachers perceive pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. The group interviews are designed to elicit, among other things, some of the tacit knowledge that the teachers have. The interview is managed to encourage the teachers to talk about three pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities unfamiliar to them. In talking to each other about the pupils it is hoped that a depth of discussion would take place that would offer a deeper understanding of the meaning that they were making about the pupils as learners, and about themselves as teachers. Bers (1989) defines one of the main purposes of group interviews. It:

> "Is that with a permissive atmosphere that fosters a range of opinions, a more
> complete and revealing understanding of the issues will be obtained".
> Bers 1989 p.4

The group interview would hopefully allow a dynamic discussion to take place. A video of three pupils, unknown to the teachers, is used as the focus for the interview. The teachers are asked to note down their thoughts about the activities: child, adult, and interaction of each of the pupils. Once the video was finished, I initiated a discussion amongst the teachers. When teachers were talking, I intended to step back and allow the discussion to develop without my interference. My involvement was to be one of 'chair', to encourage participation by all teachers. This approach to research design, using video clips to initiate discussion, is not evident in the research literature and presents a new approach to methodology. This has its problems and potentials. For this study, it affords an insight into the perceptions of the group of teachers

towards pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. It enables them to share a joint experience and discuss it from their perspective. However, because it has not been evaluated in the literature, there are no guiding principles that have been verified in the field. The work of Prosser (1998) explores the theory and practice of photographic and film work, with some particular reference to educational research that offers a contemporary view of the range of research activities that are occurring in this genre. However, it does not include the use of video as a focus for discussion in group interviewing. The application of group interviewing is apparent in the qualitative research work of Spencer and Flin (1990) and Vaughn et al (1996). The interactive element of group interviews was stressed in the work of Lewis (1992) when she found that the understanding of all respondents to severe learning disability was enhanced through the process of the group interview. This process of group interviewing then, can be seen as developmental for the teachers in the study. In this way, the developmental research Cheliminsky and Shadish (1997) advocates is built into the research design. The work of Cohen and Manion (1998) highlights that group interviews can prove to be difficult arenas for pursuing personal issues and are more suitable for the discussion of general issues. This is expressed in the words of Fontana and Frey (1996) as:

"The emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression."

Fontana and Frey 1994 p.365.

The adoption of group interviews in this research was employed to encourage depth of discussion, to offer an opportunity for teachers to elaborate and develop their discourse and, from this, for myself to develop a greater understanding of how the teachers were making meaning.

The video vignettes

The pupils were all unknown to the teachers and were chosen to attempt to span the potential breadth of range of difficulties that can be encapsulated in the term profound and multiple learning disabilities. However, it must be seen as a representation of my understanding of the term. The issue of anonymity was important, as I did not want the teachers to feel threatened, or feel the need to justify anything. There were three

five-minute vignettes of the pupils: each pupil was working with an adult on an activity from their current individual education plan. Every pupil had been identified as having profound and multiple learning disabilities. One pupil required specialised supported seating, and had very poor head control with associated sensory difficulties, another pupil required specialised supported seating, had a level of head control, was able to use hands to point and activate switches; the third pupil was mobile and had additional communication and behavioural difficulties.

The quest for validity and reliability in my meaning making

Notions of validity and reliability are a constant source of debate in all research, but especially so in the qualitative paradigm. It was important to me to consider issues of validity and reliability in order to afford some level of integrity. The contribution of the chosen social theory approaches, and the chosen methods of enquiry to the endeavour for an increased level of validity and reliability needs be analysed. Lather (1993) presents a problematic view of validity relates the frequent criticism of the subjectivity of qualitative processes and strategies. It seems that the very nature of qualitative research encapsulates a tension with validity and reliability. In the words of Scott (1996):

> "Empirical research is a social activity, and is therefore never likely to be coherent, reliable or valid."
>
> Scott 1996 p.64

This is a rather bleak view and poses the challenge to the researcher continually to improve the integrity of the validity and reliability. In the context of my study and the search to identify highly personal meanings and then to attempt to analyse and make sense of them, it is crucial to adopt strategies and processes that contribute to the increased levels of reliability and validity. The search for meaning is central to my research: its intention is to highlight the meaning of the group of teachers. The search for validity and reliability is entwined with the concept of 'confidence' in the research process and findings. This leads to the question: how can the approaches and methodology employed contribute to the development of greater confidence in my research?

Anderson and Arsenault (1998) define validity as a relationship between expectations and outcomes of research. It assumes an established body of knowledge about a particular focus that can be referred to in the process of validation. In the present research, there is not a 'body of knowledge' that can be tapped into for this particular group of teachers relating to the theories they hold on how pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities learn. This research can, and does, relate to the body of knowledge pertaining to theories of learning that all teachers may hold for all children. In this way confidence will be developed in relation to what is already there in the literature. Grounded theory encourages us to work primarily from the data that is generated; it entails a level of readiness to listen to different and alternative theories if they emerge. In order to develop confidence in this context there needs to be a process that enables interim interpretations to be referred back to teachers. This process is a fundamental principle of grounded theory. A perspective of validity and reliability is offered to this study from critical theory. Kincheloe and McClaren (1994) assert that:

"Critical theorists award credibility only when the constructions are plausible to those who construct them."

Kincheloe and McClaren 1994 p. 151

This stresses to me the importance of the cumulative nature of the research process and the crucial need to refer back to the teachers in this study the interpretations that are being developed. The work of Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) offers another helpful perspective of critical theory in relation to components of validity. From this perspective validity can be claimed when:

"What is said can be shown to be meaningful, true, justified and sincere."

Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997 p. 23

The quest for validity appears to be a quest for meaning, truth, justification and sincerity in research. It is helpful to consider each of these elements in the light of this study. Making meaning is a central theme of the present research. The principles of symbolic interaction and grounded theory will help me to try to ensure the meanings developed are meaningful, in relation to the context of the teachers themselves. In doing this it is hoped to develop a discussion of meaning that is generated and

supported by the data. The role of the raw data will be crucial in this process and any analysis needs to be completely reflected of the generated data. The search for truth can be seen to be very complex and problematic. In one way the whole general discourse of research can be seen to be a discourse about what is truth and who owns the definitive definition. The contribution of grounded theory is helpful here:

"Truth is enacted: theories are interpretations made from given perspectives as adopted or researched by researchers."

Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.274

This and the developmental nature of truth as stated by Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) offers a more pragmatic and achievable notion of truth:

"Truth is the rational agreement reached through critical discussion."

Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997 p.26

In this way truth can be perceived as being related to reliability and justification. This poses a question for the present research. Are the processes and conclusions a correct reflection of the perspectives of the teachers and can the assumptions developed be justified in the data collected and analysed? Grounded theory offers this constant questioning of the interpretation of data and offers a rigour to the present research. This process in one way can also be seen to reflect the desire to be fair and just to the thoughts and aspirations of the teachers in the study. However, the success of this desire demands constant critical reflection. This relates to what Ashworth (1997) claims when he suggests that researchers of the qualitative paradigm engage in constant scrutiny of their work in order to develop higher levels of validity and reliability.

How does my own meaning making influences the research?

A particular issue that relates to this research is that of the influence of myself as the researcher. Prior to coming to the University I taught in the special school sector. For a significant time, I taught pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Most of the teachers in the study know me; some I have worked with and some have been, and currently are, on courses that I teach. The influence of this relationship has

to be acknowledged and appreciated in the context of this research. On the one hand, teachers know me, and I may be in a strong position to put them at their ease and create an atmosphere conducive to discussion. On the other hand, teachers may have said what they said because of what they know of me and my previous work with this group of pupils. They may say things they think I might wish to hear. Bruner (1990) talks of the interview as a two way process.

> "Obviously 'the story of life' as told to a particular person is in some sense a joint product of the teller and the told. Selves, whatever metaphysical stand one takes about the 'reality', can only be revealed in a transaction between a teller and told."

> Bruner 1990 p.125

Anderson and Arsenault (1998) develops the issue of the influence of the researcher to the analysis stage when they suggest:

> "The relationship of the informant to the researcher tend to colour the interpretation of data. In practice researchers triangulalate their data to develop levels of confidence."

> Anderson and Arsenault 1998 p.134.

There is triangulation built into the research design, through the use of questionnaires, individual and group interviews. Through the process of this triangulation my influence may be minimised (Anderson and Arsenault 1998), which offers the potential of the development of greater confidence in the research findings. However, from the perspective of critical theory, the words of Bruner can be interpreted as a valuable element of the research process. My place in the research process is not only clarified but is acknowledged and celebrated as an integral part of the research process. The challenge is to ensure my own ideologies are very apparent and that any potential influences of these on the process of research are acknowledged and discussed. In the transparency of myself in the study it is hoped that even greater confidence may be built up about the process and outcomes of the research. The methodology employed contributes to the development of confidence in the research. In the present study, triangulation is achieved through the multiple research methods adopted. This relates to Denzin's typology of triangulation (Denzin 1970) as 'methodological triangulation', which is described as the application of different research methods to the same object of study. The different methods being applied are

questionnaire and interview (both individual and group) and the 'object' being the group of teachers in the study. Triangulation has been achieved in this study through the use of questionnaires, interviews and group interviews. At the analysis stage, the cumulative nature of the research process attempts to overcome some of the influence of the researcher. However, this influence will always be there and therefore should be acknowledged, as Bruner (1990) suggests, as part of the symbiotic research process. There is a school of thought that suggests the very use of words chosen by the researcher to write up and present research is a form of 'academic colonization', which can create a representational crisis (Goodson 1999: 124). This has led to the development of a research genre, the use of narrative and story, where researchers enable people to tell their own story in their own words. This study has not adopted this genre but learns from it the need to be constantly vigilant about the influence of myself in the whole process of research.

Ethics

Ethics is an integral element of this research project. Meaning making is highly personal and because of this ethics must be an inherent character of the research process. Ethical considerations are complicated and, in the words of Anderson and Arsenault (1998:23), are rooted in both moral and ethical grounds. Owing to the nature of my past and present experiences with the group of teachers, I believed it was crucially important to be as ethically and morally appropriate as I could be. I had actually experienced some of the experiences the teachers were experiencing now. I can empathise with the demands of the professional role, the personal strain, the vulnerability and often the isolation of working with this group of pupils. The present research involves a group of teachers working with a group of pupils who, in the words of Detheridge (1996), are a very small and extremely variable group of pupils. In published research, these teachers have rarely had a 'voice'. Even more rarely have they been asked their perceptions, feelings and aspirations. I approached the research with an attitude that I was working with a vulnerable group of teachers. I will explore this perspective in greater detail when I analyse my own perceptions and role in the research. However, in relation to ethics, this perception did influence how I approached the research process. For me ethics became a strong philosophical thread throughout the whole of the research process. As Haggart (1997) suggests,

"Ethics are constantly in the process of negotiation and re-negotiation throughout the research, therefore they cannot be a set of rules, but must be an attitude to inform the researcher's judgement at every stage of the research."

Haggart (1997) p.18

Ethics, in the context of this research, became an attitude that was intended to influence every stage of the research process. Anderson and Arsenault (1998) discuss the six most common problematic elements related to ethics. These include: the research topic; the research procedure; the sponsor; free and informed consent; obtaining more than what was asked for; and conflict of interest. Due to the personal nature of the study many of these issues, except the sponsor issue, are particularly applicable. Cohen and Manion (1998) highlight the developmental nature of ethical dilemmas throughout the research process. They also relate ethical dilemmas to issues of validity and reliability when they suggest:

"Ethical issues may stem from the kinds of problems investigated by social scientists and the methods they use to obtain valid and reliable data. In theory at least, this means that each stage in the research sequence may be may be a potential source of ethical problems.

Cohen and Manion (1998) p.348

Work in the field of ethical discourse exemplifies both an attitudinal stance and the consideration of a set of rules (Social Research Association 1986, British Education Research Association 1992). Some of the pertinent issues related to the ethical considerations of this research are: informed consent; access; anonymity and confidentiality and vulnerability. Anderson and Arsenault (1998) discuss informed consent as the most fundamental principle for ethical acceptability. In relation to the present study this involves the informed consent of the group of teachers and the consent of parents of the three pupils videoed for the group interview stage. Informed consent necessarily involves information about the study: its purpose; expectations; outcomes; the right to be involved and the right to withdraw at any time. At the very first meeting with teachers an ethical code of practice for the research was developed through dialogue with them (Appendix four). This discussion of the research involved: the nature of the study; the expectations of myself as the researcher and themselves as the participants; information about the potential outputs of the research;

the importance of confidentiality and anonymity and the choice they had to participate in and to withdraw from the study. This process not only fulfils the BPS (1993, 1995) considerations for ethical design but also sets a tone for the research process, which places the teachers in a knowledgeable and central position in the research. This was something I intended to do from the very inception of the study.

How can I achieve meaning making through my analyses and reflection?

The research generated an enormous amount of data that required analysis and interpretation in detail in relation to my research questions and my search for meaning. It was important to me to adopt an approach to analysis that helped me to not only draw out the theories of teachers, but also to develop an understanding of the range of meanings teachers were making of their work with pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. The qualitative paradigm of research enables a broad scope of analysis as Strauss and Corbin (1994) state:

> "Qualitative modes of interpretation run the gamut from "let the informant speak and don't get in the way" on through theme analysis, and to the elucidation of patterns, theoretical frameworks or models and theory formulated at various levels of abstraction."
>
> Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.278

This is helpful to me as it offers a range of strategies for analysis and interpretation. Huberman and Miles 1994a offer a much more specific approach in their work on data management and analysis. They believe data management and analysis contain three sub processes: data reduction where the data is reduced "in an anticipatory way" (Huberman and Miles 1994a:429) as we choose our conceptual frameworks; data display where data is organised and displayed in order to begin to draw conclusions; and conclusion and verification where we draw comparisons, develop patterns, cluster and confirm our interpretations. There are assumptions in this approach to analysis and interpretation that help me to understand more fully how and why I am analysing the data. One is that naturally within the data there is meaning to be found:

> "At the heart of analytic induction is the thesis that there are regularities to be found in the physical and social worlds. The theories and constructs that we derive express these regularities as possible."
>
> Huberman and Miles 1994a p.431

This is important to me as it acknowledges that meaning is intrinsically there in the data and it is a challenge to me to develop an interpretation of this. Another helpful assumption in this approach recognises that researchers have a conceptual framework in the first place and that this is an important influence when approaching the process of analysis and interpretation. It was important to me to try to understand the conceptual framework that I would apply and for this I returned to the social theories that influence my understanding and development in the study. I wanted to make meaning of the way I was making meaning. I wanted to understand the approach these theories offer to analysis and interpretation and to draw on these as appropriate for my own search for meaning. A fundamental principle of symbolic interactionism, grounded theory and critical theory is the important role of analysis and reflection. In symbolic interactionism and grounded theory the place of analysis ensures any interpretation is well placed in raw data and that the process of analysis and interpretation is cumulative and developmental. Strauss and Corbin 1994 discuss this in the light of grounded theory when they discuss the strong relationship between theory generated and data collected, and also the importance of feeding this back to the people involved in the research:

> "We owe it to our 'subjects' to tell them verbally or in print what we have learnt and to give clear indications of why we have interpreted them as we have."

> Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.281

I draw from this the importance of the raw data and the essential need for the process of analysis to be cumulative and to relate directly to the research process as a whole. This perspective offered by grounded theory helps me decide that, for this study, the sub process of data reduction described by Huberman and Miles (1994a) would not be helpful to me. It is important to retain the data in its raw form to enable me to ensure the direct relationship between my interpretation and the actual voices of the teachers. This is helpful in my search for meaning as it attempts to ensure that any analysis I make is meaningful to the raw data collected from the teachers themselves. The sub process of data management appears much more appropriate as it is a strategy that helps to manage and organise the raw data to enable me to engage in the process of making meaning.

Critical theory has also influenced my analysis of the data in an essential way. It has helped me to look beyond my initial interpretation and reflection of the data and to consider the wider context of analysis. Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994 state the complexity of this process when they say:

"Critical researchers maintain that the meaning of an experience or an observation is not self evident. The meaning of any experience will depend on the struggle over interpretation and definition of that experience."

Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994 p.144

Critical theory encourages me to ask the question: what influences the meanings teachers are making? In attempting to answer this question I am encouraged to participate in a level of analysis, that not only explores meaning making, but also explores meaning making of meaning making. Critical theory has significantly impacted on the perception of myself in the process of analysis and reflection. It tells me:

"What we see is not what we see but what we perceive."

Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994 p.145

My own perceptions and meaning making, therefore, have a considerable influence on the research and it is important to try to analyse these and to explore the possible impact these have on the developments in this research. This has led me to another level of analysis, which can be described as reflecting on reflections. Table Two illustrates the process of analysis that was engaged with throughout the study with emerging themes from the data and how this contributes to the development of the major substantive themes for my thesis. From this it can be seen that the process of verification and interpretation of the data was an integral part of the research process. The principles of grounded theory helped to create a cumulative and evolving process of data collection and analysis. It can be seen that at times a particular methodology enabled a particular focus to be explored. As the research progressed a tapestry of data collection and data analysis intertwined to help me to extend and verify the meaning making I was engaged with. The progressive nature of the research process illustrates the importance of engaging with the fundamental issues of the epistemology of knowledge as well as the character of that knowledge.

Table Two

Process of data collection and emerging themes

Methodology	Emerging themes	Link to my thesis
Questionnaires	- Influences that impact on teachers' understanding - personal - professional	Epistemology of teacher knowledge and understanding
Individual teacher interviews	Thematic analysis - teachers' understandings of their pupils	Notions of specialist knowledge
	- professional and personal experiences	Epistemology of teacher knowledge and understanding
	Individual analysis - role and impact of teacher identity - professional and personal experiences	Notions of teacher identity
First group interviews	- Teachers' understandings of their pupils	Notions of specialist knowledge
	- Teachers' understandings of what teachers need to know	Role and impact of society's knowledge
	- Teachers' understandings of how society views them as teachers and the pupils they teach	Epistemology of teacher knowledge and understanding
Second group interviews	- Teachers' understandings of how society views them as teachers and the pupils they teach	Notions of specialist knowledge Notions of teacher identity
	- Teachers' understandings of what teachers need to know	Epistemology of teacher knowledge and understanding

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Conclusion

This chapter sets out my decision making process in relation to my research design. It begins by placing the research design in the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative methodology was discussed in relation to its contribution to the process of meaning making and the diversity of qualitative methodology clearly presents a challenge to this study. The fundamental principles of symbolic interactionism, critical theory and grounded theory along with the central focus upon meaning making have contributed to the decision making process. The problematic nature of issues related to questioning, ethics, reliability and validity have been discussed along with the role they have to play in my research. The adopted research methods: questionnaires, individual interviews and group interviews have been analysed form the perspective of their contribution to meaning making and the through the complexity of the substantive issues a varied range of methodologies has been chosen. The employment of video analysis as a research tool has been discussed although there is very little literature pertinent to this in the field. The relationship of analysis and reflection to meaning making in my study has been explored. I set out my intention, in the spirit of grounded theory, to search for patterns and regularities and ensure the generated data leads the analysis. The chapter ends with a synopsis of the emerging themes linked to the data collection methodology. The substantive themes that form my final thesis are also highlighted. This shows the evolving nature of the research process and the key points where my substantive themes of teacher identity, specialist knowledge and influencing factors emerged. These are now going to be developed and analysed in the following chapters where my journey of meaning making progresses to an interaction with the teachers themselves.

Chapter five

Analysis of questionnaires: issues of professional experiences

Introduction

This chapter begins the process of data analysis and meaning making with the teachers in the study. The aim of the questionnaire was to start the process of collecting information from the teachers about the professional histories and to ask the teachers to begin to reflect on professional experiences that they perceive to be influential. The questionnaire helped me to begin to develop my understanding of the teachers as a whole sample group as well as building up a picture of individual teachers. It was essential, if I was to attempt to make meaning of what the teachers were telling me, to try to understand the context and background of their experience to date. The questionnaire had specifically asked about initial teacher training qualifications, experience and other employment, INSET (pmld and general), other experiences and any other issues teachers felt were important. They were also explicitly asked whether they felt qualified to teach pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. I organised and analysed the data in a structured and managed way; within each section of the questionnaire I looked for and checked out regularities and patterns (Huberman and Miles 1994a). The professional experiences of the teachers, including the nature of specialist training opportunities, emerged as issues that might help me to develop a greater understanding of how and why the teachers develop their understandings and beliefs. These became the themes by which the questionnaires were analysed and formed the initial process of meaning making on my part. For the purpose of the structure of this chapter I posed questions related to my developing meaning making. Throughout this process, in the spirit of grounded theory research there were issues that would need to be fed back to teachers for their reflection. Thus the process of cumulative meaning making with the teachers begins. This chapter concludes by collating the issues that need to be explored further with the teachers.

How did the analysis of the initial teacher training information help me to develop my understanding of this group of teachers?

The analysis of the initial teacher training information from the questionnaires highlighted that half of the teachers had completed specialist special education teacher training and half completed mainstream training. This suggests a broad balance in the sample group of initial training experiences. Six of the group had additional qualifications in severe/profound and multiple learning disabilities and two teachers had completed additional training in general special educational mainstream. All of the teachers who had initial mainstream training had gone on to pursue specialist training. This tells me that the group of teachers is, on paper, well qualified to teach children with special educational needs having attended 'specialist' training courses. Less than half of the teachers identified that this 'specialist' training was related to teaching pupils with pmld.

How did the analysis of the information relating to teaching experience help me to develop my understanding of this group of teachers?

The analysis of this information revealed that the majority of the sample group of teachers had over ten years experience of working in a special school context, three had less than ten years and one teacher out of the sample had experience of teaching in mainstream schools. This helps me to understand that the culture of the special school has been the foremost influence for the majority of teachers in the sample and that the culture of mainstream schools may have played a much less significant role for the teachers. All of the teachers in the sample have worked specifically with pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities for more than five years, eight of the group have upwards of ten years' experience. This tells me that the teachers in this sample have a significant amount of experience teaching this group of pupils. Five of the sample has had other employment out of teaching, the nature of which was exclusively in caring roles, for example, youth worker, and mental health counsellor. The responses to the direct question relating to how qualified the teachers felt to teach this group of pupils revealed that nine felt confident they were qualified, four were not sure and one did not reply. This helps me to understand that, although over half feel quite confident, there are a significant number who are, in fact, unsure if they are

qualified to teach this group of pupils. Table Three sets out the teachers' responses to this question. This information now needs to be fed back to the teachers in order to develop an understanding of the meaning this makes to the teachers themselves.

Table Three Answer to question: do you feel qualified to teach pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities?		
Years teaching Pmld pupils	Yes	No
0-5yrs	2	2
6-10yrs	1	1
10yrs plus	6	2

How does the information teachers gave about subsequent inset courses help me to understand the sample group more?

The information offered in this part of the questionnaire tells me more about what subsequent non-accredited training, which was available for the teachers that they, or their schools, chose to attend. Table Four outlines the general special education courses teachers have bought into over the years. It is clear that these, with the possible exception of the conferences, offer highly structured approaches to teaching and learning. This is interesting as it may help me to understand how and why teachers, in the individual and group interviews, show an affinity to highly structured teaching.

Table Four Subsequent inset – Special Educational Needs		
High Scope	TEACCH	DLS
Autism	Makaton	Conductive Education
Conferences 1 – 3 days with particular speakers or themes		

The general courses teachers have attended have been very few and relate to bullying, self esteem and classroom management. This suggests to me that their experience and interaction with mainstream training opportunities and colleagues have been minimal. It contributes to my later interpretations relating to the distinct and separate teacher identities that emerge through the interview stage of the research. This also helps me to understand that the major training influences for the teachers has been from the context of the special school. There have been a number of inset courses the teachers have attended that have been specifically related to teaching pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. These are outlined in Table Five. The nature of these relates to the developmental curriculum including communication, movement, perceptual, sensory, personal and social and curricular. This has the potential of helping me to understand more the understanding teachers have in relation to their pupils and also the influences that may impact upon these understandings.

Table Five
Subsequent Inset – PMLD related

Objects of reference	Communication	Facilitated communication
Multi sensory	Intensive Interaction	Equals
Ace	Deaf / blind	Feeding
Halliwick	Sherbourne	Music
Sensory science	Curriculum development	Rebound
Aromatherapy		
Alternative approaches to movement		

The questionnaire asks teachers to note down other experiences outside of teaching they feel has been influential on their teaching. The teacher responses included highly personal experiences including personal philosophy, personal experiences, being a parent, and parents of children with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

In order to develop further my understanding of how and why personal experience may impact upon the understandings of the teachers I need to be explore this more fully in the individual interviews. Teachers were invited to write down other issues they felt particularly strongly about in relation to their experience of training and teaching. Issues relating to the demise of the pre-service specialist teacher training courses, experiential learning and the nature of the curriculum of pupils with pmld

emerged. This stage of analysis offers a beginning insight into some of the issues involved in the meaning making that I am engaging in with the teachers and provides a foundation for the next stage of the research.

Conclusion

The analysis of questionnaires has allowed me to begin my meaning making with the teachers in my study. Some tentative conclusions can be drawn from this analysis that may help me to understand the sample group a little more and identify issues for further exploration with the teachers themselves. The teachers appear well qualified from the perspective of accredited specialist training although some feel unqualified to teach pupils with pmld. The majority of the teachers in my study has over ten years experience in special education, which suggests that the balance of the group is biased towards older teachers with all of the teachers having upwards of five years teaching experience of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. The majority of subsequent training has been specifically related to special educational needs and profound and multiple learning disabilities. This suggests an experienced group of teachers. The links with mainstream education are few, only one teacher has mainstream teaching experience, and there have been very few mainstream courses that the teachers have attended. Less than half of the sample has job experience out of teaching, although those that have were in employment that involved caring for others. Personal experiences appear to be important influential factors that teachers have discussed as being relevant.

The interpretation of the questionnaires, although following data management strategies advocated by Huberman and Miles (1994a), is very personal to myself. In order to develop my meaning making of the teachers' understandings, the next stage of my research must reflect my interpretations back to the teachers. A simple feedback sheet was designed that highlighted my analysis and interpretation of the questionnaires. An example of this feedback sheet may be found in Appendix Five and forms the beginning of the individual interviews.

Chapter six

Professional understandings, key influences and personal reflection

Introduction

This chapter extends my meaning making to a discussion of my interpretations of the individual teacher interviews. Issues raised through the analysis of the questionnaires formed a starting point for the interviews. The interviews progressed to a discussion of the teacher's individual questionnaire and finished with a discussion of some more generic issues. The analysis of the interviews took place in two stages. The first stage adopted a thematic analysis, which is what this chapter discusses. The second stage involves a return to whole individual interview transcripts, which is discussed in the next chapter. Following the principles, strategies and sub processes discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994b) relating to data analysis, I began to make sense of the data generated through data display, and then through a process of conclusion and verification. The data was organised into sections to help me to take some interpretation and meaning from it. The sections corresponded broadly to the general structure of the interviews but allowed me to begin to make some meaning of what the teachers were saying from various perspectives. From grounded theory the importance of raw data was crucial to me, and in my analysis I tried to allow the raw data to be explicit and let the data itself tell a lot of the story. The meaning making I have already engaged in provided a basis for analysing the individual interviews. Diversity and similarity emerged from this process of analysis. The definitions the teachers talked about were broadly in line with those I had explored in my earlier meaning making. The teachers appear to view the pupils with pmld as requiring different teaching and learning experiences from their disabled and non disabled peers. The teachers highlight the central role of communication in the curriculum. They talk about their struggles with notions of integration for this group of pupils. The discussion develops to an analysis of the teachers' responses to professional training experiences, which appears to support notions of 'specialist' teacher. The chapter concludes with a reflection of my personal and professional understanding and some of possible key influences on my own meaning making. Critical theory helped me to recognise the need to try to understand the meanings I had made. Thus I

would begin to understand more fully my role in the meaning making I am engaging with, a process that would continue throughout the research.

The structured management of the data led to the following sections of data being organised:

- Developing an understanding of the teachers' perceptions of the term profound and multiple learning disabilities.
- Developing an understanding of the teachers' perceptions of what they believe to be important elements in the education of this group of pupils.
- Developing an understanding of the teachers' views of pre and in service training they have attended
- Developing an understanding of how teachers are making meaning of their current experiences working with this group of pupils.

Through this thematic approach of analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1994), I looked for and examined regularities and patterns (Huberman and Miles (1994a). To help in my meaning making of the teachers, I posed some questions. These included:

- How does this analysis help me to make meaning of how the teachers perceive the pupils are learning?
- How does this analysis help me understand more about how the teachers develop their theories of teaching and learning and what may be the influences that sustain and challenge these theories?

Making meaning about the definition of profound and multiple learning disabilities

By almost all teachers there was an initial reticence to offer a definition of profound and multiple learning disabilities. However, once talking the teachers offered very similar views about their perceived nature of profound and multiple learning

disabilities. In the analysis of what the teachers said it became clear that they were talking about a group of pupils with *complex* and *multiple* learning disability. Pupils who can be very *different* from one another, who may present as very *individual* and *unique*, who may share common characteristics but whose individual pictures are very difficult to define in a group definition. This was summarised by one teacher:

> "It's hard to describe a typical child because they're often very different, they can be ambulant and mobile, they can also be profoundly disabled"
>
> Interview 9

Through listening to the teachers talk about individual or groups of pupils there does appear to be some adoption of an individual model of disability. Through the language the teachers use it appears that it is the pupils who own the disabilities. Reflecting on the definitions discussed in Chapter Two it appears that the understandings of the teachers in this study is supported in the literature. The use of personal pronouns is very evident through each of the interviews and can be seen in the quotations from the teachers. Teachers talked of some neurological damage that may have created the profound and multiple learning disability:

> "Little people who have been damaged usually at birth or sometimes by an accident"
>
> Interview 10

> "Significant damage to different parts of the brain"
>
> Interview 9

> "A child who has not got the ability for the messages to get through to the right parts of the body at the right time and are very jumbled up"
>
> Interview 7

These echo the spirit of the definition offered by Orelove and Sobsey (1996), that places an emphasis on neurological impairment. The use of the term 'damage' supports this. One teacher expresses her worry:

> "Children in the past who have been down as profound and multiple learning disabilities children haven't had a low IQ."
>
> Interview 13

She talks about this being awful and terrible and this suggests the term 'profound and multiple learning disabilities' is a negative term for her that has an 'awful' impact on the child.

Aspects of development that were discussed by teachers when describing this group of pupils include cognition, communication, sensory, physical and social/behaviour. This is in line with published definitions. For example, the WHO (1980) definition that stresses a range of cognitive functions. It becomes clear that teachers are talking about very early stages of development:

"We're looking at huge baby really"

Interview 1

One of the areas where there was most consensus was in the capacity of cognitive functioning and intellectual reasoning. All but one teacher marked this as a possible distinguishing element of profound and multiple learning disability.

"I think its got to start with the brain, you know the level of cognitive functioning determines profound as opposed to severe"

Interview 4

"Cognitive component is for me critical...they are usually at a very early stage of development, pre symbolic, pre representational"

Interview 6

In contrast one teacher stated her belief that the children are thinkers:

"They don't have problems in thinking at all, they can think but they need help to think clearly and they need a lot of help, physical help."

Interview 10

Notions of pupils with pmld as thinkers are something that I did not find in my meaning making of published definitions. Communication emerged as a particular element of the definitions offered by the teachers:

"If they can communicate verbally, haven't achieved the skills to be able to do that in an effective way"

Interview 11

Indeed, the central role of communication received attention from other teachers, which fits with the definition offered by the SCAA (1996). An example of this is from one teacher who said:

> "There's a communicative element in anything…that would be an absolute starting point"

<div align="right">Interview 6</div>

When teachers talked about physical difficulties in their definitions, the range of pupils' abilities emerged, from:

> "A child who is immobile, probably supported by some chair for sitting"

<div align="right">Interview 2</div>

And

> "They haven't got the physical ability to explore"

<div align="right">Interview 1</div>

To

> "A child who is running around the yard who doesn't know where he's running or why he's running"

<div align="right">Interview 7</div>

The notion of highly mobile children was not evident in the definitions I explored although some stressed physical characteristics (Orelove and Sobsey 1996). Two teachers mentioned the medical/care needs of pupils with pmld. One exemplifies this:

> " It's like doubly incontinent who need the care side as well. Might take epileptic fits, we've got to be on constant mental guard for that"

<div align="right">Interview 12</div>

Teachers also talked about the fundamental basic needs of pupils, eating, drinking and toileting. The inclusion of personal care needs matches Ouvry's (1987) definition and is echoed by other teachers in my study:

> "I would say it's somebody who needs a lot of help to do most things…to do simple things most people take for granted… things like having a drink"

<div align="right">Interview 5</div>

And,

> "A child who is dependent…on an adult to meet their needs in all ways, to provide their eating and drinking, to provide security in their daily routines."

<div align="right">Interview 2</div>

All the teachers made reference to the multi sensory impairment that they believe compounds or adds to the nature of the child's difficulties. This is something that

emerged in my earlier meaning making, particularly through the definition offered by Lacey and Ouvry (1998). Notions of complexity emerged in the interviews when teachers talked about how it is difficult to ascertain a principle difficulty due to a combination of difficulties. One teacher summarises this as:

> "It's probably, although not always, a complex arrangement of disabilities, layering on top of one another but are quite hard to disentangle"
>
> Interview 3

Whilst another talks about:

> "Complex learning difficulties that impinge on each other"
>
> Interview 9

Supported by another who said:

> "We would almost, but not always, be looking for children with sensory deprivation, deaf blind, compounded with cerebral palsy"
>
> Interview 1

From this analysis I can begin to make some conclusions about how the teachers in my study may be viewing this group of pupils. The definitions offered by the teachers are clearly supported in the literature. This could be a reflection that the definitions in the literature are influencing the teachers' definitions. When talking about their pupils in this section of the interview teachers talked about the 'needs' and 'difficulties' of the pupils. The 'strengths' and 'attributes' reflected in the definition offered by Lacey and Ouvry (1998) were not present. This suggests that the teachers have a particular way of viewing their pupils. The definitions offered by teachers in my study suggest they are viewing pupils with pmld as:

- Highly individual with complex needs alongside significant neurological damage.

- Operating at a very early level of development, specifically with cognitive and communicative functioning.

- Presenting additional and multi sensory disorders, which compound the learning disability. Teachers talk of these mainly being physical and sensory.

In the light of this area of discussion it appears that teachers developed, sustained and had challenged their understandings about their pupils through their direct experience with them.

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All the pupils received some level of medical support and it is an interesting anomaly that more teachers did not talk about this explicitly. They did talk about their pupils requiring a very high level of adult input and support to help meet their fundamental needs, some of this from a multi professional team.

Making meaning about important elements in education.

The issues the teachers raised in the individual interview relating to important elements in education helped me to continue to make meaning about how they understand their pupils with pmld. In discussing their perceptions of an ideal classroom and important elements in the education of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, I gained further insight into how the teachers understand and perceive this group of pupils. This challenged the interpretations I had already made relating to the teachers' views. One teacher offered a very different perspective from those I had earlier interpreted relating to the definition of profound and multiple learning disabilities when she dismissed the need for labels and proposed the notion of lifelong learning:

"I would want a person with profound and multiple learning disabilities not to have to be seen in those sorts of terms, not to have to be seen with any sort of label other than a person just like any other person who has a personality, a character, and has like all of us learning needs and those needs by definition, as with all of us, are lifelong.

Interview 4

This presents an interesting contradiction to the earlier definitions and highlighted a possible methodological issue of my research that would require further reflection. Teachers talked about issues of integration and inclusion although not specifically asked. All teachers express the view that this group of pupils should be taught with more able peers, whether in a special school or mainstream context. In an ideal classroom one teacher illustrates this:

"There would be one or two integrated in a class with lots of other children so they could get the stimulus from others. I would really like to bring mainstream pupils down and make it fun."

Interview 10

In this statement the use of the word 'down' suggests to me that the teacher perceives pupils with pmld as lower than their peers. There emerges a paradox, on the one hand teachers believing pupils with pmld benefit from being in a more able group but, on the other hand, express a concern that individual pupil need is difficult to meet in these contexts:

"The group of kids love her and I mean she is so happy and vocalises and shouts out. I just don't feel I can give her what she got before."

<div align="right">Interview 12</div>

In this statement there is no acknowledgement of what the little girl contributes to the teaching and learning experiences of the other pupils. The integration experience appears to be of value only for her. This may indicate that the teacher does not believe pupils with pmld can contribute to the education of other children.

Developmental curriculum

The developmental curriculum already seen to be dominant in the literature (Ouvry 1987) emerged as a central element in how the teachers in my study view the curriculum. In line with the profile of communication, in the way the teachers define pmld, communication becomes a central feature of this developmental curriculum:

"Communication, yeah, that's the starting point for everything really."

<div align="right">Interview 8</div>

One teacher stresses her belief of the crucial place of communication when talking about one of her pupils who has recently entered her class:

"He's a child who doesn't communicate any reaction to me and that's a hard one because you don't know if that child's happy, if he's enjoying something, if he doesn't like it. How are we going to know?"

<div align="right">Interview 14</div>

Communication is seen as both functional and recreational. It is functional in that it enables pupils to exercise choice and control, and recreational in that it contributes to relationships and the quality of those relationships. Along with communication,

cognition also appears to be regarded as important, forming a view of the curriculum in developmental terms:

"I'm doing cognition and communication fundamentally... looking at different aspects of cognition and communication and a range of opportunities that would facilitate those central things."

<div align="right">Interview 6</div>

Teachers discussed the importance of the development of communication for the purpose of developing relationships. This was linked to notions of personal and social education, with self-esteem and personality being highlighted as particular areas of importance. Relationships are complex. It has long been acknowledged that the development of positive and effective relationships is a crucial element for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities (1998) and the development of communication is one of the essential contributory factors (Ware 1996, Nind and Hewlett 1998, Allen 2001). Having listened to the teachers in my study, I interpreted that there was a feeling amongst them that there are fundamental essential elements of education they believe to be important for pupils with pmld. These include communication, cognition, personal and social education and movement. The teachers did not talk about other areas of the National Curriculum although IT was discussed as a mechanism to support the pupils' opportunities to express choice, which is evident in the work of Detheridge (1996).

Making meaning about teaching and learning

The teachers talked about their views of the pupils as learners and themselves as teachers through their discussions of their present work, particularly when talking about their ideal classroom. An issue that emerged and relates to the way the teachers talked about their definitions of pmld was the notion of difference. One teacher exemplified this when talking about the fundamental differences in teaching and learning that this group of pupils require:

"When it boils down to it they still need a different sort of day."

Another teacher who makes a comparison to teaching and learning in the mainstream context echoes this difference:

"You're taking things back to a very developmental level which I don't think in mainstream you would do."

However, one teacher disagrees with this when she says:

"The same educational philosophy applies to a student with pmld as to any other student in the school, it's all the same processes and procedures."

This was a lone voice in the discussion of difference. The notion of difference can also be seen when the teachers talk about timing and pace in teaching and learning. One example of this is:

"They definitely need time which you can't give them, the time, what I mean is time to react."

This is supported in the literature by Ware (1996) whose classroom based research with adults and pupils with pmld found, through detailed video analysis, staff were missing communicative interactions of the children. In listening to the teachers in my study there emerged some tension in the teachers' thoughts. On the one hand a confidence in the pupils as learners:

"Everyone can learn and we shouldn't just be doing we should be developing."

To feelings of uncertainty about themselves as teachers, able to facilitate learning:

"I think how to manage the class, how to manage the class, how to manage."

There appears to be a need for the teaching and learning to be flexible and for the teacher to follow the lead of the child, whatever the context:

> "If they suddenly want to communicate, if we're in the middle of assembly or out, so be it, that's when we start".

<div align="right">Interview 6</div>

This echoes the intensive interaction approach to teaching and learning advocated in the work of Nind and Hewettt (1998). The need to allow teaching and learning to be child led is repeated by the same teacher when talking about following a pupil's interest:

> "He's 19, he's enjoying sand and has no concept that it could be babyish then it's other people's perceptions that make that an inappropriate situation."

<div align="right">Interview 6</div>

Making meaning of professional training experiences

Listening to the teachers' views and perceptions about training and continued professional development is a fundamental element of this study. The emerging themes are crucial to the understandings I make of the influences on the meaning teachers are making. The themes that emerged through this process of analysis include identity, driving forces for attendance on courses, how teachers value and evaluate training, issues that arise from training, and who have been influential in their development. The concept of teacher identity emerged in a small way in this section, but is an issue that proceeds to take a central role later in the research. There was concern raised that younger teachers who have not experienced pre service courses for pupils with severe learning disabilities do not have the depth of knowledge and experience required for this group of pupils:

> " It seems an impossibility to me to cover (*4 years work*) you just snatch at bits, teachers just don't understand these children".

<div align="right">Interview</div>

This was also expressed by younger teachers through feelings of frustration at having to complete a general Postgraduate Certificate in Education, when really they wanted dedicated severe learning disabilities/profound and multiple learning disabilities training. This was expressed as feelings of being different, 'stuck out' from others on course.

Developing an understanding of why teachers attend a course

Through a structured process of data management and analysis the driving forces for teacher attendance on professional courses appear to fall within three groups. Firstly there is a personal drive held by the teacher, a desire to find out about something, which has echoes of humanitarian benevolence:

"I wanted to make a difference"

Interview 3

Related to this is a personal connection with the content being covered on the course:

"I'm certainly wanting to find out more about objects of reference because I like using three dimensional things."

Interview 1

Secondly, there seems to be a drive that is relates to individual needs of pupils and the desire by the teacher to understand the pupils more:

"I went on that course specifically because I have a boy with..."

Interview 3

Five teachers made some reference to responding to the needs of particular pupils as an impetus to attend a particular course. Thirdly, there appears to be a drive related to whole school development and initiatives. At a school level decisions are made and teachers attend training to contribute to whole school developments. Two examples of this are Objects of Reference and the TEACCH approach.

The first two drives emanate mainly from personal and individual perspectives. Teachers choose a course for highly personal reasons that may be seen to relate to individual pupils, and possibly the impact of the course could be defined in individual and personal terms. The third drive moves away from the personal into a whole school issue. The role of the school improvement plan (SIP) is influential in the choice of courses. The role of individual choice gives way to the collective need of the school. However, as we shall discover, whatever the drive that leads a teacher to attend a course, it is the personal factor that impacts on the teacher's responses to that course.

Developing an understanding of how teachers view and evaluate training

The teachers talked about courses they have found successful. For some this success is seen in terms of whole school development:

"We need that discussion in severe learning disabilities schools"

<div align="right">Interview 3</div>

And

"A healthy dilemma to debate in school"

<div align="right">Interview 4</div>

For others the success criteria were much more personal. Table Six illustrates examples of teachers' reflections on successful professional courses they have attended. It is clear that the majority of teachers discuss courses from a personal perspective, either to do with personal gain, personal connections or individual philosophy and values. The teachers' quotations all include the use of a personal pronoun that emphasises the highly personal teacher responses. This suggests that influences on the teachers' meaning making are personal to them, whatever the initial drives for attending a course.

Table Six
Teacher reflections on successful professional courses

I like using objects of reference	Interview 1
I think it is very important...	Interview 1
I could connect with what was said.	Interview 2
They were working with a definition I recognised...	Interview 2
I was absolutely taken aback by seeing her working	Interview 2
I wanted help	Interview 3
It gave me...	Interview 4
I was interested in.	Interview 4
You could think Oh yes I could take that back on Monday	Interview 5
What I think is really really important	Interview 5
I came out thinking I got something from that	Interview 6
I found that very difficult	Interview 7
I know that everything she said, you thought yeah that's Johnny or Fred	Interview 10
I really did find it, really was going to be very useful and valuable	Interview 11
I think they are a really good means of...	Interview 11

The need to adapt and be eclectic with course information appears an issue for some teachers. This is shown by one teacher to be a natural and essential process:

"You have to pick and choose what information you're actually getting and how you use it with the children"

Interview 7

The quality of the process of this adaptation can prove to be difficult and complex with another teacher highlighting:

"It's how you adapt it that's important"

Interview 10

This suggests there is an issue present relating to the specialist nature of the teacher of pupils with pmld. The teachers in this study view relationships between course content and practice as important. The relationship between theory and practice is interesting. It has already been identified that some teachers felt strongly that practice should be embedded in theory. One teacher illustrates this important element:

"I could just take that back on Monday and do it rather than thinking ooh I need to go and read two volumes and then take it back."

<div align="right">Interview 5</div>

Some teachers talk of their concern with developments that may be experimental and perhaps not grounded in theory and research. The nature of the pupils' learning disabilities created concern with pupils being possibly viewed as passive recipients, and as such vulnerable to experimental approaches. Discussing a course on sensory science one teacher felt strongly that:

"They have this person who they see in a chair who they almost don't think about, who they think can just receive things and as long as they are stimulated you're doing something."

<div align="right">Interview 9</div>

One teacher reflects consistency and continuity as a concern and talked passionately about a facilitated communication system that a child had received following attendance on a course. Unfortunately this system was not continued on account of changes in staff and context. A child had been given a way to communicate and this was not pursued and developed. The implications of this for the child were obviously great and it clearly impacted on the teacher in an emotional way. Courses on Aromatherapy and Massage created concern with one teacher who worries that short introductory courses encourage teachers to dabble with things they have little knowledge about and that this can be dangerous for the pupil. This teacher appears to want more than a practical course, and expressed the need to know more of the application of the theoretical basis of the strategies before adopting them into their practice. This is clear in a teacher's comment relating to perceptions relating to what an effective training experience may be:

"Linking theory to practice"

And having

"Courses grounded in practice"

<div align="right">Interview 11</div>

Key influential people

Teachers talk about a range of people whom they feel has influenced them and why, including colleagues, parents, pupils, other professionals, tutors and conference speakers and disabled friends.

Teachers discuss the contribution to their learning made by colleagues: one teacher offers an example of this when she discusses her current deputy head. She describes her as having 'a wealth of knowledge' (Interview 1). Another describes the clarity of the vision of the senior management team as being helpful:

> "In my school the head has always been a good influence on me and now when (deputy) came, I just think that they know what they want."
>
> Interview 3

There is also an element of a shared identity with other colleagues whom teachers perceive as sharing a similar philosophy to themselves:

> "I know just who had something there (*with the pupils*) and who never patronised and who you knew had a complete belief in the things that I hope I have"
>
> Interview 6

Again, notions of teacher identity are emerging in the data that I feel needs further exploration. The practical examples of the practice of other colleagues is also seen by teachers to be influential to them:

> "When somebody's really enthusiastic and is communicating well, I'm always eager to steal ideas for communication".
>
> Interview 5

This point is made again and shows that with some teachers they recognise these characteristics from a young age:

> "You know I can remember admiring them when I was 16 and 17, thinking 'God you know how to do that with her' and just watched and watched".
>
> Interview 9

The importance of actually seeing someone make an impact on the learning of pupils with pmld is very clear when one teacher recollects a colleague's work:

> "He was just absolutely brilliant with the kids. I don't know what it was, no idea at all. If I could put my finger on it I would sell it".

Again, notions of identity are emerging, this time relating to the recognition of something special and different in the work of others that is aspired to by the teachers themselves. Learning from others in the classroom context appears to be a significant way some of the teachers seem to be making meaning of their own work:

> "She was in the adjacent class. I really didn't know an awful lot about pmld children, she took me through the first six weeks really, in what to do."
>
> Interview 10

This valuable role of mentoring as perceived by the teachers came through the individual interviews. One teacher expresses this when talking about opportunities to work alongside other teachers:

> "I'm not a great academic. I can't say I've read a book that's completely changed my whole philosophy of special educational needs. It's been very much learning through doing from and with other people".
>
> Interview 8

Parents of the pupils are also identified as being influential to the teachers. One teacher talks in an emotive way of the plight of parents and how the work of the teacher is made meaningful through identification with this plight:

> "These parents, they seem to have such a raw deal, they are really up against it. When they come to somebody, I hope like me, who is, you know, speaking the same language and on their side".
>
> Interview 1

This offers a stark contrast to the perspective offered in the published writing of parents I have already engaged with (Penman 1996). It also seems to repeat the notion of humanitarian benevolence reflected in the work of Clark (1993).

Another teacher celebrates the attitude of one parent who has been particularly influential to her:

> "I think she showed a lot of fun, she enjoyed the kid, the little girl was taken everywhere, it didn't matter what happened then as everybody else just accepted her".
>
> Interview 10

Whilst another points to the knowledge and understanding parents have about their own child:

"It's their child and they know the child best, they know the context."

Two teachers identify the pupils themselves as having significant influence on their work. One expresses it in a way that seems to suggest it helps to make meaning of teaching:

"The people themselves, I mean if that's not a silly thing to say but that's a start, they've influenced me first and foremost because that's why I'm here doing it".

Two teachers talk about the influence of other professionals. This appears to be from a very practical perspective, as highlighted by one of the teachers here:

"One of the physiotherapists who introduced conductive, well again, it was her enthusiasm for the actual method and what it could do for the children and how it could help them",

while the other teacher talks about how the nature of teaching this group of pupils demands a multi professional approach:

"Certainly working with multi professional colleagues has become so much more part of the life and equality of understanding and complimenting each other."

When teachers in the study talk about particular tutors and lecturers that they feel have influenced their work issues related to shared identity, practical application and visionary thinking emerge. These are picked up again later in the study when the epistemology of the teacher's knowledge base is discussed. The impact of personal relationships appears important for three of the teachers in this study, be it through family, friendships, or foster parenting. One teacher talks about how the understanding of the role of 'teacher' has been influenced by personal friendship:

"Our little godson has downs syndrome and you can see from him all the problems
and you know what you've got to sort out".

Another teacher reinforces the impact of personal insights:

"I would say friends who have visual impairment and hearing impairment have
influenced the way I work, in talking to them and their experiences at school and how
frustrated they were."

Reflecting on my own meaning making

Critical theory supports me to acknowledge the impact of my own personal meaning
making on my interpretations of what I am hearing from the teachers. The nature of
the research is organic. It also highlights the importance of searching for the
influences on my own making of meaning in order to offer a perspective to my own
meaning making. In the initial analysis of the transcribed interviews, I began the
process of collecting together a small selection of quotations that I perceived as
particularly interesting. I thought they might be significant in helping me to make
meaning of my meaning making. These quotations may say a great deal about me and
my own understandings and perceptions. They offer me a process for embarking on a
personal journey of my own making of meaning, which in turn, moves the meaning
making of the study away from 'of teachers' to 'with teachers'. The first quotation I
chose was:

"The children I had come across had almost exclusively been in a hospital setting,
they seemed to be in a sort of medical care situation, even the thought that there were
things they could learn ...it was really quite revolutionary."

This mirrors my own initial experience of teaching this group of pupils. When I began
teaching, people with complex learning disabilities were being moved out of long stay
hospitals into the community and I set up a class in a special school for this very
group of pupils who were sixteen to nineteen year olds. I was appointed to this post as
a new teacher. There was a sense that they challenged the status quo of the school.
Like the story recollected by Corbett (1994), no one in the school wanted to teach the

class. A third 'special care' class was created in the school and I began my first permanent contract in teaching. The pupils were different. They were big, highly complex and had experienced institutional life in a ward environment for most of their lives. Some had attended the hospital school for only a couple of sessions a week. I identify with the teacher in the above quotation. It was acknowledged, by my colleagues, that the work I was involved in was original. The pupils showed very quickly that they were able to learn, make progress, have fun and contribute to the social community of their class. However, it was a hard struggle to try to create integrated sessions where pupils with pmld moved into other classes, and I identified with the teacher in this study who said:

> "I would try to integrate them and for them to be as individual and equal as other children."
>
> Interview 14

I believe strongly that this group of pupils should be educated alongside their peers in a mainstream context and the words of one of the teachers in this study echo my personal feelings:

> "I would say for my pupils at the moment, 14 – 16 year olds to be in a mainstream school in a classroom that was differentiated enough to meet their needs."
>
> Interview 5

I too struggled with the dilemma of meeting individual needs in a social context and I identified with the teacher who talked about bringing groups of similar pupils together for particular teaching sessions:

> " But I would like to see a time when they (pupils with pmld) can get together as a group like three or four children together doing say communication."
>
> Interview 12

This is interesting to me as it challenges my views on inclusion. Although I may identify with inclusion issues, I continue to driven by the need to view this group of pupils from a very individual basis. It also highlights to me my personal paradox of inclusive education that is echoed by this teacher:

> "I find it very hard to do an awful lot with her at the moment because of the group I have got."

I now realise that I am struggling with inclusion if it carries a threat to my perceptions of what I believe is effective teaching and learning for this group of pupils. I seem to want inclusion but I do not want the children to be victims of inclusion and left at the side of the room. This suggests to me that I am adopting an individual model of disability (Emerson 1992) with an emphasis on impairment (Thomas 1998). This was a point in my research that offered a personal challenge to my assumptions. I seem to want what this teacher wants:

> "I'm interested in making a community if you like in our classroom and helping everyone to understand each other but that everyone should be achieving to the level of their ability."
>
> Interview 3

However, is this just the humanitarian benevolence highlighted by Clark (1993) or the sweet sentimentality presented by Corbett (1994)?

In reflecting on the teachers' responses in the interviews I acknowledged that in my teaching I wanted the pupils to be actively engaged and I identified with the thoughts of the teacher in this quotation:

> "The pmld children rely on you to give them activities and you know I hate to ever see those children just sitting there."
>
> Interview 11

This leads to a scenario where the adult is dominant. I can remember being in class and becoming very agitated if the pupils in the class were just sitting there. I had completed a pre service initial teacher training course for 'mentally handicapped children'. My training had given me extremely structured teaching strategies. The agenda for teaching, although I hoped it was child led, was in fact very adult directed. Through the interviews, I felt myself identifying with the teachers who had participated in pre service training similar to my own. This presents a methodological issue that will need further exploration.

I collected lots of quotations relating to the value and important role of communication:

"I think they need to be given access to communication, before you start doing anything, communication."

And,

"There is a communicative element in anything I am doing. It is the absolute starting point. I think everything we do in teaching and in life is about communication."

In reflecting on my own beliefs, I subscribe to the central role of communication for pupils with pmld and from this can begin to make meaning of why the theme of communication became so significant in the analysis of the interviews. Another quotation I identified with offers another insight into the meaning making I am engaged with:

"The most important thing is that these children have a choice...they are entitled to a choice in their life."

The fundamental importance of choice making for this group of pupils is something I subscribe strongly to and recollections of my own teaching, however structured, always included the process of choice. When teaching, I was the only teacher in my school at that time to operate 'an integrated day', which allowed pupils to choose what they wanted to do. I employed Objects of Reference as a process for teaching the mechanics of choice before this emerged in the literature as a particular approach.

Conclusion

How does this analysis help me to make meaning of how the teachers perceive the pupils are learning? Teachers in my study appear to be saying that a developmental curriculum is important for pupils with pmld. They advocate a central role for communication but also acknowledge the importance of cognition, personal and social education and movement. There appears to be a belief that this group of pupils has fundamentally different needs than their peers in teaching and learning. These differences centre on time and pace. These differences in teaching and learning may impact upon the teachers' views of contexts for learning, particularly integration with

more able peers. In analysing the issues raised by the teachers I reflected on the initial conceptual framework I had developed in Chapter Two. From this perspective, the teachers' understandings are confirmed through the literature on teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs and more specifically, pupils with pmld. There appears little evidence that the understandings emerging from the disability movement and perspectives of parents and pupils are impacting on the teachers' understandings. How does this analysis help me understand more about how the teachers develop their theories of teaching and learning and what may be the influences that sustain and challenge these theories? Some teachers express feelings of inadequacy about their ability to teach pupils with pmld. This supports the findings in the questionnaire about their confidence level about feeling 'qualified' to teach this group of pupils. This is an interesting issue, which I wish to explore more in the study, particularly in relation to what the teachers believe a teacher needs to know. Thus, the issue of specialist knowledge emerges, which will become central to my thesis. Issues emerged relating to possible influences on the teachers' understandings. The teachers talked about professional development in a highly personal way that emphasised shared identity with course tutors and the practical implications of courses. The impact of colleagues and mentors on individual teacher development has been shown to be important to the teachers, and to a lesser extent, parents, pupils and other professionals. The beginning of an analysis of my personal reflections demonstrated the influence and impact of my own personal and early experiences and the need to be continually aware of the impact of these on the research project.

Once I had completed this thematic analysis I felt that, through the employment of data management techniques, many important issues had emerged. Nevertheless, I felt that the wholeness of each individual teacher's interview had been lost in the process. In the spirit of grounded theory I returned to an analysis of each individual interview.

Chapter seven

Teacher identity and key influences

Introduction

The influence of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994), with the importance of raw data, helped me to decide that, once I had carried out this structured and organised thematic analysis, I would return to the whole transcript of each interview. This would help me to appreciate the raw data in the context of the whole interview and also help me to develop my process of analysis. The thematic analysis had raised many important issues, too many to take back to the teachers so there was a need to choose and prioritise them. This level of analysis would help to focus back on individual teacher perspectives in a holistic way that might highlight a second level of analysis. The process of returning to the whole interviews was enlightening. I felt at this stage that I knew the data very well but there was an element of surprise in finding the strength of the issues that developed through this stage of analysis. The issues that emerged in strength had also emerged during the thematic analysis, only to a lesser degree. During this stage of analysis I seemed to be drawn instinctively to what the teachers were telling me about their identity and the influences that impacted on this. Identity was a new area of understanding for me and to enable me to analyse the generated data I needed to make some initial meaning of the concept of identity. The chapter begins with this and includes a discussion of identity related to occupation. I then progress to making sense of identity as it emerges through the teacher interviews, which includes a section focussing on the teachers identity related to occupation. The discussion moves to an analysis of the professional and then personal experiences that I have interpreted as being influential to the development of the teachers' identities. Detailed analysis was completed for each teacher interview and these can be found in Appendix Six.

My meaning making of identity

The major influence on my understanding of identity has been sociological. Taylor (1999) synthesises this perspective as:

"The key idea of sociology is that the lives of individuals cannot be understood apart from the social contexts in which they live."

Taylor 1999 p 1

It appears that the discourse relating to identity is about continua, tensions and boundaries that continually interplay. Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) show the potential for the individual to exert influence on identity:

"We are participants in our own construction and exercise some autonomy in the face of the forces of socialisation."

Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) p5

In contrast they also discuss the role of the society on the development of identity:

"The human mind is not just shaped by society, it is made by society."

Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) p5

In developing my understanding about the concept of identity I quickly came to realise the intricacies and complexities involved. The volume of work connected with identity is extremely large. The early work of Park (1950) sets the tone for the discussion of identity when he suggests:

"It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role...it is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves."

Park 1950 p.259

It is the meaning making of the roles of the group of teachers in this study that has formed a central focus of my own development and helped me to reflect and analyse the meaning of the roles I have and continue to adopt. The discussion of identity appears to be inextricably linked to our view of ourselves and the view of others about ourselves. The work of Jenkins (1996), Wetherell (1996) Bakehurst (1995) and Branaman (2001) were particularly influential in the shaping of my understandings. I needed in some way to organise my developing thoughts and I did so through the use of a continuum of perspectives of identity, which is cumulative, evolving and circular

in nature. As Jenkins (1996) suggests identity can best be understood on a dialectical model that acknowledges the crucial role of boundaries and tensions.

Figure One

The dialectic model of identity

I	to	me
Personal	to	social
Individual	to	collective
Internal	to	external
Nominal	to	virtual
Difference	to	similarity
Asserted	to	assigned
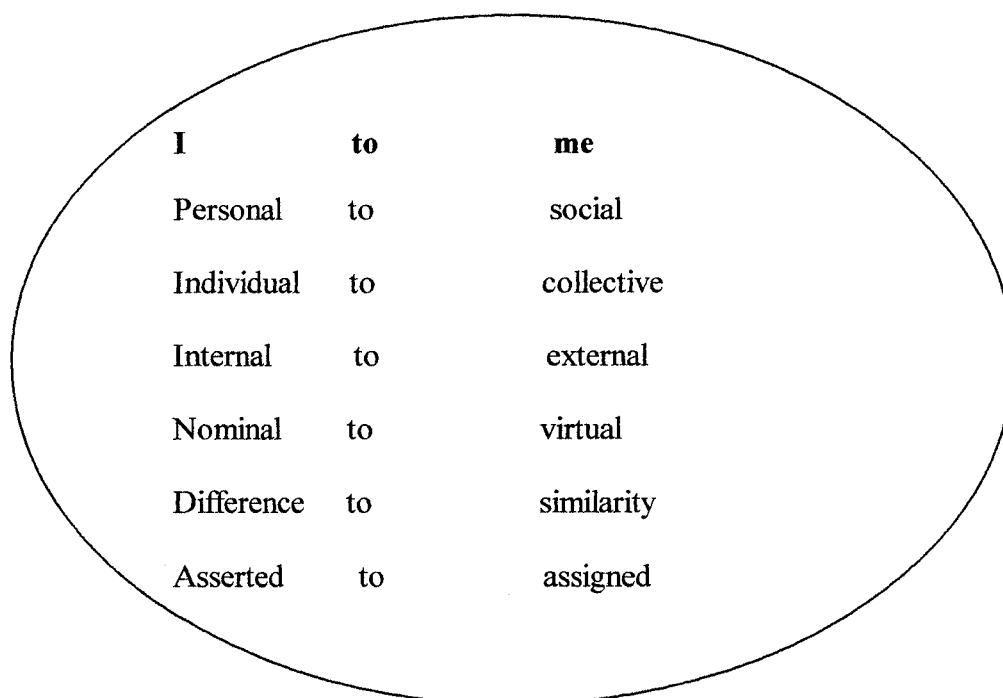
These continua are represented in a circular way to stress the interrelated nature of identity and theories about it. The way I discuss some of the key concepts is a reflection of the process I engaged with to make my own meaning of identity; its simplicity does not represent the complex relationships that exist between the concepts and ideas. In some there are clear similarities across theories but in others there are particular differences. Jenkins (1996) dialectical model helps me to appreciate the evolving theories about identity and the resurgence in interest in this area:

"The popular concern about identity is, in the large part perhaps, a reflection of the uncertainty produced by rapid change and cultural contact: our social maps no longer fit our social landscapes."

Jenkins 1996 p. 9

Jenkins appears to be suggesting that the changing understandings of identities coupled with changes and developments in society have created a tension and

mismatch of identities in a social context. To appreciate fully the nuances of the concept of identity, I progressed through the main theories, from a dialectical perspective.

I and me

This view of identity proposed by Mead (1934) has been extremely influential in sociology and social psychology. The 'I' represents a unique individuality which comes from within a person, whilst the 'Me' represents the internalised attitudes of significant others. At its most simple and clear this discourse of identity may be seen to represent the beginnings of the understandings between the individual and the collective, or the personal and social.

Personal and social

Personal identity is central to the work of Giddens (1991) who places personal identity in a political context. He appears to believe that individuals reflexively construct a personal narrative that allows them to understand themselves in relation to power structures. Social identities exist as something people 'have', 'are' or 'belong to' (Jenkins1996). Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) discuss the social self, and social identity becomes the our true purpose:

> "The fundamental powers at the heart of our identity as persons can exist only in social space."

Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) p.5

Wetherell (1996) highlights that social identity theory stresses identification with a group and attempts to understand the social and theoretical consequences of that identification. This relates to the next continuum, that of individual and collective.

Individual and collective

Individual identity relates directly to an individual. Jenkins (1996) being influenced by CW Mills (1959) suggests that individual and collective identity can be viewed as

similar in that they are both firmly placed in the social world. Duck (1999) discusses the move from the individual to the collective through the development of relationships:

"Their identities must become not only related but interconnected as a sense of relationship is built...the individuals move from two separate I-dentities to one We-dentity."

Duck 1999 p.54

Collective identity in its most pronounced form can become institutional identity in which:

"Individual and collective identities are systematically produced, reproduced and implicated in each other."

Jenkins 1996p.25

Internal and external

This discourse for understanding identity relates to the earlier words of Park (1950) when he talks about the roles we play and how through these roles that we come to know each other and ourselves. The internal identity refers to the self image someone has of their identity and the external is concerned with the public image, the image others have of their identity. Jenkins (1996) talks about this public image as crucial and that an individual participates in elaborate impression management in order to influence the reception of an identity in others. Goffman (2001) refers to this in two ways, one is where the individual is a performer and one is where the individual is a character. As a performer the emphasis is on manipulating others to think in a certain way:

"We find that the individual may attempt to induce the audience to judge him and the situation in a particular way."

Goffman in Branaman (2001) p.180

As a character the emphasis is on the qualities that the performance tries to evoke. Goffman himself acknowledges that the individual may not in fact believe in these qualities but participates in impression management processes.

Nominal and virtual

Jenkins (1996) discusses nominal identity as the name attributed to an identity and virtual identity as the experience that individuals have related to an identity. It is possible for people to share the same nominal identity but for each individual to have varied and different experiences. This may be related to the different meanings attributed to a nominal identity or the different consequences that identity has on their lives.

Difference and similarity

Jenkins (1996) offers a helpful distinction between personal/individual identity and social/ collective identity. He suggests personal/individual identity emphasises the unique differences between people whereas social/collective identity emphasises similarities. Through this Jenkins develops a clear definition of social identity as:

"In social identity the individual and collective share the same space."

Jenkins 1996 p 26

Attributed and asserted

Snow and Anderson (2001) discuss identity being established in two ways: the attributed identities assigned by others, and the asserted identities that are self designated which we bring into play during our interaction with others. Their model of distancing and embracement added a perspective to my analysis that helped me to move from the humanistic interpretation I had previously engaged with. Distancing is:

"When individuals have to enact roles that imply social identities that are inconsistent to desired self conceptions."

Snow and Anderson (2001) p229

This can involve association, role and institutional distancing. Embracement is:

"A person's verbal and expressive confirmation of acceptance and attachment to the social identity associated with a specific role."

<div align="right">Snow and Anderson (2001) p233</div>

This again can involve role association and ideological embracement and was particularly apparent when teachers talked about the children and parents.

The development of identity

An understanding of some of the main theories related to how identity develops would help me to appreciate how the teacher's identity develops. There are major differences in the way different theorists understand the process by which identities are developed and maintained. Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) offer an example of this difference when they suggest, on the one hand, we actively construct our identities with a level of autonomy through the process of socialisation we engage with. On the other hand:

"What we believe and how we behave are profoundly influenced by the social circumstances of our lives, but our very capacities to think and act are themselves socially constituted."

<div align="right">Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) p.5</div>

The work of Wetherell (1996) highlights the complex relationship between ideas that cumulate in the development of identity. In this the element of choice and autonomy is stressed. She talks about social identity having a major impact on the personality, character and individual identity of a person. She also stresses that:

"One's personal identity, conversely, will have contributed to one's choice of social identities or the personal way in which social identities are carried out."

<div align="right">Wetherell 1996 p.40</div>

This develops the notion of the impact of culture and places meaning at the centre of the argument against individualism. As Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) referring to the seminal work of Vygotsky suggest:

<div align="right">117</div>

"Vygotsky recognises that as much as culture creates individuals, culture itself remains a human creation."

Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) p.12

The work of Foucault (Scott 1996, Barth 1998) questions the level of autonomy Wetherell (1996) alludes to when he discusses the social, political and economic issues implicit in any representations we engage with through the discourse available to us at the time. Hewettt (1985), who highlights a paradox between individual and social identity, supports this:

"Only individuals can act. Everything else – society, culture, social structure, power, groups and organisations are ultimately dependent on the acts of individuals. Yet individuals can act only because they acquire the capacity to do so as members of a society, which is a source of their knowledge, language skills, orientations and motives."

Hewettt (1985) p5

The ossification theory presented by Blumstein (2001) suggests that the development of identity is gradual and continuously evolving. Over time new identities are created:

"Ossification means that we enact identities with great frequency and we become the person whom we have enacted."

Blumstein in Branaman 2001 p. 185

It is the in the work of Jenkins (1996) that we can appreciate the complex way identities are created and sustained. He suggests that identities are developed in the borders, where different discourses of identity meet and impact upon each other:

"Social identities are to be found and negotiated at their boundaries, where the internal and external meet."

Jenkins (1996) p24

Making sense of identity related to occupation

Notions of identity related to occupation may be particularly pertinent to this study. The identities the teachers have may naturally be linked to their work. Wetherell (1996) explores this relationship and offers a social constructivist perspective:

"The person is shaping the work and the work is shaping the person."

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The nature and intensity of this shaping is variable and relates to the power structures that are in operation. The engagement in work has a major influence on a person:

> "The work we do locates us in the social and cultural world, positions us in relation to the power structures of society, and provides a context for social interaction."

> Wetherell (1996) p.253

It has been shown that the choice of the work we engage with is related to different variables. The research of Moir (1993) with engineer and nurse students suggests that individual personality traits do underlie occupational choice. This research found there were different influences that appear to affect or become justifications of career choice. These are Standard Membership Category Repertoire and Family Influence Repertoire. In the former the research showed how students justified their occupational choice through the discussion of personal traits that linked directly to a particular career. They engaged in a process where they established their suitability for the job through their personal interests, experiences and strengths. Hence, engineer students tended to talk about their life long attachment to 'construction' and 'building' which made the career of engineer almost inevitable. In the latter family influence becomes a key factor. The students interviewed discussed how the occupation was an integral part of the family and the student was initiated and socialised into it:

> "My mum had been a nurse and I have relatives who are nurses and they all sort of, not influenced, but I was always interested in what they had to say."

> Moir (1993) p26

Making sense of the teachers identity in my study

Armed with this new knowledge I returned to the individual teacher interviews. In applying my new meaning making to the individual interviews the complexity of notions of identity became clear. In the teacher quotations I choose to highlight as examples of particular aspects of identity I also include reference to other aspects that may also apply. This presents a methodological issue for my study in that my own meaning making is exerting a strong influence on the analysis; this is something I need to be constantly aware of. When looking for similarities and patterns in what the

teachers were saying relating to their identity there appears to be strong themes emerging. Eleven of the teachers talked in a way that led me to interpret they identified with a cause, they wanted to make a difference, have an impact, be, for example, a leader. Thirteen of the group talked in a way that tells me about their social identity. They talk about an affiliation to and with teachers in a specialist field, about their difference from mainstream teachers and about their training that specialised in severe learning difficulties. In this section I also discuss the teachers' identity related to their occupation of teaching and consider some of the professional and personal key influences that may have impacted on the development of their identity.

Identity to a cause

There was clearly something emerging about an identity or commitment to a cause from the teachers. One teacher exemplifies this:

> "These parents, they have such a raw deal, because of an accident at birth or a genetic disorder or something they are really up against it...they seem to have to fight for everything for these children. Things that should be theirs as a right. So when they come to somebody, I hope, like me who is, you know, speaking the same language and is on their side."

Interview 1 p.9

It appears she is almost on a crusade to help the parents in their fight, and she does this because she identifies with them and 'speaks their language'. However, the parental perspectives (Penman 1996) emerging from the literature does not support this. It may be said that this teacher is participating in role embracement where she is explicitly accepting an identified role. This may also be an example of what Goffman (2001) refers to as the process individuals engage with in order to convey a desired impression to others:

> "An individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously, the impression that is fostered before them."

Goffman 2001 p179

The teachers talked about wanting to make a difference. One teacher illustrates this and revels in her perceived success:

" I like a challenge. I like to make a difference…it's very firmly established that I did make a difference through my knowledge."

This is an example of Snow and Anderson's (2001) ideological embracement where the teacher is expressing an adherence to a particular ideology. It can also be interpreted as the teacher signalling the need for specialist knowledge for this group of pupils. This in itself can lead to an exclusive scenario with specialist knowledge creates power from those who have it. Another teacher offers an example of ideological embracement:

"I've become increasingly interested in the outer edges yes of society and people and development and that which is more difficult in a sense, that which is struggling with life."

This need to make a difference began early with one teacher when she questioned what she was experiencing at an early age and sparked her interest in this area of disability:

" I happened as a young person to go into some institutions and think what the heck is going on here and why didn't I know about this?"

Another teacher reiterates this when she talks about working on play schemes and visiting long stay hospitals:

"I loved it, I hated it, I hated, you know, all these institutionalised things and all the horrible things going on that weren't the fault of anybody probably, but I knew, that kind of like I was passionate about it all…and was desperate to find ways to make it better."

This suggestion that teachers of pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning disabilities having an identity to a cause is supported in the innovative sex education and sexuality work of Downs and Craft (1996). There is a sense that, for the two teachers in my study, their personal identity began to be formed when they were very young. Jenkins (1996) makes the point that, in some instances, identities that are

developed at a young age become very firmly established. It may also serves as an example of Moir's (1993) Standard Membership Category Repertoire where the teachers engage in a level of justification that supports their suitability for teaching this group of pupils. In this instance it is their passionate interest and experience that could be interpreted as their offering of justifications for their suitability.

For one teacher the process of role embracement appears to be personally difficult although she does indeed accept the role. Concerning a recent home visit, a teacher talks about her wish to make a difference in a personal and individual way. The pupil she was visiting was eleven and during the course of the visit mum changed his nappy in the middle of the room in view of the rest of the family, the teacher and accompanying speech therapist:

> "I could have just sat and cried, I thought oh, you know but it's lack of understanding and just the fact to them he's still their little baby because he's in nappies, he's still a baby. So things like that you feel like sort of to be able to influence I suppose without being imposing."

> Interview 7 p.10

Making things better for the pupils was highlighted as an element of making a difference. This can be interpreted as a desire to protect the children and through this, accepting in the terms of Snow and Anderson (2001), associational embracement. One teacher expresses this:

> "I mean it's what we're doing it for to give an impact of having the child learning."

> Interview 9 p.13

Another teacher supports this:

> "I think you feel that you can make a difference to those children's lives."

> Interview 14 p.13

One teacher talks about an incident that occurred when she attended a course. She talks about how she had to put the case for her children in a way that suggests she identifies herself as an advocate for them:

> "I was able on that course to stand up for the children with special needs and to understand what the government was trying to do and interpret that for my mainstream colleagues."

Aird's (2001) work in a school for pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities supports this opinion of the teacher acting as advocates for the rights of their pupils with pmld. It appears that this cause is verging on a crusade for a teacher in my study who appears to have embraced a social identity she perceives her role to be, and is engaged in associational embracement of that role and identity. The teacher clearly sees herself as an advocate for her pupils:

"I've made it one of the most important things I do, when you introduce strangers to the children to make sure that they know, they don't sort of talk about them as if they are stupid."

Through this, the teacher may also be seen to be manifesting an external identity for the benefit of an audience (Goffman 2001). There is a hint of institutional distancing along with a sense of an identity to a cause with one teacher:

"I manage in the very best way I can and ensure that my children get you know, the maximum that we can offer for them which you know isn't easy."

The teacher appears to be expressing her personal crusade, which we hear is not easy, through the institution she works in. I have interpreted institution to be greater than the school setting, encompassing the educational and health service surrounding the teacher and pupil as well. Another teacher engages in role embracement when he talks about his belief in enabling and promoting choice for his pupils:

"If you've ever stayed at your parents' house and you've been forced to drink sherry over Christmas you realise how important choice is. It's just a basic human right, isn't it, to have choice over the things that surround you every day."

Another teacher talks about supporting her colleagues by teaching a class they did not want to teach but, through this, may be perceived as engaging in a process of role justification and an acceptance of a social identity to her colleagues rather than the children themselves:

"I only went into that because nobody else would take them, you know, take the class on."

Through the analysis of the teachers' individual interviews examples of collective teacher identity were apparent. One teacher illustrates this in her use of the collective 'we':

"I think to a certain extent we're all pioneers in the field and [at] the cutting edge."

Individual interview 4

One teacher talks about exerting her identity as a manager and one of the ways does this is through direct work with teachers, as a role model:

"But what I'm trying to do is actually to get into classes and just do a little bit of work with teachers."

Interview 9 p.9

There are examples of teachers identifying strongly with their pupils too. One teacher talks about a great commitment to the pupils and, through this, offers an overt justification of her role as teacher:

"I think the children themselves you know...just the sheer fact that you know I was going to get back more than I was actually putting in and I think that kept us driving."

Interview 13 p.2

The fact that this teacher believed she was getting back more than she was putting in may, on the one hand, refer to her commitment and hard work but, on the other hand, it may relate to the child justifying the teacher's existence and professional role. Through these children this teacher realises her role as teacher. This can be seen to relate to the professional conspiracy theories offered by Tomlinson (1982) and Sandow (1994). This may also be seen in another teacher's comment about her pupils:

"I just thoroughly enjoy being with the children, I really enjoy it and get so much satisfaction from any small steps, which we know are very small. If I can help in one tiny way to better the children's environment and the choice and direction in their lives."

Teacher 11 p.10

It is through her work with the children that her personal identity (Giddens 1991) is realised and valued.

Identity to their occupation

The identity of some of the teachers to a specialist field of teaching can be seen to emerge through the interviews. It reveals itself in two ways, away from mainstream education and identity, towards a specialist profession within teaching. The discourses of embracement and distancing (Snow and Anderson2001) and the legitimisation of social identity (Goffman2000) offer additional perspectives of analysis. There is evidence of associational distancing from mainstream education. One teacher discusses mainstream colleagues as people who underestimate and do not appreciate the work being done by teachers of pupils with special educational needs:

> "I felt special teachers of special schools such as severe learning difficulty schools were not seen by mainstream teachers as not having the knowledge (*subject*)."

> Interview 2 p.10

She talks about comparisons and her observation that teachers of pupils with special educational needs are perceived differently and more negatively:

> "In comparison to a mainstream teacher it was something like you were second…because people perceived that the children weren't going to learn that much so they didn't need bright teachers."

> Interview 2 p.11

This is supported in the work of Garner (1994), where he illustrates the thoughts of special school teachers in relation to the negative ways they think mainstream teachers perceive them. Brudnell (1986) also talks about the isolation of teachers and children in special education from society. This is also an example of virtual and nominal identity (Jenkins 1996). The teachers in the present study talks about her nominal identity of a teacher being perceived as very different by the colleagues on the course she attended. This, in turn, may influence the way she expresses and validates her social identity as a teacher. It may drive her to engage more in role embracement and distancing. Another example of role embracement may be seen during one interview when it became clear that the teacher completed her mainstream teaching in order to be able to go and work in the specialist field of special educational needs:

> "I didn't really have any desire to become a mainstream teacher ever, I was just told that was the best way to get into it at the time."

This distancing away from mainstream teachers may also be seen to feed into an embracement of the specialism of teachers of pupils with special educational needs. Through the discussion of another teacher there appears to be an explicit distancing from mainstream to special educational needs teaching as specialist teaching:

> "I wouldn't begin to deny that there's not an awful lot that we learn from mainstream and we're part of the whole thing. It's not so, it's not segregated. It's part of the whole thing, but I think it's a specialist field."
>
> Interview 6 p 2

This links to the work of Haplin and Lewis (1996) who discuss the separation of special education from mainstream education:

> "In turn, this seperation and independence foster among those that work in special schools a sense of being somehow set apart or marginalised."
>
> Haplin and Lewis 1996 p 101

Although this teacher says it is not segregation there does appear to be a definite legitimisation of her social identity as a specialist teacher, which in itself can lead to segregation. There is a sense of difference from mainstream teachers and similarity (Jenkins 1996) with other teachers of children with special educational needs. One teacher illustrates this ideological embracement when she talks about her colleagues working in the field of pmld:

> "Our voice was being heard and a credible voice, our credible professional voice is being heard I'm pleased to say."
>
> Interview 4 p.6

This is supported in the work of Lacey and Ouvry (1998) who discuss how the social identity of teachers of pupils with pmld creates a homogeneous group. This ideological embracement leads into the construction of a shared social identity:

> "I would say every single member of staff that I ever worked with in a special school has influenced me in some way negatively or positively"
>
> Interview 5. P.19

The ossification theory (Blumstein 2001) of identity being gradually and continuously evolving helps to appreciate why, for this teacher colleagues sharing his collective identity have been and continue to be so influential to him. They help to validate his personal, social and collective identity. This also strengthens the argument that a profession within a profession is being constructed and reconstructed. A profession that requires something different, is harder to enter and requires specialist training. The personal qualities of the teachers themselves are important and Moir's (1993) Standard Membership Category Repertoire comes into operation. This teacher's experience of colleagues sharing his individual identity feeds into his collective identity. This is an example of Jenkins (1996) cohesion of similar and different identities as one:

"In social identity the individual and collective share the same space."

Jenkins 1996 p. 26

A teacher who says that teachers of pupils with pmld need to be particularly committed to work in this specialist context and have knowledge of the specialist induction procedures further supports this notion of a specialist profession within teaching:

"It's very difficult for people and I think people have got to be very very dedicated and know what they want to do to get into special needs."

Interview 14 p.1

Another teacher refers to the specialist knowledge that feeds into the collective and social identity of such teachers. She talks about the role of the teacher of pupils with pmld as highly specialised requiring a high level of knowledge and understanding:

"You've got to be very careful that you know what you're doing and not just dabble."

Interview 7 p.4

She goes onto discuss the importance of being able to be flexible and adaptable, and of needing knowledge and understanding in order to do this:

"It is how you adapt it that's the important bit isn't it."

For some of the teachers the training provision for teachers of this group of pupils provided concern that at times verged on anger. Through the analysis, insights were gained about the identity some teachers have for highly specialised training. This offers an example of how the teachers are engaged with constructing their social and collective identity through the work (and preparation for work) they are engaged in (Wetherell 1996). Some talk about their own pre-service dedicated training and decry the end of this type of training. One teacher discusses the demise of the pre service course that she completed:

> "I mean it's unbelievable, it really seems a retrograde step that there is no specialist training. A general teaching course nowhere near fits you, nowhere near."

<div align="right">Interview 1 p.6</div>

Another reiterates this:

> "Let's never be critical about those mainstream teachers although I will, but I think they're, as I said, they're being asked to learn something that I did four years to train to start, and I think it's an impossible task and I think because of that pupils are not getting the education they have a right to."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p 13</div>

Through this the teachers are decrying the end of a traditional route of training that constructed and validated the idea of a profession within a profession. There is a sense of grief of something lost that is also echoed by some of the teachers who wished to have had this training:

> "I didn't have it but I wish I had because I feel the people that had that intensity of training over that time are incredibly knowledgeable about so many, you know I might have been lucky."

<div align="right">Interview 3 p.13</div>

Another teacher talks about his initial teacher training (ITT) experience and illustrates a clear distancing between him and the mainstream course and his frustration of the uncertainty he experienced:

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"I wanted to train in SLD, PMLD, it was really irritating. I just couldn't, It's like, well how am I going to work in a school if I'm not going to get any training? They did employ me but it was like, you know, you have to be working before you could get any training."

<div align="right">Interview 5 p.9</div>

This also suggests the ITT teachers have experienced that was not specialist in nature, they feel did not equip them with the specialist understanding and skills they perceive to be so important. The experience of the teacher quoted illustrated to him that his individual identity was very different from the collective identity of the ITT course. To return to Jenkins (1996), this could impact on the development of the teachers social identity to the role of teacher and feeds into individual identities of teachers of children who are considered to be different. This identity to specialist training reveals itself through an identity with others that have completed ITT in severe learning difficulty:

"That there is an understanding and an easy dialogue that can take place between myself and my deputy just because we've both done that same course, we were trained in the same way in the same authority, so we think the same way."

<div align="right">Interview 4 p. 8</div>

Throughout this there is clear ideological and role embracement. However, when reflecting on colleagues that have not completed the training this embracement is not there. Colleagues who have not shared the specialist training may not share the collective and social identity (Jenkins 1996) that the teachers are committed to:

"I still see friends of mine and colleagues who have had similar backgrounds who say similar things and when you meet teachers who've not had that background who come into special from a mainstream background, you can see their anxiety when they go into a classroom because they literally don't know where to start."

<div align="right">Interview 9 p.1</div>

Another teacher takes this a stage further when she suggests that teachers who have not had the specialist training and induction do not share the nominal identity of teacher that she has constructed:

<div align="right">129</div>

"Teachers come into school on supply and they have very little training and they haven't got a clue what to do, they haven't got any idea and that's a shame because I still think they need teachers for those kids."

In contrast to specialist training creating segregation one teacher believes that it is the generalist training that will create the segregation. She appears to suggest that the experience of teaching children with pmld is very different (virtual identity) to the role of teacher (nominal identity):

"I think if the training is not there then people become wary of pmld children and it's almost like they have to be treat separately."

The issues related to identity and specialist training will be further explored in the section that analyses the meaning of the influences that teachers perceive to have been influential to them.

Making sense of influences

To continue to develop my understanding of how the teachers were making and realising meaning in their work it was important to appreciate and understand the range and nature of particular influences that may have impacted upon their understanding and identity. The analysis of individual interviews enabled some depth of meaning making to occur and also served to highlight the complex inter relationships of how circumstances join together to impact on how and why teachers make meaning. Through this process it became clearer that, in relation to influences, there might be a number of issues working together to inform the teachers' understanding, practice and identity. These issues appear to be experiences in specialist teacher training; continued professional development; personal experiences and key people. This offered an alternative interpretation to the one I had carried out relating to these issues in the thematic analysis.

Professional experiences

I have already interpreted the importance of specialist training in the construction and validation of the teachers' individual, personal, social and collective identities. When listening to teachers it became clear that those who had completed a specialist ITT experience appeared to express their view that the course was very influential to their current work. Only one teacher who had completed a generalist ITT course chose to discuss the influences of a particular aspect of that course. For other teachers who had completed generalist ITT they were unable to find influential aspects of the course that influenced their current teaching. The area of specialist training relates to the collective (Jenkins 1996) and social (Bakehurst and Sypnowich 1995) identities of the teachers. Indeed, it may be the vital role of culture and society in the construction of those identities highlighted by Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995) that has been influential in my own meaning making throughout this process. The approach to disability offered in the specialist courses must have been influential. In my analysis of specialist knowledge it emerges that the individual model of disability was one of the fundamental philosophies of these specialised ITT courses. One teacher talked at length about her degree in mental handicap:

> " We used to do something called the jigsaw approach, we looked at movement, perception, cognition and communication…making it relevant to the children I was going to teach…it was a lot of early developmental stuff really"

Interview 1 p.1

This may be seen to have impacted on the way another teacher actually views the children: as very individual and different and who have complex difficulties that require a child focussed and assessment based curriculum. The reliance on a specific approach to teaching in her initial teacher training is apparent:

> " It was about 1-1 teaching. It was about behaviourist approaches. You know physical prompts."

Interview 2 p.4

Another teacher highlighted the psychological aspects of the course:

> "We did a lot of theory, a lot of theory on psychology and syndromes that were then known."

Interview 7 p.2

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It appears then that the approach to teaching reflected in this specialist course was influenced by a particular approach to teaching and learning:

"There was an awful lot more on dealing with children with special needs and profound and multiple handicaps, methods of teaching them, ways to work with them and things like that."

This level of emphasis may have encouraged a deficit approach to the abilities of the pupils and may also relate to an emphasis on the developmental curriculum. These specialised courses do appear to encourage a sense of identity to a specialised profession which one teacher expresses as her essential skills for teaching:

"It gave me I think, a very secure foundation in, in lots of the essential skills and knowledge and theories to start me out."

This is an acknowledgement of a social and collective identity of a specialist teacher (Jenkins 1996). It offers a statement of membership to a profession within a profession and allows the teachers to embrace an ideology and role (Bakehurst and Sypnowich 1995) that are perceived as different to mainstream education. Some of these essential skills appear to be related to a developmental curriculum and assessment for teaching. The perceived value of this specialist training is repeated:

"It was an excellent course. I think for all of us whether you had some background in special education or not it took you through the developmental process involved in, you know child development and specifically related to children whose, you know profile wasn't following the normal lines."

The influence of the individual model of disability is again apparent here. The lasting influences of these ITT experiences is recognised by this teacher:

"I've got to say it was a fundamental influence and initial by definition, I was introduced to the whole world of profound and multiple learning difficulties and I do feel retrospectively that it was a very, very useful tool and obviously by definition therefore a very good course which has informed my thinking and action in the field that I found myself staying in since 1983."

For teachers who had completed a generalist ITT and went onto engage in continued professional development (CPD) the notion of specialism remains important. One teacher completed a postgraduate certificate in generic special educational needs but felt that the pragmatic teaching skills for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning disabilities were missing. Although he acknowledges:

"It was more broad based on special educational needs as a whole it was interesting to talk about policy and you could you relate that to the work that, the policies that you are developing in school around PMLD."

He appears to have really wanted a skills based course that could furnish him with specialist skills that would in turn perhaps support his identity to the role of a specialist teacher. Over their professional careers the teachers have clearly engaged in a range of continued professional development. In my search for an understanding of what influences the meaning teachers are making I asked them to elaborate on courses that they perceived to be influential to their current work. There appears to be some interesting issues emerging: firstly, there are only a small number of courses that were discussed as being influential, and similar courses (of a specialist nature) were repeated across the teacher interviews. These may indeed contribute to the construction of a collective identity to a specialist profession. Some courses served to encourage the teachers to question the specific approach they had received in their initial training and enabled them to begin to make meaning in different ways and in some ways to begin to question their earlier identity construction. This can be seen to relate well to the dialectical model of identity construction offered by Jenkins (1996) that acknowledges the importance of tensions in the evolving process of identity construction.

The most mentioned specialised courses discussed by the teachers were Conductive Education, TEACCH and MSI, three highly structured and specialised courses designed specifically for particular groups of pupils (Conductive education for pupils with cerebral palsy, TEACCH for pupils with autism, and MSI for pupils with multiple sensory impairments). It appears that the teachers were relating elements of

the courses to their own context of teaching and making meaning of them through this. One teacher was involved in the development of Conductive Education in a previous school and it appears that fundamentals of it continue to influence her:

"The fact that the brain, different aspects of the brain could take areas of, the brain can take over, you know that was quite a breakthrough and of course that was from the Conductive Education."

Interview 4 p.7

In this way she was embracing the ideological assumptions fundamental to the course. The TEACCH course received a great deal of attention from the teachers with six teachers explicitly discussing its influence as being particularly relevant to their current work. The emphasis on organisation and structure with the fundamental underpinning philosophy of the central role of communication appears to be important:

"The TEACCH approach with people with PMLD... I think the environment, there's the you know, there's a lot of emphasis on the environment and structure, communicate, you know what comes next when something's finished, you know that is very relevant."

Interview 8 p.5

It appears that the TEACCH course, in particular, offers the specialised but practical pedagogy that enables the teachers to feel prepared to fulfil their role as a specialist teacher. This is illustrated when one teacher describes TEACCH as a lifesaver:

"I did TEACCH the year after and they, they were just like a God send just telling how I can ...I had not a clue what to do."

Interview 5 p.6

MSI (multi sensory impairment) training appears to have influenced the meaning some teachers are making and continues to enable teachers to embrace the role of specialist teacher with highly specialised knowledge (Snow and Anderson 2001). One teacher talked at great length about a multi sensory impairment distance learning course she completed in a way that suggests she enjoyed the specialist nature of the information:

"Completely focused. Absolutely I found it one of the most helpful courses that I've ever done because of its emphasis on the impact on visual and hearing impairments...the sorts of approaches that have been developed for deaf/blind and multi sensory impaired students are entirely relevant for pmld, entirely."

Interview 3 p.6

There also appears to be an element of ideological embracement towards the fundamental principles of this course too. For another teacher the Multi Sensory Impairment training may have contributed to the emphasis she places on sensory experiences and physical interaction of the pupils themselves. The central core of her work appears to be around communication and this may have been influenced by the work she developed on this course. This relates well to the social and cultural constructivist approach outlined by Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995).

It has already been established that teachers engage more actively with courses that support their ideological and role embracement as a specialist teacher. It also appears that for some teachers it is important for them to be able to visualise the relevance of a course directly to their teaching. Discussion about a rebound therapy course illustrates this:

"You know that was quite influential because I thought yeah it does work and I can see it working and it's worth doing."

Interview 9. p.15

Another teacher highlights the link between theory and practice as important:

"It was different ideas and to me it was very practical but linked to the theory and you could see where she was coming from and you could see it was practical and you know, you knew it would work from there."

Interview 14 p.18

This again appears to confirm an identity of a specialist teacher who needs to be convinced that anything different will have direct relevance to the perceived specialist provision. Thus, the practical application of courses is again raised as potentially influential for the teacher. One teacher describes her frustration at attending a course, developing new knowledge and understanding, only to be faced with problems in the

school that affected the translation of this new knowledge into practice. This teacher appears angry and cynical when she recounts this experience:

"The Facilitated Communication was the best course and the worst course I've ever been on. I think first of all it gave me something to think about in the fact that this one little boy who I knew could communicate but had no means of communication at the time and I went in and it was about facilitating his communication but then all the issues that surround it about you know, if you start it and then for some reason you know, other people don't pick up on it, you've given that child some, you know you're going to take way that child's means of communication, so it is right to start it in the first place. I mean there was a whole load of issues so it was a bit sad."

Interview 13 p.3

This experience may have an impact on the next course this teacher attends. It highlights the tension between theory and practice and, for this teacher in particular, the need to assist the translation of theory into practice. There are only a couple of examples offered by teachers of courses that particularly challenged their thinking and practice. This may be due to the scarcity of courses of this nature but it may also reflect the strong individual and social identities constructed by the teachers. Giddens (1991) expresses personal identity in a political context that highlights the relationship of the personal narrative to power structures. Perhaps some teachers find courses that challenge their personal and social identity too threatening to engage with.

One teacher came to question the very structured approach to teaching and learning she had encountered in her initial training:

"Highscope was coming on board. I went into classrooms that I recognised as classrooms that were much more hands on than the classrooms I had created. I had given too much direction because I was still influenced by my original qualification."

Interview 2 p6

Another example of the liberating nature of a course can be found when one teacher studied for a Masters degree. She chose to focus on psychology and counselling at Masters level this may be where her view of community and relationships developed:

"I thought it helped me understand where everybody's coming from...it was quite a political course, it was about the place of people with special needs in society."

Interview 3 p.6

Personal experiences

The early experiences of some of the teachers appear to be influential in the construction of their identity and belief systems. For many of the teachers there were very clear recollections of early experiences that sparked their interest in this group of pupils. It can also be seen to be potentially influential in their philosophy and approaches to education. The stories told by the teachers relate to their personal experiences and offer examples of critical moments of identity construction (Jenkins 1996). A teacher who had earlier described one of her pupils as a big baby recalls her experience as a child:

> "I can remember growing up in a colliery village where they were a couple of Downs
> Syndrome children and it seemed that they didn't do anything. I mean they were
> actually in prams, big silver cross prams until about five or six."

Interview 1 p. 4

Another teacher talked at length about various experiences she had encountered when she was younger and there is an immediate sense that these had sparked an interest in her. At this young age there appears to be elements of role and ideological embracement taking place. This can be seen again when she tells the story of when she was nine, returning home from school with a friend, and an adolescent boy with learning disabilities chased them and, scaring them with a pretend gun:

> "You know I was frightened but it didn't have that effect on me, it just felt like where,
> who is he, why is he like that, what's he, you know I guess there must have been an
> interest."

Interview 3 p.11

This is echoed again in a second recollection about a family friend who was sent into an institution at an early age. One day when attending an unusually early Catholic mass she met her again. This early experience seems to have been important in helping to form her identity, particularly to a cause:

> "So you got this perception of people being separate and why and when they were
> separate, they had to wear gabardine macs and their hair cut in pudding shapes and
> sometimes their clothes were all the same."

There is also evidence of Moir's (1993) Standard Membership Category repertoire in

action when a teacher recollects a visit to a long stay hospital:

> "I can remember vividly as a young girl seeing dormitories, wards with perhaps, I can
> actually picture in my mind thirty cerebral palsy type young people lying in canvas
> cots. Twisted, I can remember the noise, I can remember seeing nurses in uniforms. I
> can remember seeing somebody with hydrocephalus that absolutely shocked e...they
> didn't get out of those wards in those days. I think I was stunned by the lack of, what
> they didn't get."

Through the retelling of this story she may be seen to be justifying, not only her

experiential suitability for her present role as teacher, but also her identity to a cause.

Reflecting on my own experiences I remember how I came to realise the isolation of a

disabled girl in my family community. I remember walking past her house and seeing

her looking out of the window and on returning home announcing to my family, at the

age of eight, I was going to work with people like her. Pupil school experience

appears to have been influential in helping some teachers to construct a social identity

related to the work they now engage with. One teacher reflects on this:

> "My comprehensive school was approached by a voluntary group to use their
> facilities for a play group initially on Saturday morning and they wanted volunteers to
> come along. So to be honest, me and a few friends wanted to have a laugh and
> thought, oh what's this, you know the spaka bus and all of that kind of thing and we
> didn't know any better... I use absolutely hooked from the first morning I went, there
> were children there who were profoundly disabled."

The use of the words 'absolutely hooked' may be seen as an acceptance of an identity

It can be seen to justify his present role as teacher of this group of pupils. It may also

be interpreted that this work he is now engaged with is different and only certain

people are attracted to it. Another teacher talks about her definite decision to work in

the field of special education and she actively sought experiences in a special school

to realise this:

> "I mean that was why I went to A school as a volunteer, I knew I wanted to do it and
> I'm not quite sure, we were taken at primary school...the headmaster had a daughter
> with learning difficulties and were taken to some social club."

This illustrates how her initial understandings and practice has been shaped by experience in a special school and relates to Bakehurst and Sypnowich (1995):

"The human mind is not just shaped by society, it is made by society."

Bakehurst and Sypnowich 1995 p. 5

This can be seen to relate to other experiences teachers have encountered. One such example of this is the older members of the sample group experiencing teaching when the Health Authority were responsible for the education of pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities. One teacher recalls:

> " When I first came to special education it was very different, I wouldn't have said
> what I was doing then had a lot to do with the teacher training I'd had prior to it...I
> mean it was just coming out of like Health Authority to Education, it was very
> different then."

Interview 12 p.1

The medical influences on the educational provision must be significant in forming and shaping teachers' beliefs and social identity. Another teacher remembers that even in the educational settings provided for by health many of the pupils with pmld were not there. They were in long-term hospitals and she simply did not experience them:

> " A lot of the children that were in P hospital then would be in school now, we would
> have them in school. So the range of PMLD children wasn't there, there weren't the
> whole group of PMLD, they were probably the better PMLD children that were in
> school."

Interview 13 p. 1

When change began in the range of provision a teacher describes a critical moment of change in her views relating to this group of pupils:

> "Even the thought that there were things they could learn, roads they could go down,
> it seemed then, terrible really, quite revolutionary in 1978."

Interview 1 p.2

In this illustration there is an interesting use of the term 'they' which again supports the teachers' affinity to other teachers rather than the pupils. This may be an illustration of the teacher relating to a highly specialist social identity that could be seen to relate to the historical medical professional roles of them and us. From a different perspective, it may also be seen to relate to the work of Foucault, where the teacher maintains the power relations of the professional role she identifies with and accepts (Scott 1996). An additional example of this apparent distancing between the teacher and the pupil is when one teacher discusses the influence of being a parent:

> "Knowing the development of children, I think that's very important, it gives you a vision of where normal children go which will obviously help you with the way you look at the children you work with."

<div align="right">Interview 7 p.6</div>

There is an element of validation for her present role here (Moir 1993). Her own parenting of so called normal children was seen to equip her with the skills and strategies for working with the children she works with now. There also appears to be a distancing between her own children and the children she works with; they are very different, and her own children offer her a vision for the possible development of the children with pmld.

When one teachers discusses his own short personal experience of disability it may help to explain his strong belief in enabling pupils in his class to develop choice and control:

> "I know when I hurt my leg and I was in a wheelchair in school for a day. My God. It's so revealing being at a different height level and being whizzed past sharp objects within a millimetre of my head. And people say do you want to go outside now as they force me out the door. No! Stop, stop I don't want to go in here. And that's from me whose got enough skills to make myself plain."

<div align="right">Interview 5 p.15</div>

The ideological embracement to the cause of human rights can also be seen to directly relate to the experiences he has encountered when socialising with disabled friends and through this the insights he gained into discrimination:

> "I would say friends who have visual impairment and hearing impairment have influenced the way I've worked in talking to them and their experiences of school and

how frustrated they were and even just like being out with them in a pub and seeing people if you're signing with someone and watching people, and people think that I'm deaf as well 'cause I'm signing. You can hear them talking about us and actually I'm not deaf. I can hear what you're saying."

Interview 5 p. 20

Key influential people

When the teachers talked about people whom they believed to have influenced their work, stories of ideological embracement and collective identities came through. One teacher talks about someone she perceives as being influential to her work. The person appears to demonstrate a positive and enthusiastic identity to a cause, which she herself identifies with:

"It was like listening to people who are really zealous about their method, who are absolutely convinced about their method."

Interview 1 p.3

Another teacher who seems to suggest that sharing a collective identity is important echoes this:

"I listened to speakers who I could connect with what they were saying about the actual group of children we were talking about."

Interview 2 p.6

Someone showing commitment to a shared cause is something one teacher seems to perceive as influential, there appears to be an explicit identification with him, particularly his beliefs:

"He had all of those real passionate, personal beliefs and philosophy I think that he conveyed, very objectively in a way but still sensitively but he wanted to take it on from just caring into doing."

Interview 6 p 21

The influence of colleagues was a strong theme in the individual interviews. For some it was the intellectual stimulation that appeared to be important:

"Just through discussion and dialogue and you know staff meetings or whatever, so often I come out the wiser and the better for it and it's kept my grey matter ticking over and I can even relate it to our school development plan."

Another teacher discusses the contribution of one colleague in particular whom she perceives to be knowledgeable and experienced:

"I think X. here has been a good sounding board, she's very good, you can go with a query or you can go to discuss something and she's got a great deal of knowledge and experience and I find that particularly useful."

Some teachers appear to like seeing or experiencing the elements of a social and collective identity with other colleagues. Team teaching is an experience one teacher talk about very positively:

"I worked my first year as team teacher and that was so helpful just for everything that you're doing you know from physio positioning that you have to learn about from scratch. But even people, just having that understanding that somebody who might be speaking clearly to you might not actually have any cognition about what they're actually saying to you. But when you first come in you, I had no clue at all about anything like, obviously there was no training for me anyway but actually working on the job, I think it was the best definitely."

He appears to be advocating that this experience was, in fact, his training for the teaching he now does. For him this appears to have been an effective entry process into a specialised profession. Another teacher who recollects it as an apprentice experience supports this:

"I mean I didn't know an awful lot about pmld children and I mean I wanted to say she took me through the first six weeks really in what to do."

This can be seen to relate to the work of Rogoff (1993) who highlights the importance of learning from a more skilled peer. His work concerns children but his theory can be equally applied to this teacher. Collaborative work with others is shown as important to this teacher:

"Largely just other staff over the years in the school. I'm not a great academic, I can't say I've read a book that's completely changed my whole philosophy of special educational needs, it's been very much learning through doing from and with other people."

<div align="right">Interview 8. P.8</div>

The importance of seeing colleagues in action is illustrated here:

"Working with her and seeing her passion you know for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. I mean I was kind of quite probably a cocky probationer when I knew J. you know, probably disagreed with her at times and that's fine but I could sense her commitment, and that affected me, you know, and she was doing all this kind of incredibly extensive detailed research."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p 11</div>

A small number of teachers talked about the influence of parents. It is clear from one illustration that the teacher embraces the shared belief she sees herself having with the parent. At this point she is claiming shared social identity with the parents:

"Seeing those parents, umm belief in their children's rights, and interests and personalities and all those things, touched me enormously."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p 11</div>

An even smaller number of teachers talked about the influence of the pupils. One teacher discusses how an individual pupil influenced her work:

"Just had to make an approach for him that was different because it was just not working and his behaviour escalated and it was down to 'OK, he needs to know every minute of the day what he is doing' and I basically created an area in the classroom that was his, with his things."

<div align="right">Interview 3 p.10</div>

It could be interpreted that, in doing this, the teacher's individual and social identity as a specialist teacher is in fact reinforced.

Conclusion

Through this process of analysis the role of individual and social identity appear to play a significant factor for the teachers in my study. The complex and diverse nature

of identity, as I learnt through my own meaning making, has helped me analyse identity from different perspectives. The dialectical model of developing an understanding of identity was applied as a framework to support my meaning making. Although this was helpful in its clarity there are issues related to the possible over simplification of the complex ideas inherent in teacher identity. It is clear that the teachers are embracing a role that is specialist, they have an affinity to other specialist teachers and some engage in some distancing from mainstream teachers. There are examples of the teachers engaging in this, thus giving an impression of a profession within a profession: something that needs to be further explored. It is also clear that there are key professional and personal influences that impact and inform the teachers' individual and social identity. Also, as a teacher educator I need to be aware of the influence of teacher identity has on the development, sustenance and challenging of teachers' understandings. The strength and force of the early personal experiences of the teachers was a surprising feature of the analysis. Through this stage of analysis I have come to believe that, in engaging teachers in professional reflection, the influence of personal experiences must be appreciated, so that teachers may acknowledge and reflect on the possible impact of them on their current understanding.

Chapter eight

Issues of pedagogy emerging from the analysis of the first group interviews

Introduction

The first group interviews centering on three video vignettes of pupils with pmld contributed to my meaning making, particularly in relation to the teachers' apparent understandings related to pedagogy. This was achieved through the first group interview and also through a broader social and historical and personal context of their work as teachers. Through this, this level of analysis builds upon the thematic and individual analysis of the single interviews with teachers. It relates to the findings of the first group interviews, particularly in relation to the ways the teachers appear to be understanding their pupils with pmld. I have already gained some tentative insights into some of these understandings and this was an opportunity to confirm and develop my previous analysis. This was in keeping with the inherent processes involved in the research methodology of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1994), taking the previous responses and interpretations of the teachers as a foundation for further research and analysis. I had become increasingly interested in how this group of teachers appeared to understand the knowledge base needed to teach this group of pupils and possible influences on this. This stage of analysis shed light on some of the understandings of the teachers in this area. When approaching previous analysis, the application of a range of questions proved to be beneficial in helping to guide and structure the data management and analysis. I decided to employ a similar strategy here using questions that would hopefully contribute to the process of my meaning making:

- how may the teachers may be understanding their pupils with pmld?;

- what are the teachers apparent perceptions about the teaching and learning that they believe is needed for this group of pupils?;

- how do the teachers seem to be understanding the knowledge they feel is needed by the teacher to teach this group of pupils and?;

- how do the teachers appear to understand the way society views the pupils they teach and the teaching they engage with?.

Reflecting on these questions I was able to formulate some further assumptions about the teachers' apparent meaning making in two areas. Firstly, concerning the teachers' apparent understandings relating to teaching and learning issues for this group of pupils, which is intricately related to their understandings of their pupils. Secondly, related to what the teachers appear to be saying in relation to the knowledge base they believe is needed in order to teach this group of pupils. Inherent in this is the notion of specialist knowledge, and the way the teachers feel society views this group of pupils and teachers. It became clear that this latter aspect was something that needed further exploration with the teachers. This chapter is structured around these two themes, each including related issues. The sub themes for the first section are:

- related to the apparent understandings about how the teachers are discussing teaching and learning issues, particularly the areas of motivation, time and pace and physical positioning;

- related to the apparent understandings about how the teachers appear to understand their pupils.

The sub themes for the second section of this chapter are:

- related to the teachers' possible assumptions about the knowledge that pupils with pmld needs to have;

- related to the teachers' possible assumptions about the knowledge a teacher of pupils with pmld needs to have;

- related to the teachers' possible assumptions about society's knowledge about this group of pupils.

Issues of teacher identity again surface through this first group interviews and are discussed accordingly. During the interviews the teachers began by discussing the

pupils on the video, but then moved the discussion onto reflections on themselves and their own practice.

Understandings related to the teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning for their pupils with pmld

At this stage of the research further insights are gained relating to the beliefs the teachers may have about the particular teaching and learning that is required for this group of pupils. This builds on earlier stages of my research. In interpreting what the teachers believe to be important elements of teaching and learning for their pupils, I believed I would be gaining a greater understanding about the meaning that they make about pedagogical issues. This offers another perspective that helps to triangulate themes that have already emerged, as well as developing a greater depth of insight. The themes that came through relate to the areas of motivation and rewards, time and pace, positioning and presentation, including physical positioning of pupils, and curriculum. This helps to form a more cohesive interpretation about how the teachers understand their pupils. On another level, the interpretations made at this stage of analysis contributed to the understanding of the teachers' perceptions related to notions of specialist knowledge and the consequential need for specialist teachers. This helps to form a more cohesive interpretation about how the teachers understand their own teaching.

The teachers talked a lot about how the pupils in the video, and in their teaching experience, related to motivation and rewards. The need for effective, consistent and clear rewards became a focus of the teachers' discussions. This is something that is clearly endorsed in the research and literature related to the teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs (Coupe and Porter 1986, Tilstone, Florian and Rose 1998). The teachers' views appear to be in line with the literature, and they talked at length about the motivational issues emerging from the video vignettes. This is illustrated by one teacher who was concerned about the level of motivation of one of the pupils:

"Did she actually want what she was being offered?"

First group interviews 1 p.3

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The importance of matching the activity to the intellectual needs of the pupil was also highlighted in the teachers' discussions as being very important to them. Their discussion about an incident on the video, where they thought this was not achieved, illustrates this:

"It was just too easy for him, he knew, he knew it, it was just too easy."

First group interviews 2 p.5

This is referred to in the literature of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs as differentiation (Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart 1996, Carpenter 2001) where the learning activity reflects the stage of conceptual development of the pupil. Corbett (2001) also refers to this as connective pedagogy where the teacher is able to connect the curriculum content to the conceptual strengths of the learner. In relation to the nature of the reward, teachers highlighted their view of the personal nature of rewards for this particular group of pupils and linked this to the relationship between the teacher and the pupil:

"The reward might be a smile between us rather than touching the switch."

First group interviews 1 p.4

The literature in the field of teaching and learning for pupils with pmld affirms this need for highly personalised reward structures between the teacher and pupil, particularly so in the work of Ware (1994, 1996), that emphasised the important role of relationships. The above quotation also offers an illustration of the teachers' perceptions that there is a need for a teacher who is trained to 'tune into the responses of the pupil'. The teachers discussed the way rewards are given and the video vignette prompted one teacher to reflect on her own practice:

"The amount of adult language, how we all fill in the spaces, we all do it, sometimes you're saying good girl when she hasn't pressed the switch."

First group interviews 1 p.4

One teacher appears to recognise how difficult a task this is, again possibly hinting at the specialist nature of the teaching:

"There was one point she was praising her and she didn't seem as she had done it."

In the second group discussion the notion of relevance became a central issue of focus for the teachers' discussions. Again, this is an area that has received much attention in the literature relating to teaching and learning for pupils with pmld (Clark 1993). In the discussions between the teachers in this study, notions of relevance appear to stem from the perspective of the teachers themselves. One teacher illustrates this:

"Everyday things are better aren't they, they're real and they're topical"

This again relates to literature in the field, particularly to functional curricular for pupils with severe and complex learning disabilities that emphasises the teaching of functional skills in order to prepare pupils for life in the community (Orelove and Sobsey 1996, Snell and Brown 1993). This may also be another example of how the teachers believe they bring their world to the world of the pupils.

The discussions the teachers held relating to time and pace of teaching and learning again proved to be confirmatory of research and literature in the area (Ware 1994, 1996, Watson 1996). This was particularly so in relation to allowing the pupils enough time to respond and the need for sensitive teacher support and prompting, again an area of focus for the Ware (1994) research. The teachers in this study appear to agree with this and seem to perceive their pupils as needing a lot of time to respond and stress the important role of the teacher as facilitator to each individual pupil:

"Some students do need more time to communicate and not to give too many prompts."

Teachers discussed incidents on the video where this time was not given. On one occasion one of the pupils was taking a long time physically to respond:

"I noticed the teacher stroked it on his arm and it took him a long time and then he reached and it wasn't there anymore, they'd taken it away."

On another occasion the teacher on the video was again too hasty in removal of an activity:

"She never got to play with the bells, they were shook in front of her and then taken away."

The teachers did acknowledge, in their discussions with each other, when they felt the pace was more appropriate. In this instance it was demonstrably much slower:

"The pace was so much better than the first."

In these examples the teachers appear to be showing, not only the need for, but also the nature of specialist knowledge for this group of pupils. This is similar to the work of Aird (2001) with his emphasis on individual teaching and learning styles of pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties, and the necessity of the teacher to appreciate and plan for the varying learning styles of each pupil. The discussions between the teachers in this study suggest the achievement of addressing the individual learning styles of the pupils, particularly in relation to pace and timing of learning is both intricate and problematic. They identified the difficulties emanating from the video vignettes and also recognised these difficulties in their own practice. This may also be seen to support the teachers' apparent belief that there is a need for specialist knowledge and specialist teaching for pupils with pmld.

The video vignettes encouraged the teachers to talk about their beliefs relating to physical positioning and appropriate presentation of teaching tasks to pupils with pmld. The teachers talked a lot about the physical positioning of the pupils, which suggests how important this area is for them. This became evident in their reflections of the video:

"I wondered about her position in relation to him, should she be in a better position together so that he could initiate interaction."

And,

"I thought the adult was too far away from him, too far away from him."

In the literature too, this is an area of focus and interest (Ouvry and Lacey1998) where physical positioning and appropriate presentation of tasks are fundamental elements of teaching and learning for pupils with pmld. There was a feeling coming through the discussions in this research that the area of physical positioning is both stressful and contentious for the teachers. When talking about why they engage in the practice they do, they talk about being advised to do so by physiotherapists:

"It's like they need to sit in these chairs because it's good for them."

When asked why they thought it was good for the children there was some hesitancy of reply. It appears that the teachers are making some tentative justification of the practice, but possibly they do not really know why:

"I mean maybe things will degenerate faster if you don't position children."

It became clear that, for some of the teachers, there are issues relating to physical positioning, since this can be the cause of stress and discomfort for the pupils. One teacher appears to justify the practice by her view that she knows what is ultimately the best for the pupil:

"I think for some children you have to be cruel to be kind."

However, set beside the earlier quote that suggests that the teacher may be accepting the guidance of the physiotherapist without really knowing why, there appears to be an issue about teachers justifying a practice that they have been told by someone else to carry out. In doing this they do not listen to the responses of their pupils. There is little in the literature specifically relating to this. However, Oliver's (1986) critique of Conductive Education, from the perspective of someone on the receiving end of the practice, suggests the need to listen to the responses and reactions of the children.

This may be an example of institutionalised identity (Snow and Anderson 2001) where the teachers accept the routines and roles of the institution, even above their own personal feelings. There was one teacher who tentatively questioned the practice:

"But am I the only one that seems to have noticed that they're not terribly happy in that position."

It is interesting to note that there was no response to this question by her colleagues.

Teachers also talked about the actual presentation of activities. In the concerns they voiced about the video scenarios, they appear to express a belief about the importance of presenting activities in a highly structured, simple and clear way. When this did not occur in the video, the teachers picked it up:

"She was confusing in what she was saying to her...well, I think she was confusing her."

There seems to be a need for the activities to be presented in a familiar way with a routine being developed through each teaching activity. This is a feature apparent in the literature for effective learning for all pupils (Weikart 1978, Gardener 1993), and in the literature related to teaching and learning for pupils with special educational need (Lacey, Smith and Tilstone 1991, Snell and Brown 1993). In the context of the present research, discussions centered upon teaching in the video vignettes that lacked a discernable structure:

"Because for him there wasn't any beginning and end to any of that sequence, they all merged into one another."

This is echoed in another interview when the teachers discussed consistency:

"You need to teach a consistent system."

The teacher appears to justify the need for this structure in the behaviour and responses of the children themselves:

> "I think that's why children like it because they can predict...it's always the same and they become comfortable with it."

For this group of teachers then, teaching and learning for pupils with pmld appear to involve the important elements of motivation, reward, positioning, presentation, timing and pace. This may be seen to reflect the understandings the teachers have about the pupils they teach. The teachers in this study appear to share the understandings of the literature concerning pupils with pmld and special educational needs. This may indeed be a reflection of the influence the literature has on the understandings and practice of their teaching. It can also be assumed that their understandings can be seen to relate to some literature concerning all pupils, however, they do not appear to recognise this.

Making more meaning of how the teachers perceive the children with pmld they teach

From my considerations of the teachers' discussion, I have developed an interpretation of some of the beliefs the teachers appear to have in relation to pupils with pmld. It also offers some insights into the influences and frames of reference relating to how the teachers are constructing and forming their understanding and beliefs. What has emerged at this stage of the research is evolutionary in nature; it builds on the insights already gained about teachers' understandings of their pupils.

The low developmental level at which the teachers appear to believe their pupils with pmld are operating is confirmed through this stage of analysis. This belief is also apparent in the literature generated by practitioners and researchers in this field (Tilstone 1991, Ware 1994, 1996 and Aird 2001). This can be seen as confirmation that the teachers are sharing similar understandings about the pupils. It may also be seen as the teachers' understandings being influenced by the literature offered by a particular group of researchers and practitioners. The developmental levels the teachers in this study believe the pupils to be operating at are confirmed as very low and early:

"It's the beginning of cognition, it's problem solving, it's early developmental skills."

Again it is apparent when the teachers talk about their pupils as babies:

"It's actually going back to early communication with babies."

We already know that this frame of reference is evident in the literature in the work of Ware (1994). It also suggests that the frame of reference the teachers may be using to understand the pupils they teach is based on the developmental progress seen in the literature on normal child development. One of the seminal texts used to help assess, plan and teach pupils with pmld itself is based on a Piagetian model of child development (Uzgris and Hunt 1978, Snell and Brown 1993) and more recently the QCA (2001) guidance. In applying these frames of reference, the pupils may never actually reach the stated developmental milestones as set out in these scales of infant development. If they do, their pace and the nature of development may vary greatly. This suggests that the pupils, by the very nature of the frames of understanding available to the teachers, may always be viewed as having a deficit. The later guidance (QCA2001) recognises the varying pace and nature of development but retains the developmental framework.

The notion of difference again emerges as important to some of the teachers. One offers an example of this difference:

"They don't or aren't able to give us immediate responses as readable a response...they don't look at you in the same way that we typically read."

A further example of how the teachers may perceive the children to be different comes through when the teachers discuss levels of attention:

"Their attention span is so small."

The early developmental levels of the pupils appear to provide justification to the teachers for the specialised professional input that they seem to believe is needed:

"Students at that early developmental level you need to be close."

In this example, the idea of closeness appears to be the factor that fuels the need for specialised input. One teacher offers an illustration of the possible nature of the specialised input when she describes her interpretation of what is happening on the video:

"He was really still...I just thought he really likes listening because sometimes to be still is the response."

Here she appears to be actually demonstrating her expertise in understanding and interpretation and in so doing, justifying her role as an expert with this group of pupils. This relates to the professional identity work that Moir (1993) has carried out with nurses and engineers. She found in her discussions with a group of these professionals, that they too justified their role as a professional through their current understanding and past experience in the field. It presents as a justification for their present professional roles; they are in the role they are in now precisely because of the personal and professional expertise they have built up over the years.

In this study on another occasion, the scale of the specialist teacher role is hinted at:

"They have got to have the world brought to them."

This illustration suggests that this teacher believes the pupils with pmld she teaches to inhabit a different world, one that is different from her own, again validating earlier findings emerging from the study. From this it may be interpreted that the teacher believes her role to be one of rescuing, breaking into the different world of the pupils and indeed rescuing them and bringing them back to a more accepted world of the teachers. A role that requires her as teacher to apply specialist knowledge in order to bring the outside world to the inside world of the pupils. This can be seen to support

the individual professional identity of the teacher (Snow and Anderson 1996), particularly in her possible assertion of a specialist professional role that requires the teacher to have special qualities. There is a hint, by another teacher, that the pupils themselves are aware of these special qualities that she believes a teacher needs to have. In this example these specialist qualities are highly personal:

"I think they are very aware of how you feel towards them."

This suggests that the teacher may believe her pupils to be very intuitive in their recognition of the feelings of the teacher. This is one example of the teacher attributing a positive strength to the pupils. It may also be seen to support the virtual identity of the teacher as suggested by Goffman (2001) where the teacher is outwardly expressing how she believes her professional role as teacher is perceived by others, in this instance, her pupils.

In discussing the video vignettes, a discussion about the importance of being physically close to the pupils arose. In doing this, it appears that there is again some elaboration of the teachers' perceptions relating to the major differences of the pupils that they teach. One teacher illustrates this when she says:

"It's nearer their world isn't it?"

This also supports my interpretation about the influence of a model of disability that highlights the difference of the pupils in relation to normality. This has already been shown to be the case in relation to some of the scales of infant development applied to this group of pupils and also reflects notions of difference and individuality expressed by the teachers. As discussed in Chapter Two understandings relating to disability are complex. Barton (1989) suggests that the disability discourse is not only complex but also contentious in that it challenges the professional raison d'être. Through this analysis, it may be interpreted that the teachers are focusing on individual deficits (Corbett 1994) rather than appreciating the influence of the impact of community and society upon creating a disability (Oliver 1996). The use of the word 'their' may also suggest some distancing between the teachers and the pupil and reinforce the

professional role of the teacher that is may also be perceived as specialised, thus building a case for a professional role for themselves (Sandow 1994).

For one of the teachers there appears to be a compassionate, almost religious, approach to the pupils:

"Bless him..."

First group interviews 1 p.8

Other teachers also illustrate this:

"Poor little soul."

First group interview3 p.7

And,

"You just felt sorry for him, poor little soul."

First group interviews 3 p.8

This may be seen to support the teachers' identity to a cause but could also suggests that the teachers may be influenced by an understanding of disability related to tragedy (Ryan 1978, Oliver 1990) and superstition (Sandow 1994).

Making meaning about the teachers' assumptions about knowledge

This stage of analysis offers a different level of interpretation. It focuses upon the teachers' presumed assumptions about specialist knowledge from the interpretations made through their discussions about the video vignettes. It presents a second level of analysis, which is more obtuse in nature. It is an attempt to make sense of the meaning making of the teachers from a different perspective. When analysing the group interviews it became increasingly apparent that the concept of knowledge, as it relates to the pupils with pmld and the teachers themselves, may contribute to the process of meaning making. Notions of knowledge have already been discussed in Chapter Three in relation to social theory and will form a substantive part of Chapter Ten of this thesis. At this stage in the research, the issues raised in relation to knowledge are:

- Knowledge interpreted as important for pupils with pmld to develop;
- Knowledge interpreted as important for the teachers of pupils with pmld to have;
- Knowledge about the understandings held by society about pupils with pmld and teachers of this group of pupils.

It contributes to my interpretation of the meaning making of the teachers by allowing me insight into the possible epistemology of their knowledge base. It approaches the notion of knowledge from three different perspectives to allow a greater depth of meaning making to be achieved. When interpreting the teachers' perceptions about the knowledge they believe pupils need to develop, I hope to increase my awareness of their understanding of pupils with pmld. When interpreting the teachers perceptions about the knowledge they believe teachers need to posses, I intend to develop a greater awareness of their meaning making of their own roles as teachers of this group of pupils. In analysing the possible interpretations made by the teachers in relation to how they believe society understands pupils with pmld and teachers of this group of pupils, I intend to investigate some of the possible influences on their understanding and practice.

Knowledge interpreted as important for pupils with pmld to develop

The teachers' discussions relating to the curriculum offer some relevant insights into their perceptions of what constitutes appropriate knowledge for this group of pupils. The interpretations made involve curriculum areas and issues of choice and control. These aspects of interpretation have already been highlighted as important in the analysis of the individual interviews and provide confirmation of those findings. However, at this stage in the research process, this also contributes to my understanding of the teachers apparent perceptions of specialist knowledge.

When talking about what they believe is the knowledge pupils should develop, it appears that the teachers are again confirming the crucial role of communication. The place of communication in the curriculum received a great deal of attention and seems to be the prime area of focus for teaching. This is clearly evident in the literature for teaching pupils with pmld, particularly in the work of Ware (1994, 1996), who has contributed to the understanding of the role of communication in the education of

pupils with pmld. One teacher in the first group interview illustrates the general discussion of the teachers and their thoughts on communication:

"Communication development primarily."

The nature of communication became a focus of discussion. The active engagement of the pupil in the process of communication is clearly important to the teachers in this study. The concept of communication is discussed as needing to be two way and spontaneous:

"He really wants to get some two way communication going and that's the top and the bottom of it."

Integral to the development of communication is the importance of enabling the pupils to develop relationships with others. The ability to develop relationships appears to be an important part of the children's knowledge:

"To me it's got to be about relationships, got to be about you and the child making a bond."

This supports the literature in the field (Lacey and Ouvry 1998, Dowse 2001,Aird 2001) where the development of communication is directly related to the social interaction of the pupils in their community. The teachers in this study appear to believe there is a need to help pupils to appreciate their place in the class group, the society of the classroom. This is illustrated by one of the teachers:

"It's important that they come to know they are part of a group."

The importance of the pupil being actively engaged in the learning process was stressed by one teacher, which may reflect the teachers' belief that pupils with pmld need to be taught to initiate:

"I just wanted her not to do that so he could do it and ask her to do it so he was given opportunities to communicate."

This led to a discussion amongst the teachers about whether it should be the pupil or teacher who leads the communication interaction. One teacher voices her concern over whose agenda dominated the teaching in the video vignette: there is a feeling that the adult's agenda ruled the learning context:

"It seemed like the adult had the agenda and was going to stick to that and a lot of the pupil's communication was missed."

This is supportive of the interpretations made in the analysis of the individual teacher interviews where the need to enable the pupil to develop control in his or her interactions emerged as an issue for some of the teachers in this study. The teachers discussed the notion of active engagement further and talked about the importance of careful management by the teacher to allow this to happen:

"You have got to let them be free so they can explore themselves."

Through the first group interviews there seems little consideration by the teachers of what the pupils should be learning in relation to more general aims of education. For example, there was little indication that the teachers' discussions may be interpreted as reflecting their belief about education being there in order for their pupils eventually to, e.g. lead independent lives, get a good job, or become responsible citizens. Apart from the inherent interpretations I have made to the functional curriculum literature. This may be a reflection of the way the research was designed and the teachers were not given the opportunity to engage with such discussions. It may also be a reflection of the way the teachers perceive the needs of the pupils as being in the hear and now of the classroom rather than concerned with life long learning issues.

Knowledge interpreted as important for the teachers of pupils with pmld to have

Following from the analysis so far, particularly that related to specialist knowledge, it appeared to be important to focus on the meaning making the teachers seemed to be engaged with in relation to their own professional knowledge base. In analysing this I was hoping to gain a greater depth of insight related to what the teachers believe a teacher of pupils with pmld needs to know. In engaging in interpretation of the teachers' discussions in relation to this, there was some confirmation of insights already gained in the areas of how the teachers are perceiving the pupils they teach and notions of pupil knowledge. The Specialist SEN Standards (DfEE 1999) were employed at this stage of the analysis in order to help me to reflect on the knowledge teachers perceive they should have and compare this with national requirements deemed by the government to be necessary.

In this study there appears to emerge an idea that a teacher of this group of pupils has special capabilities related to personal and professional qualities. This is highlighted by one teacher in the first group interview as:

> "Teachers need to have empathy for the child, respect for the child, an optimism to see progress and has knowledge."

First group interviews 2 p 14

The knowledge of the teacher can also be seen to relate to the highly individual expertise they build up about individual pupils:

> "He looked at her for reassurance and she could read him when he was going off."

First group interviews 3 p 6

The professional expertise needed by a teacher is promoted in the specialist standards, both for particular areas of development (communication, cognition etc) and for particular disabilities (autism, deaf/ blind etc). However, the Specialist SEN Standards discuss professional knowledge, skills and understanding only and the teachers in this study appear to be discussing personal attitudes and beliefs as important too.

The importance of the adult as a motivator was highlighted:

> "She seemed interested in the woman but she didn't seem interested in the ball."

It may be interpreted from this that they believe that the teacher is the main motivator for the child and becomes the main focus of the child's engagement. The implication this has for the knowledge the teacher needs to have in relation to motivation is enormous. It may be seen to justify the specialist nature of their teaching and again emphasises the personal qualities of the teacher and particularly the relationship between the teacher and learner. The importance of the teacher being constantly aware of, and capitalizing on, the pupil's interest was something the teachers discussed in the group interviews. Concern was expressed by one teacher when this was apparently not occurring in the video vignette:

"She didn't use his interest."

The role of timing and pace of teaching and learning already highlighted as important appears to be a constituent part of teacher knowledge. The skill to be able to manage the time and pace of teaching and learning is a skill that the teachers seem to appreciate is difficult and complex. There were examples of this difficulty in the video and teachers did remark on it:

"She wasn't given enough time, given enough time to respond."

The need for creativity and imagination is evident:

"You have to have a bottomless bag of tricks sometimes, don't you, because you've got to keep giving new things and new things."

This could be seen as an acknowledgement of the difficult nature of the knowledge and practical teaching strategies the teacher needs to have, and the fact that it must continually change and evolve.

There was some question over the nature of the teaching that teachers engage with:

"Certain people seem to spend their lives assessing pmld children rather than teaching, they're always looking to see what they can and can't do instead of just getting on and doing it."

This presents the idea that for some teachers their knowledge is dominated by assessment rather than teaching. For some of the teachers, the teaching that occurs is intensive and highly structured, supporting the view that they are engaged in highly specialised knowledge:

"We all do intensive structured teaching sessions to maybe build up skills."

This is reflected in the literature related to teaching pupils with special educational needs and the importance of clear and focussed structured teaching (Snell and Brown 1993). When asked directly about what they think is the knowledge a teacher should possess to teach pupils with pmld, each teacher offered different interpretations on what constitutes this specialist knowledge. At this stage of my analysis I could see little consensus between them. One teacher illustrates this complexity:

"You'll get different answers from every different teacher wouldn't you? Every teacher is an individual and they've all got their own method of working."

However, the knowledge proposed in the Specialist SEN Standards does offer a rubric that encompasses all teachers and emphasises professional rather than personal knowledge and understanding. For one of the teachers the lack of a nationally shared curriculum was something he felt strongly about:

"There isn't a prescribed curriculum...there isn't a consensus on what is relevant."

In another group interview this led onto a discussion about tokenism and the need to have shared professional understanding to combat this:

"It really can be very tokenistic and people working with these children really need to get their act together with colleagues and agree on a way of teaching and stick to it."

This may suggest the teachers appear to be calling for their specialist knowledge to be acknowledged and promoted as the knowledge needed by teachers in order to teach pupils with pmld. From this it may be interpreted that this teacher is seeking recognition of his professional identity. The QCA Curriculum Guidance (2001) that offers a process for looking at specialist knowledge in this way had not been published at the time of this group interview.

Knowledge about the understandings held by society about pupils with pmld and teachers of this group of pupils

At this point in the analysis it became important to me to try to understand more about the influences on the meaning making the teachers are engaged in, particularly the influence of the wider society. I wanted to gain some insights into the assumptions teachers are making about the understanding of society about their pupils and also about their teaching. In exploring this, it became apparent that the teachers had not really engaged in explicit discussion of this issue. I felt it was worthwhile to pursue this process of my making meaning and teased out some tentative interpretations based on the implicit information emerging through the data. I decided my interpretations could offer a focus for my third and final stage of data collection, which would encourage the teachers to discuss these issues in greater depth.

In reflecting on the discussions between the teachers, I believed that there was some insight to be gained in relation to the possible influence of the paradigms and models of disability in the literature. At this stage there appeared to be issues emerging relating to ownership of disability being with the individual pupil (Oliver 1996). This had previously emerged in the analysis of the individual teacher interviews. Through the discussions of the teachers in the first group interviews, it appeared that the notion of individual ownership of disability was also there. To return to a quotation from earlier in this chapter, a teacher felt that:

"They (the pupils) have got to have the world brought to them."

Through this it may be interpreted that the teacher believes the pupils own the disability and through the disability they are distanced from society. Following from this, it may be assumed that there is some level of marginalisation of the pupils in relation to society, this could also be argued as true for the teachers too. There is a hint from the teachers that there has been some change in the way the pupils are perceived, and that this change is a positive one:

"I'm really pleased the days of lying on beanbags are over, I'm glad that's gone."

First group interviews 1 p.7

Naturally, an assumption emerges from this that there is an historical context for how society views these pupils, which has changed in some way. In this example the teacher refers to the pupils being viewed as passive and suggests a change has taken place. However, another teacher illustrates the notion of the child being passive can actually be seen to prevail:

"You answer for them, oh he wants this and oh he must want that."

First group interviews 1 p 5

In the group interviews there appear to be insights relating to how the teachers felt society viewed them as professionals. There appears to be a hint that the teachers feel pressure to succeed in their teaching, that there are expectations made of them by society:

"Sometimes because you're teaching you want the child to learn and you'll invent some sorts of things that aren't there because you want to be successful."

First group interviews 3 p 2

It becomes clear that the way society views this group of pupils and this group of teachers is a theme that, although not explicitly addressed in the study so far, warrants further consideration and analysis. The way society views the teachers and pupils must have direct relevance to the understanding, beliefs and practice of the teachers. The area of how the teachers perceive society to understand and relate to them as teachers and the pupils they teach, naturally becomes a focus for the second group interviews.

Conclusion

This stage of analysis has contributed to my meaning making in confirmatory and revelationary ways. The confirmatory moments relate to the understandings this group of teachers holds about their pupils with pmld and their identity as teachers of this group of pupils. The discussion related to pedagogy serves to build on issues that have already emerged in the study relating to the way the teachers may be viewing their pupils as learners and themselves as teachers. The issues the teachers discussed in relation to these centre upon their perceptions related to their pupils and then to notions of knowledge. In relation to their pupils the teachers talked about the importance of ensuring pupils have motivating learning experiences with effective rewards; rewards being matched to individual pupils. The need to equate the activity to the ability level of the pupils was also highlighted. They talked at length about the much slower pace their pupils with pmld respond and the impact this has on the timing of the teaching and learning. Problematic issues emerged related to the teacher being too fast and missing the delayed responses of their pupils were raised as particularly difficult. Their discussions about physical positioning offered some insight into the potential tension that this presents for some of the teachers, and it can be interpreted that, in some cases, the teachers are not aware of why they are following particular practices of physical positioning. The need to present the learning in a highly structured way emerged as a theme, with the role of the teacher being to ensure clarity and consistency. It became clear, through this analysis that the teachers in my study share the understandings of the literature.

From the teachers' discussions at this stage of the research I was able to tease out some interpretations related to the teachers' understandings of their pupils. The perceived low developmental level of the pupils appears to dominate this and contribute to the teachers' ideas of the need for a specialist teacher; a teacher with particular professional and personal qualities. The intuitive nature of their pupils, where they recognise these personal qualities, serves to contribute to the teachers' understandings. The revelationary moments of this stage of analysis relate to ideas of specialist knowledge and the epistemology of this knowledge. In relation to knowledge, it becomes clear that the developmental curriculum, with communication as a central feature, influences the teachers' understandings. The role of society's

knowledge was analysed through the teachers' discussions in a tangential way, through their discussions of other issues. This served to highlight the potentially important influence of society's understanding and appears to contribute to the teachers' notions of specialist teacher and specialist knowledge. These are issues that I have become increasingly interested in and having made some tentative assumptions now need to engage the teachers in a more in depth discussion about them. This becomes one of the one of the foci of the third and final stages of data collection.

Chapter nine

Teacher reflections on my meaning making; the influence of society's knowledge

Introduction

Following on from the questionnaires, individual interviews and first group interviews the second and final group interviews took place. Table Two illustrates how the analysis of this stage of interviewing contributed to the whole research process. The second group interviews offered an important opportunity for the teachers to reflect upon and discuss the interpretations made in the research and to extend the discussion of these further. This was the final opportunity to verify these interpretations with the teachers themselves. In the analysis so far, substantive themes had emerged, these were:

- understandings about the influences (professional and personal) that impact upon the understanding of the teachers;
- notions of teacher identity;
- notions of specialist knowledge; and
- understandings about the way the teachers' understand how society perceives them as teachers and the pupils they teach.

Teachers were presented with a synopsis of my interpretations (Appendix Seven) and in analysing the data generated there was a strong confirmation and agreement of the interpretations made so far. There were also greater insights gained from the teacher's perspective. In doing this, this chapter, like the previous one, is concerned with the meaning making of teachers in the context of their understandings of the social, historical and personal context in which they operate. The three themes of:

- teacher identity;
- specialist knowledge; and
- society's knowledge

emerged as the focus of analysis at this stage of the research. Intertwined through these themes were a range of issues related to the epistemology of the understandings and knowledge of the teachers. This chapter is structured according to the three themes highlighted above with analysis of epistemological issues occurring as they arise in these themes.

Continuing to build meaning of the teachers' identity

Emerging from the analysis so far the concept of the teacher's individual and social identity emerged as a potentially important idea. Through the analysis of this stage of group interviewing the strong social identification that the teachers have with each other seems to be affirmed. This notion of identity appears to be illuminated by the way that the teachers believe the wider society perceives them. Teachers talked about how they feel society in general makes assumptions about their work and about them as people. This was illustrated by the one of the teachers:

"That's usually the next sentence isn't it, you must have a heart of a lion, I couldn't do that. That's what people say to you. But they wouldn't say that to a mainstream teacher."

Group interview 2:2 p.5

Although the tone of the teachers was scornful this shared experience appears to support their social identity to each other and to their work (Jenkins 1996). Through the discussions there was an apparent difference emerging relating to the perception, knowledge and experience of the teachers and the wider society. These perceptions appear to impact upon and influence the individual and social identities of the teachers. One teacher seems to feel the wider society holds an inaccurate understanding of the children they teach:

"Substantially, I think it comes from experience and that is how it's going to be so much harder for the wider society to get to where we are. They never will and there is nothing more irritating I don't think than to see someone speaking about our kinds of children in a sound bite."

Group interview 2:1 p.1

From this, it may also be deduced that the teachers may believe that their way of thinking about pupils with pmld is the right and correct way. This can be seen further when the teachers discuss how new teachers working with pupils with pmld attain their understanding and knowledge. Teachers in group interview 2:3 talked about the need for new teachers to be guided and supported whilst they attained the experience working alongside experienced teachers. When asked the length of this period the teachers suggested that at least one generation of children was the minimum period. This presents almost as a 'rite of passage' that new teachers must comply with to enter the specialised profession of the teachers. It also relates to the teachers' notions of the epistemology of the knowledge needed for this group of pupils being firmly placed in experience. This theme is developed later in this chapter when further analysing the teacher's notions of specialist knowledge. This offers an illustration of how the work the teachers are engaged in is shaping them as people (Wetherell 1996). There seems to be an idea that the knowledge of the teachers is hard to attain, taking a length of time to acquire that relates to Blumstein's (2001) notion of particular identities developing gradually over time. Further understandings about the role and impact of the social identities of the teachers comes through their stories of a common purpose and struggle. In the second group interview there are discussions about the notion of an identity to a cause, some teachers confirmed this idea whilst some had difficulty with the concept. The confirmations came in the nature of a struggle against the establishment (Group interview 2:3); the need to inform the policy makers of the needs of the pupils who they teach (Group interview 2:1); and supporting parents (Group interview 2:3). Other teachers, namely those in group interview 2 did not like the idea of an identity to a cause. They felt it created images of martyrs and benevolence, something they felt they could not identify with:

"I mean for me to read the language 'to a cause' is a bit emotive isn't it. It's almost like it's not like a profession. It's almost like some crusade that you have that you want to help and charity."

Group interview 2:2 p.1

This may offer an insight into how this teacher perceives society is viewing him as a teacher and as a professional. There followed from this a discussion between the teachers about the nature of their work as a vocational profession. Through this discussion there appears to be concern about how the teachers believe the wider society perceives them as teachers. This will be further discussed in the analysis

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relating to the teachers' thoughts and beliefs about society's knowledge about them as teachers and the pupils that they teach. This will occur later in this chapter.

Continuing to build greater understanding about the teachers' idea of role embracement

In my analysis related to identity the idea of role embracement as offered by Snow and Anderson (2001) appears to offer some help in understanding the teachers' ideas, beliefs and attitudes. The final group interviews offered further insights into how the teachers embrace their professional roles. This embracement appears to be the glue that bonds their social identities together and reveals itself through the assumptions that the teachers seem to be making about each other. One teacher illustrates this when she attributes particular shared interests to her other colleagues in the group:

> "The brain and relationships and all those exciting things that I think by definition everybody on this table is immensely interested in and again you know we are aware that we're just scratching at the blooming tip of the iceberg here, we're doing our own little bit."

> Group interview 2:2 p.2

This embracement may also be seen in the teachers' discussions of an acceptance of a particular ideological belief (Snow and Anderson 2001). One teacher illustrates this:

> "Well to be honest, for me it's about where do we come from, where are we going to. You know who are we, why do we exist and what's the purpose of life."

> Group interview 2:2 p.3

Which is supported by another teacher who talks about her personal and professional beliefs:

> "One of the things that I understand is that although people are all different from each other there are some fundamental ways that we are all the same and I think the question that you asked G for me it's that inclusiveness is that's what it's about, it's

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about not making people be on the outside because of their differences but rather gathering them together and emphasising things that we're the same about because that's what our mutual understanding is about."

The embracement of the teachers to a particular image of a role of a teacher of pupils with special educational needs is expressed by another teacher. Here she talks about her perceptions of mainstream schools. In doing this she embraces her role as a teacher in a special school and indeed distances herself from mainstream schools. Talking about mainstream:

"I wonder as well though if you go into those schools you get the happiness you get here and that's so important, the happiness is part of the joy of working in a school like this."

This can be seen to relate to the Bakehurst and Sypnowich's (1995) notion of professional identity evolving through the interrelation of personal and professional beliefs. Role embracement is also shown through the confirmation of the expertise of the teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. One teacher illustrates this when she talks about the shared level of understanding and expertise:

"The most disabled child that in fact can have the most intellect or be more able but they need access to the curriculum through the technology that's available today and that's the expertise of our teachers if you like to assess them."

A shared identity is also illustrated with the above teacher's use of the words 'our teachers', here it can be seen that she is perceiving a particular designated group of teachers rather than the teaching profession as a whole. Another clear statement of identity that illustrates the teachers' perceptions of difference from other teachers can be seen by another teacher when she discusses the complexity of pupils with pmld and suggests:

"then it's difficult for people to handle that whereas we're familiar with it and we know the child."

There are examples of the expertise of the teachers being confirmed by visitors to the segregated schools where this group of teachers work. An illustration of this is a visit from two policemen into a class, through the teacher's recollections of the story. It appears that the experience consolidates her view that the job she does everyday is viewed by outsiders as particularly physically and emotionally taxing:

"You know just a normal lesson and at the end of the lesson, eh you must be worn out and said well, why, you've just never stopped, you've been on the go all the time."

Group interview 2:3 p.5

This can also be seen as an example of how the teachers' experience confirms a particular identity as a specialist teacher. Jenkins (1996) refers to this as virtual identity and suggests it has a major influence on the development and sustenance of a particular identity.

Continuing to build meaning of the teachers' understanding of specialist knowledge

Through the analysis so far it emerged that the teachers' grounds for a strong social identity to each other appears to be strongly related to their perceptions and understandings around notions of specialist knowledge in relation to pupils with pmld. In this final group interview there was indeed confirmation from the teacher's about this. There was also some exemplification of the nature and purpose of this specialist knowledge, which helps to make more accurate assumptions about the meaning making the teachers are engaged in.

It becomes apparent that the teachers are engaged in a quest to attain greater and greater levels of understanding about the pupils that they teach. There emerges an idea that the specialist knowledge required to teach this group of pupils is indeed highly complex. One teacher highlights this as:

"It's not about teaching your subject, I know technology, I can teach this but I've got to teach everything to these students that I don't maybe understand their behaviour, I don't understand how they're feeling, I don't know how what to teach, how to do it because as well as be a teacher anyway I mean I know that's me coming from where I am but I think it must just be so hard."

From this it may be assumed that the teachers' ideas of specialist knowledge may somehow be related to each individual pupil, and it seems that the teacher perceives this to be indeed very difficult. Insights into the epistemology of such specialist knowledge may be gained through this. This focus on the individual suggests the psychological model of understanding disability highlighted by Corbett (1994) may be influential to this teacher. This is supported by the words of another teacher when talking about the teachers' perceived role with parents:

"I think as well we can give to the parents, I mean we only have the children for how many hours a day, those parents have the children all the...you know so much of the time. We can provide them with so many positives. They must have such difficult times and for them so much of the time must be so very very negative but say when I write their review reports and things we say we can give them some joy."

Inherent in this is the teacher's view that her specialist knowledge and skills will make the plight of the parents better. It also appears for this teacher, that her specialist knowledge is greater than that of the parent. The epistemology of specialist knowledge is something that is analysed further in the following chapter. However, in the final group interviews it appears that the specialist knowledge teachers talk about derives partly from specialist training:

"Going back to knowledge as well, I certainly think there is no substitute for specialist training. I was trained from the beginning which I'm told is just not available now...I mean the lights just come on when someone is explaining what you've seen, what it means, you know, you think oh yes how many times have I seen that and it's just amazing that it isn't available now or that it's only available as inset."

Affirming what has already emerged (through analysis of individual interviews) the teachers talk about specialist trainers as sharing their social identity, holding more expert knowledge than they have and having the ability to translate it to practice. For others in this group interview there appears to be an idea that this specialist knowledge can only be developed through direct experience. There emanates a notion of a 'rite of passage' into the specialist knowledge; discussing newly qualified teachers one teacher declares:

"I don't think a newly qualified teacher could possibly cope on her own until she's probably gone through a generation of children and seen most of the main problems."

It also appears that the specialist knowledge teachers are talking about in their discussions with each other takes on a magical element. It seems that it cannot be quantified, it appears intuitive and emotional, only being gained through experience with the pupils and other teachers. There also arises an idea of there being only one answer, that must be right, that can be seen to support the view that new teachers into the profession are deemed lacking:

"Because you've had that experience you can see that but when a new teacher coming into the profession she's not gone through that before so she doesn't really know what to expect or what to say really. And it's having the confidence that you know what you're saying is right.

This teacher appears to be suggesting that specialist knowledge is perceived as absolute with only one right way. However, another teacher talks about specialist knowledge as being something mystical, mythical and somehow instinctive. Talking about how and why she makes decisions about what and how to teach a particular pupil, she says:

"It's just instinct isn't it, it's just something...you know that these children need to know this."

Implicit in this there may be seen to be an inborn personal quality that a teacher of this group of pupils must possess. This interesting tension about specialist knowledge highlighted here by the teachers will inform the later discussion of the epistemology and nature of specialist knowledge. The notion of the need for specialist knowledge also serves to strengthen the idea of a profession within a profession. A profession made up of a group of teachers who possess particular specialised knowledge. It can also be assumed that for some of the teachers in this research only teachers with particular personal qualities, as well as specialised knowledge should become teachers of pupils with pmld. It may be interpreted that this is an example of the teacher's gate

posting their specialised profession. This idea will be seen again when the teachers talk about their understandings of the wider society.

Some teachers adopted a wider perspective that encompassed the teaching of all children. In discussing the contextualisation of their specialist knowledge into the wider context of schooling they talked about their specialist knowledge as being an inherent part of the wider tapestry of skills and understanding needed to teach all children:

> "To me it's as simple as if you are going to build a house you need a roofer, you need a carpenter, you know you need somebody that's good at plumbing but you rarely get somebody that's skilled at all of those things and in education it's the same isn't it and we're only one small fraction of wonderful, wonderful system in the western world of education."

<div align="right">Group interview 2:2 p.2</div>

Supporting the teachers' earlier statements early child development and particularly communication are highlighted as the fundamental constituents of their specialist knowledge. The teachers' assumptions here can be seen to be supported in the literature about teaching and learning for pupils with pmld where the development of communication is seen as a central and essential part of the curriculum (Ware 1996, Aird 2001). One teacher illustrates the constituent parts of specialist knowledge when she says:

> "The essential requirement is that for our teachers to have the most basic understanding of the development of cognition, early communication to come into work into our sort of field."

<div align="right">Group interview 2:1 p.6</div>

The use of the word 'our' again supports the idea of a shared social identity that these teachers have to each other and away from other teachers. Through the discussions between the teachers it can be assumed that the development and attainment of this specialist knowledge does not appear to come easily. There is an idea of a struggle, not just with attaining it, but also with the very nature of it. This is illustrated through the discussions about how different pupils with pmld are, not only from their peers in the special school but from each other:

"You know why do we give those children that definition because as you've just said within that grouping, as we group them within the school, they're very, very different."

This idea of difference is also supported in another group interview, this time in relation to pupils from mainstream schools. This is illustrated when one teacher talks about managing an integration experience with a local mainstream school:

"I'm just meaning were talking about pmld children here and we're a thousand miles away from ever having any pmld children having the opportunity to go into mainstream school."

Through these final group interviews there is support for the earlier assumption about the teacher knowledge required for the teaching of this group of pupils as being perceived as lower than the knowledge required by teachers of other pupils. The teachers in this group interview developed this further by suggesting that the specialist knowledge perceived as being required to teach pupils with pmld has been perceived as having less status than that of teacher knowledge for other pupils with special educational needs. This is illustrated through one teacher's discussion about an apparent change in perception that has recently occurred:

"We've raised the status of things like rebound therapy, use of the hydro pool, quality of personal care routine so if there is a time when support for staff teams... and I think that's worked very well and I've been looking at some parent responses and one of them says "Well done G... for providing holistic therapies for children with complex difficulties".

When the teachers talk about their own specialist knowledge it is directly related to knowledge about individual children's need and their disability:

"I think through our knowledge of the children and our empathy of the children because that's why we're in the profession we're in that for some of the public to see children say in a restaurant or somewhere in the community who perhaps through no fault of their own has saliva dripping from their mouths or makes sounds which aren't voice-like sounds or is trying to communicate using emotions which will be yelling then it's difficult for people to handle that whereas we're familiar with it and we know the child."

A teacher talks about a teacher colleague in a mainstream school and the attempts made to develop some level of specialist knowledge of disabled pupils with disabilities. She questions the central focus upon the disabilities that this teacher has engaged with:

> "I actually spoke to somebody the other day who actually worked in the profession and said that the first thing she does when she goes into a schoolroom is gets to know all of the disabilities of the children and I said why, I said the first thing I do is get to the children's names because they're children and that's first and foremost."

However, this presents as a paradox as it has been highlighted through the thesis so far that it is the category based understandings that appear to have a dominating influence on teacher understandings of pmld. It may be interpreted, through the teacher discussions in the final group interview, as verification that they appear to believe their knowledge base to be deemed inferior to their colleagues in mainstream. One teacher exemplifies this:

> "I felt like a poor relation. Poor relation, that's what I felt. Yeah, you were looked down on ... in fact I can remember somebody actually saying well you don't need a degree to teach those children do you."

A teacher in the second group interview supports this:

> "You know there is almost this if you're working in a special school that actually you are not a proper teacher. You know and I'm really conscious of that."

As previously highlighted in the analysis of the individual interviews the engagement with new knowledge by the teachers appears to relate to particular factors. It has been seen possibly to depend on the experience and level of understanding the teacher already has as well as the practical relationship the new knowledge has to his or her teaching. This is illustrated in the final group interviews when the teachers discuss the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. One teacher talks at great length about the value of the Literacy Strategy and how she would fight to have her pupils with pmld included.

She has much more difficulty with the Numeracy Strategy and is clearly struggling with the application and translation of it. She is a literacy specialist and does acknowledge the role of her own experience:

> "I think I would fight on the way that these children should be included in the Literacy session but maybe not so much the Numeracy session but my strength is literacy so maybe that's something to do with my understanding, I don't know."

This supports the thesis of the crucial role of the present level of understanding and experience of the teacher in relation to the willingness and potential to change and develop that knowledge. The teachers discussed the understandings they believe the wider society to hold about them as teachers and the pupils they teach. One teacher illustrated the tension that is present:

> "I think a lot of society are still quite frightened of the children because they don't know how to react to them, they don't know how to communicate with them. They are embarrassed as well sometimes."

Another teacher supports this and, through the way society views them and their pupils, receives confirmation of their role as specialist teacher:

> "They almost say, well I feel anyway, that I couldn't do it, I don't want to work or I don't want to be around pupil like that. So if you are around them you must be a really good person because I couldn't do it."

Throughout the discussion there are examples of the beginning of the sharing of knowledge and experience with teacher colleagues in mainstream settings. For this group of teachers, whose individual and social identity is wrapped up in the idea of highly specialised knowledge, this may be perceived as possibly problematic. One teacher recalls her experience of delivering inset to local mainstream schools:

> "Last year I was out doing some literacy work in other schools and when I was first approached I thought it was going to be special schools and then realised it was going to be mainstream schools so I panicked didn't I like that, till I went in and did the workshops with the staff and they were very, very receptive to me because there is a lot of teachers out there struggling with children like ours and they don't know how to

react and you know some were very receptive, taking the ideas on board and I
thoroughly enjoyed it, very positive about it."

This experience for this particular teacher appears to have supported her individual identity as a specialist teacher in a positive way, rather than being disempowering, it proved to be an empowering experience for her. Although she continues to talk about 'our' children as being separate, there is a sense that she is acknowledging that some disabled children are in mainstream. There also appears a realisation that her specialist knowledge is also needed in the mainstream setting (although she did not say that there were pupils with pmld in the setting she visited). For this teacher, this experience appears to have been an empowering one.

The discussion in group discussion one developed into exploring some of the similarities between the segregated context the teachers are working in and a mainstream setting. One teacher says:

"I know my classroom is certainly probably no different to other reception mainstream classroom would be. You know I think all the children have thrived and made progress in that situation."

In the analysis of the final group interviews there appears to be emerging a story of a process of change relating to their ideas of specialist knowledge. The teachers, through changes and developments being brought about at policy level, appear to be having their notions of social identity and specialist knowledge challenged. There are examples of teachers responding to this by closing ranks, becoming angry and stating the differences between them and mainstream. There are also examples of some form of conciliation where teachers are interacting with mainstream colleagues with a shared focus and finding that they can contribute positively. A critical factor in this is the development of a conciliatory process is a shared language. The role of language is perceived by some of the teachers in this study as being very important; this links to the influential work of Foucault (1977) about language and power relations. Discussing recent policy changes, one teacher talks about this:

"Well because of the world that we live in now, even in special education, we have to have that wider knowledge of the curriculum. For all the paperwork to inform all of that and when we meet with mainstream teachers at conferences or what we have to understand the language and of course it broadens our children's access as well."

Through this there is an idea of coercion, it is the world the teachers are now living in that forces these changes. The need to change comes from the necessity to comply with the bureaucracy of the policy changes. This shared language may be perceived as helping teachers of pupils with pmld to be perceived as similar to mainstream teachers. The language they are referring to here is the language of mainstream curriculum content, namely the National Curriculum. A different perspective is gained when the teachers in this study discuss the shared language that originates from their own specialist experience. The 'P' levels are levels of pupil attainment linked to the National Curriculum; they have been recently highlighted again in the QCA curriculum guidance material for pupils with learning difficulty (QCA 2001). Discussing the 'P' levels, a teacher recollects her experience with mainstream colleagues that illustrates the power relations of language:

"I explained to the them about the 'P' levels and like M found she was just so interested that she could actually get a baseline assessment for these children but knew nothing about it, this was last year."

Through the language of the 'P' levels this teacher appears to be confirming her expertise and specialist knowledge, and the applicability of this knowledge in the mainstream context. She goes on to suggest how the language of pupil attainment through the 'P' scales has offered commonality to all:

"It's a common language now through the 'P' levels and not curriculum."

It may be assumed from this that, for the group of teachers in this study, common language that originates from their own specialist experience, rather than a mainstream context, may be more readily accepted. Discussing the use of language, the discussions between teachers seemed to raise the importance of the need to adopt the language of the time and for this to be the language adopted in society as a whole:

"He said did you not know you are working with retarded people? Exactly you see, so he said and I said no, no, terminology is really important because I do believe this that you know you move with the times, it is important now not to talk about morons and idiots but actually talk about people's severe disabilities."

Group interview 2:2 p.13

Discussing recent initiatives in relation to curriculum content for pupils with complex learning disabilities, the teachers appeared to feel positive that their specialist knowledge was reflected. In the discussion about the new QCA guidelines teachers talked about the guidelines reflecting their understanding and practice:

"We probably teach what we've always taught which is what the children needed."

Group interview 2:1 p.13

The teachers appear to believe that their knowledge is now reflected in the policy documentation and are positive about this.

Continuing to build meaning of the teachers' understanding of how society understands pupils with pmld and teachers who teach them

During the course of the second group interview teachers talked about how they believed society understood and perceived pupils with pmld. This is a fundamental aspect of their social identity as specialist teachers as well as informing the epistemology of notions of specialist knowledge. The teachers discussed what they see as the myths, surrounding pupils with pmld and their teachers that they believe permeate society:

"There's a lot of myths isn't there? A lot of people seem to have myths about what happens in a school like this."

Group interview 2:1 p.1

One teacher illustrated the nature of these myths. She recalled a visit to her school, from a mainstream colleague who was also a friend. Discussing the visit on a social occasion it is clear that the mainstream teacher had come to the school with particular expectations and assumptions. In describing her colleague's reactions, the teacher illustrated her belief that these assumptions reflected those held about special schools by society:

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"She couldn't believe how polite and friendly the children were and how well behaved and quiet the school was and I said well we are a school, you know we're not a home we're a school."

Through this it may be interpreted, for at least this teacher, members of the wider society have a different view of the pupils and the school context than she has. It can be seen that she appears to need to clarify the difference between the school not being a home. There also seems to be a belief that people in the wider society may hold some negative assumptions about this group of children.

Through the teachers' discussions in this final group interview there is once more a feeling that the teachers believe that the wider society does not value the pupils they work with and indeed perceives them as a burden:

"There's just a view...is it worthwhile that it does that there is all of this sort of investment into these poor people who actually can't give anything back to society. You know those sorts of attitudes and things which are so deeply felt by some people that I find so difficult to handle. But I mean if they were saying the same things, say racist things would you challenge them."

This can be seen to link to disablist attitudes of society (Swain, Finkelstein, French and Oliver 1993) that have been previously discussed. There emerges, from this group of teachers, an idea that the wider society actually feels guilty about this group of pupils:

"It's part of all that emotional stuff isn't it, it's about you know guilt because you're doing it for them, that's OK, they don't have to do it because you are doing it."

This can be see to link to the work of Sandow (1994) and Corbett (1994) where they expound the legacy of the influence of feelings of guilt and superstition related to disabled people. The negativity held by society is felt by some teachers to stem from misunderstanding about the children. The presumed nature of the children is the perceived source of attitudes. One teacher expresses this:

"Well a lot of the time they (people in the wider society) irritate me. I mean I want to stop and say no, no they're not like that you know it's not just all work and no rewards, it's not just sleepless nights. They actually ... there is a lot comes back the other way."

In believing this, the teacher may also be seen to be justifying her role in society as someone who does understand the children. Society's treatment of disabled people and the dominant social images it chooses to portray of this group appeared to be an issue for the second group of teachers in this stage of the research. One teacher offers a clear illustration of this:

"You know this country in general you know there is a big charity thing and that's again all about government, society and money and you know pictures of people, the blind dog and caliper."

In developing their discussion about the myths they believe people in the wider society hold, it appears that the teachers find the generalised assumptions made by people about pupils with pmld not helpful. Firstly in the way the children are perceived:

"I think it's something about does he take sugar, don't judge a book by it's cover. I mean we can have the most disabled child that in fact can have the most intellect."

Also in the way specialist knowledge is applied in a general way to all disabled children, which can be seen to conflict with the teachers' strong belief that this group of pupils are different:

"I think probably if they have experience of a child, they think they're all like that particular child, they don't think there are so many different individuals."

These perceptions of the children by society are felt by some teachers to be directed at themselves as professional teachers. The feeling of being a poor professional relation to mainstream teachers has been highlighted as important in the analysis of the individual interviews and is affirmed through these second group interviews. This

may be seen to support their strong social identity to each other and helps to justify the worthiness, for them, of the professional roles they choose to adopt.

There is an idea that the knowledge society holds is created mainly through the media and that this encourages, for the most part, a basic awareness to be developed, but as we have seen above, also offers dominant social images of disabled people as negative and requiring charity. The teachers in the group interviews appeared to show a preference for longer documentaries that allowed a greater depth of understanding to be gained. This may also be interpreted as reflecting the possible belief of this group of teachers that the knowledge they hold about these pupils is highly specialized and requires in depth processes to begin to disseminate and share it. A teacher tells a story about how, through the misfortune of a school fire, a group of pupils with pmld had to be relocated to a local primary school. This experience was the seed that allowed a process of inclusive and collaborative ventures to be developed. It is clear in this story that it was the adults who appeared to have the problems. The children interacted with each other naturally and spontaneously. The adults showed concern and this was displaced to their assumptions about the parents:

"I would image that maybe their parents would be really concerned about what was a very natural social situation for them (the children) because of their fear, because they hadn't had that opportunity to socialise with people with disabilities."

Group interview 2:1 p.4

The teacher recalls the experience was very positive and progressive links between the schools continued after the pupils had been relocated back into their segregated context. O'Brien (2001) highlights the management of integration projects between pupils with pmld and their mainstream pupils as particularly problematic and he illustrates how effective integration projects began small and built up gradually. For the teacher in this study there seemed to be no substitute for the practical experience of doing it.

The earlier notion of the personal qualities needed to be a teacher of pupils with pmld was supported in the discussion about mainstream teachers. The personal interest and motivation of teachers to want to find out more was perceived by one teacher as being very positive:

"Other teachers are now very curious, they want to know how you deliver science you know to children with profound and multiple learning and when you start, I mean one guy actually said to me I didn't want you stop talking, I really wanted to know more about that. So I think people are opening up, they're wanting to know what we do and how we do it."

<div align="right">Group interview 2:1 p.8</div>

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the final group interviews the themes I had earlier interpreted as being important to my meaning making was reflected back to the teachers. There was agreement that notions of specialist knowledge and teacher identity are central issues in the study. Also, it was confirmed that these issues are complex and highly personal to individual teachers. In their discussions it was clear that the teachers are accepting a role as a specialist teacher through the ideological embracement they appear to partake in. There appears to be an assumption between the teachers that all teachers who work with pupils with complex and profound and multiple learning difficulties share similar ideological beliefs. This, in turn, contributes to their ideas of shared identities as specialist teachers and feeds into the distancing away from mainstream teachers they appear to subscribe to. There are examples of these beliefs being confirmed through their experiences in and out of school. It appears that notions of specialist knowledge are an integral element of their identities as specialist teachers. In relation to specialist knowledge, this stage of analysis was helpful in developing greater understanding about the teachers' perspectives. There was affirmation that the teachers believe specialist knowledge is needed and there emerged issues relating to the nature of this knowledge. It is clear that some teachers believe this knowledge to be intuitive and difficult to discuss in detail, for others it is inextricably linked to a developmental and therapeutic curriculum. The issues that emerge relating to this is the possible influence of the teachers' understandings related to categorising their pupils with pmld. The increasing debate related to the 'P' levels appears to offer the teachers a process by which they are actively engaging in a wider debate about notions of specialist knowledge. The teachers discussed influencing factors that impact on the development of teacher identity and specialist knowledge including professional, personal experiences and society's knowledge. They discussed their belief that myth and misunderstanding pervade the way society perceives pupils

with pmld and them as teachers. This serves to support their identity as specialist teacher and contributes to the idea that specialist knowledge is indeed needed.

Chapter Ten

Notions of specialist knowledge and analysis of key influences

Introduction

Notions of specialist knowledge has emerged, both from the literature and from the teachers in my study, as a central issue in the process of meaning making I have engaged in. This chapter extends the discussion of specialist knowledge, integrating the expressed views of the teachers in this study with key literature some of this I have already discussed, and some is added in order to further my personal meaning making. The notion of specialist knowledge is discussed as problematic and its relationship to the teachers' ideas of identity is examined. Understanding some of the influences that contribute to the development and sustenance of specialist knowledge is a key factor in further meaning making, and these issues are also analysed in this chapter.

At the outset of this study I set out to find the Holy Grail of the knowledge of a group of teachers relating to the pupils with pmld that they teach. It was intended that I would highlight models of knowledge that may contribute to the professional knowledge base of teaching and learning for pupils with pmld. However, through my interpretation and analysis, the importance of the process of knowledge building, proved to be much more helpful in the meaning making I became involved in. An analysis of the influences on this process of knowledge building also became of great interest. Related to this, a concern of this chapter is what the teachers do not say, as well as what they do say, that is also relevant.

This nature of this chapter is one of evolving personal meaning making. At key points it is clear that I need to develop my own understandings related to particular concepts. The discussion focuses upon these concepts and then applies them to this study. The chapter begins with an analysis of notions of specialist knowledge, and develops to a discussion of specialist knowledge for pupils with pmld. There follows a discussion of notions of specialist knowledge for teachers of pupils with pmld, and progresses to an

analysis of some of the key influences that impact on the development of specialist knowledge, including the professional training experiences and the role of society's knowledge. The chapter concludes with a reflection of the issues raised in relation to my own professional understandings.

Notions of Specialist Knowledge

Almost twenty years ago Skrtic (1998) challenged notions of the construction of specialist knowledge and called for this to be critically analysed, not through scientific paradigms of research, but through the scrutiny of the philosophical principles of what constitutes specialist knowledge and why. In the analysis of some of the key issues surrounding specialist knowledge, I also explore the social construction of this knowledge and analyse the meaning teachers in this study may be making of this.

It is highlighted in the literature that there are notions of specialist knowledge needed for all pupils with special educational needs (Sasso 2001, Mather et al 2001). Garner (1994) talks about the notions of secret and alternative procedures occurring in special schools as perceived by teachers in mainstream education, which may lead to specialist knowledge being surrounded by myth. There are examples in the literature where specialist knowledge is made explicit (Coupe and Porter 1986), and, more recently, with the advent of the Teacher Training Agency Special Educational Needs Specialist Standards (1999), notions of specialist knowledge are clearly expressed. However, in this clarity there are also problems. Particular models of learning and disability, as discussed in a later section, will be seen to influence these notions of specialist knowledge. When discussing the knowledge of the teacher, Corbett (1994) suggests that the legacy of the medical model of disability remains influential. She believes this is illustrated by the dominance of categories in specialist knowledge. A teacher in this study sets herself apart from mainstream teachers through the knowledge she has compared to the knowledge she believes they have. She appears to suggest that her specialist knowledge is not appreciated in comparison to the subject knowledge of her colleagues in mainstream:

> " I felt teachers in special schools such as severe learning difficulty schools were not seen by mainstream teachers as not having the knowledge (subject)."

The nature of specialist knowledge

It became increasingly important to my meaning making to appreciate the problematic nature of specialist knowledge, beginning with further insight into how the teachers in my study define and articulate notions of specialist knowledge. Kauffman (1994) has questioned the efficacy of specialist knowledge:

> "Our research has discovered what works, but we simply lack the implementational circumstances to transfer this knowledge into practice."

Kauffman 1994 p 611

In the second group interviews, a teacher expresses her belief about the nature of specialist knowledge and it appears to be about the process of learning:

> "It's not about teaching your subject, I can teach this but I've got to teach everything else to these students that maybe I don't understand their behaviour, I don't understand how they are feeling. I don't know how what to teach, how to do it."

Group interview 2:2 p

This tension between subject teaching and the process of learning is evident in the literature. Haplin and Lewis (1996) illustrate how in special schools at the time, the teachers managed the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum and the individual needs of the pupils they teach:

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> "Curriculum development in this school is based on the notion of the child and how children learn. We develop curricula in accordance with that and relate it to the National Curriculum. So we use that, not the National Curriculum and we marry the two, so that we meet our statutory obligations, but maybe not quite in the way we are supposed to."

Haplin and Lewis (1996) p 100

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Here, teachers appear to be playing the National Curriculum game, but believing it to be inappropriate, manage the situation to enable them to apply their specialist knowledge about how the pupils are learning. This suggests the product and process of teaching is interrelated and complex. This relates to the work of Corbett (2001)

when she discusses connective pedagogy where the teacher connects into the needs of the learner, as well as the needs of the curriculum subject. This notion is not exclusive to the teaching and learning of pupils with pmld, but resides with all pupils with special educational needs. The Code of Practice (2001) assumes teachers are differentiating teaching and only need to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for pupils who require something 'different from' and 'additional to' this differentiated work.

The nature of specialist knowledge for pupils with pmld

Throughout the study, whilst talking about their pupils, the teachers offered insights into the knowledge they appear to believe is important for pupils with pmld to learn. This evolves to notions of specialist knowledge for this group of pupils. In the individual interviews teachers talk about this group of pupils as being highly individual with complex needs, often with significant neurological and sensory impairment. The role of a developmental curriculum has emerged as particularly important for the teachers. They talk about their pupils as operating at very early levels of development, particularly in the areas of cognition and communication. For the teachers in this study, communication appears to be a fundamental element of what they believe their pupils need:

"Communication, yeah, that's the starting point for everything really."

Individual interview 8

There is agreement about the central importance of communication for this group of pupils (Coupe O'Kane and Goldbart 1986, Ware 1994, and QCA 2001). In this study, some teachers link pupils communication to their very early cognitive functioning:

"I think it's got to start with the brain, you know the level of cognitive function determines profound as opposed to severe."

Individual interview 4

This can also be seen to relate to the importance of the cognitive elements of development teachers seem to believe it is important for their pupils to learn:

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"I'm doing cognition and communication fundamentally...looking at different aspects of cognition and communication and a range of opportunities that would facilitate those central things."

There is a particular influence of the work of Uzgris and Hunt (1978) that continues to impact on how knowledge for pupils with pmld is constructed. This is evident in the way the teachers in this study talk about the pupils they teach and the training they perceive to be valuable to them. One teacher recalls her initial training with enthusiasm:

"Something called the jigsaw approach, we looked at movement, perception, cognition and communication...making it relevant to the children...it was a lot of early developmental stuff really."

The developmental basis of specialist knowledge for pmld can be seen to have a strong Piagetian emphasis; this is firmly supported in the literature (Ware 1994, Ouvry and Saunders 1996, Orelove and Sobsey 1996 and Staves 2001). Barber and Goldbart (1998) talk about the learning theory of pupils with pmld being based in behaviorism, cognitive and generic error modelling systems. The work of Vygotsky (1978) challenges this. His theory promotes the idea that learning only takes place when it extends and outpaces present development through zones of proximal development. There was no insight gained in this study relating to the teachers subscribing to this latter concept of learning.

Whilst the teachers talk about the way they perceive their pupils are learning it also allows insight into the specialist knowledge they believe is important. The idea of time appears to be a significant aspect of specialist knowledge for pupils with pmld (Ware 1996, Male 1996). The teachers in this study confirm this. Time for the pupils to respond emerges as an important factor in their understanding of the teaching and learning that is occurring with pupils with pmld:

"I noticed the teacher stroked it on his arm and it took him a long time and then he reached and it wasn't there anymore, they'd taken it away."

The notion of individual learning styles of pupils with pmld is supported in the work of Aird (2001), where he discusses a whole school approach to identifying and teaching to the learning styles of pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties. However, this concept can also be seen to apply to children's learning in general. This would include the time needed for a pupil to respond. The work of Brown and McIntyre (1993) based in mainstream education found that time was an important issue for teachers in primary and secondary classes. In this work, like this present research, teachers expressed their concern, and discussed time as a contentious issue in the teaching and learning process they engage with. One teacher illustrates this as being particularly applicable to her teaching in an individual interview:

"They definitely need time which you can't give them, the time, what I mean is time to react."

Interview 7

Notions of time seem to present different challenges and emphasis for different groups of learners, but the focus on the issue of time remains the same. The teachers in this study also raise issues related to motivation, reward, presentation and pace as important elements in their pupils' learning and we have seen through the analysis so far that these ideas are supported in the literature related to teaching and learning for pupils with pmld.

Some of the teachers in my study talk about the need for pupils with pmld to receive therapy. The developing recognition of the value of this was applauded in the second group interview by one teacher:

"We've raised the status of things like rebound therapy, use of the hydro pool, quality of personal care routines...I've been looking at some parent responses and one of them says 'well don G...for providing holistic therapies for children with complex difficulties."

Group interview 2:1 p 10

There is a growing interest in therapeutic notions of specialist knowledge (Lacey and Cavat 1998, Lindsay et al 2001, QCA 2000, Aird 2001), where learners are offered therapies including aromatherapy and massage, as well as the more established therapies of hydro, physio and rebound. This more holistic approach appears to be effectively strengthened by a multi disciplinary team (Orelove and Sobsey 1996,

Clark 1993, Lacey and Ouvry 1998). Some of the teachers in this study suggest that a multi professional team is one way of meeting the complex and diverse needs of pupils with pmld. One teacher in the individual interviews illustrates this:

"Certainly working with multi professional colleagues has become so much part of the life and equality of understanding and complimenting each other."

Individual interview 2

Pupils with pmld do seem to have a large number of professionals involved in their education. However, the efficacy of such large and diverse professional teams has yet to be thoroughly evaluated, and this high role for a large number of professionals may be suspected of creating the professionally invested industry that is examined in the work of Tomlinson (1982) and Sandow (1994). In this study, in the first group interview, there were issues raised over the practice of positioning as advocated by physiotherapists. Firstly it became clear that the teachers were unsure of the reasons for the practice, and secondly one teacher questioned the impact of this on the quality of learning for her pupils.

Notions of specialist teacher knowledge

Inherent in notions of specialist knowledge for pupils are ideas about specialist knowledge for teachers. It follows that if there is specialist knowledge for pupils, the teachers of those pupils require specialist knowledge too. This section intends to problematise notions of specialist teacher knowledge and argues that it is the application of knowledge that changes with different groups of learners, not necessarily the knowledge itself. There has emerged from this study the concern by teachers that specialist knowledge is desirable. One teacher relates her concern that there is little formal training:

"Going back to knowledge as well, I certainly think there is no substitute for specialist training...it's just amazing that it isn't available now or that it is only available as inset."

Group Interview 2:1 p5

Male (1996) carried out research in schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties. She illustrates the concerns of head teachers that there is little training for teachers in the area of pmld:

"We have to initiate whole school staff development in pmld education because so many of our staff felt lacking in confidence in this area and there is little specialist training available."

Male (1996) p 315

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Teachers in this study talk about the importance of mentoring in developing this specialist knowledge, and there emerges an idea that specialist knowledge becomes the Holy Grail for the teachers, something they need to struggle to obtain. In the final group interview stage, one teacher translated this into a period of time: a generation of children. However, this is problematic as it can be seen to support a concept of a profession within a profession that is exclusive to teachers who are seen to possess the specialist knowledge. This is also explicit in my earlier discussion of teacher identity. It became increasingly important to my further meaning making to explore what currently constitutes specialist knowledge for pupils with special educational needs. The National Curriculum (*DfEE 1996*) offers specific messages that are intended for all children, and includes regular reference to inclusion statements. This has not always been the case. In previous incarnations, the National Curriculum paid little attention to pupils with special educational needs (Carpenter 1996, Haplin and Lewis 1996). Currently there are two government initiatives that allow an examination into what currently constitutes specialist knowledge for teachers and for pupils. The National SEN Specialist Standards (DfEE 1999) exemplify what is deemed specialist for teachers, and the QCA guidelines (QCA 2001) illustrate the specialist knowledge deemed appropriate for the pupils. The QCA guidelines have already been analysed in relation to teaching and learning issues for pupils with pmld. The Specialist Standards form a focus for the present discussion.

The development of the National SEN Specialist Standards has not been without controversy (Miller and Porter 1999, 2000) and has evolved through a consultation process. This evolution is important to this study, as the emphasis of the Standards change the explicit messages related to specialist knowledge. Examples of this are: notions of specialist teacher changing to notions of specialised knowledge shared by all teachers, categories based on disability changing to categories based on areas of development (Grant 2000). Understandings of specialist teaching are exemplified by

two quotations, both from a Teacher Training Agency (TTA) spokesperson. The first relates to the Standards before consultation:

> "They aimed to provide a basic framework which would help both schools and teachers, working in a variety of settings, to audit training needs, and from which relevant and effective training for these SEN specialists could be developed."

Grant 2000 p 9

The second related to the evolved Standards post consultation:

> "We began to think of them as providing a more structured approach to gaining specialist knowledge, understanding and skills in SEN, for any teacher, SEN specialist or not."

Grant 2000 p 10

The other notable shift in the Standards, post consultation, is in the nature of the categories they adopt. In the first draft the standards were grouped under three headings Core, Specialist and Key roles and responsibilities. In the specialist part there were nine headings, organised under particular pupil needs, severe and profound learning difficulties being one of them. This caused great debate, and, as Grant explains:

> "Many respondents (to the draft Standards) were clear that teachers' and pupils' needs do not fall into impairment categories. Others felt that the nine categories were helpful since they made it much easier to track teachers' needs."

Grant 2000 p 11

The need to categorise pupils with special educational needs has been linked with the current understandings of people with disabilities discussed in Chapter Two, and apparent in the teacher interviews in this study. This helps to explain why some professionals were concerned to maintain these in the Standards, since they may be seen to reflect their own frames of understanding. There is also evidence that categories based on disability are continuing to be employed in schools for pupils with pmld (Aird 2001). The post consultation Standards illustrates some shift in the type of categories, but the employment of categories remains evident. In the Extension Standards, the TTA appears to be trying to meet the needs of all their critics by including categories based on aspects of development and slipping in some extra

specific knowledge for teachers of pupils with autism, deafblind, deaf or visual impairment. Fitton (1994) illustrates the parental despair on the domination of categories and her concerns will not be allayed in the National SEN Specialist Standards. It is interesting to note the comment by the TTA:

> "We were advised of this very specialist knowledge by the relevant SEN organisations."

<div align="right">Grant 2000 p 13</div>

The views of Sandow (1994) and Tomlinson (1982) may be seen to offer some meaning making here with their social conspiracy and invested interest theories in the professionalisation of special educational needs. When analysing the nature of the content of the Standards, it becomes apparent that the influences of the individual/ psychological and medical models of disability remain dominant. Also, reflecting back on the meaning making I engaged in through the development of my initial conceptual framework, the contribution of pupils, parents and carers appears to be missing from the Specialist Standards.

The nature of teaching

The discussion of specialist knowledge urged me to try to make more sense of the nature of teaching in general and to apply these to my meaning making with the teachers in my study. At this stage of my meaning making what became interesting was what the teachers in my study *did not* talk about. There was little said about the nature of teaching. This may be explained in several ways. Firstly, I did not ask them directly about it. Secondly, they do not see the nature of teaching in general as applicable to their teaching, or thirdly, it may be that they do not have the conceptual framework to engage in such a discussion.

■■■
Eisner (1985) argues that teaching is an art form. He offers four reasons for this; it is aesthetic in nature; it is evolving and cumulative in nature; prescription and routine do not dominate it and it can be viewed as a process. It can also be seen to relate to notions of craft knowledge. Teaching as a craft is discussed in the work of Brown and McIntyre (1993), who suggest it relates to notions of routine in the classroom:

"A standardised pattern of action which a teacher undertakes recognising that certain conditions are impinging on his/ her teaching, in order to maintain particular desired states of pupil activity or promote specific forms of progress."

Brown and McIntyre 1993 p 83

Their work with teachers led them to believe that teachers were not able to explain why they adopted or discarded particular routines and that teachers' interactive thinking was not purposely intentional. Gallagher (1998) believes craft rather than scientific knowledge should form the basis of future development of specialist knowledge in SEN. He argues for this in reaction to the quest (which he perceives as unproductive) to obtain science like knowledge in special education to the detriment of philosophical issues. One teacher in this study talks about specialised knowledge as being intuitive:

"It's just instinct isn't it, it's just something...you know that these children need to know."

Group interview 2:3 p8

This is supported in the work of Bray, MacArthur and Ballard (1988) when they suggest:

"The value of 'personal knowing' in decision making in education, noting the indispensable role of the personal experiences of classroom teachers."

Bray, MacArthur and Ballard (1988) p 215

The concept of intuitive teaching and intuitive knowledge has been recently developed further (Hart 2000, Lieberman and Miller 1999 and Atkinson and Claxton 2000), but particularly through the work of Eraut (1994, 1999, and 2000) who supports notions of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is an integral element in this and is referred to as knowledge that cannot be described or explained and can only be applied (intuitively) in particular contexts and situations (Hart 2000). The work of Schon (1983) suggests the importance of professional reflection in the realisation of this tacit knowledge. He distinguishes between 'knowing in action' and 'reflection in action'. This is clearly discussed by Hart (2000) when she suggests:

"Knowing in action refers to the ability of professional practitioners to respond spontaneously, intuitively and intelligently to the complex ever changing situations of practice, but without necessarily being aware, or able to offer an account, of how they

arrive at the judgements implicit in their practice. Reflection in action is triggered when something unexpected, pleasing or puzzling happens."

Hart (2000) suggests that interactive teacher reflection is a more effective way of engaging teachers in an analysis of their knowledge and understanding. In reflecting on the interviews and discussions of teachers in this study, it appeared to me that they engage in 'knowledge in action' and talked about the intuitive element of their teaching. This appears to relate to the theory of tacit knowledge of teachers as highlighted by Schon (1983) and Eraut (2000). McIntyre (1998) suggests that due to the context of teaching, teachers have to develop new forms of knowledge that may be perceived as automatic, intuitive and non-reflective.

This contributes to my meaning making with the teachers in this study. They found it difficult to describe their specialist knowledge, which may be due to their specialist knowledge being related to notions of tacit knowledge, something that is intuitive and impossible for them to describe. However, this gives weight to the myth of specialist knowledge (Garner 1994) and is potentially problematic. As the knowledge remains tacit it continues to be surrounded by myths, which serve to make it applicable only to pupils with pmld. I argue for the need to analyse notions of specialist knowledge and, through the process of engaging in this, to make the tacit become explicit. The Specialist Standards and QCA guidelines have opened this process of discussion.

Eraut (2000) links his ideas of tacit knowledge to implicit learning, learning that occurs when the learner is not aware of it, the permeation model of theory building. This is influential in this study and serves to support the complex nature of notions of specialist knowledge. The teachers talk about experiences related to identified moments of learning (e.g. the teacher who attended a communication course and then developed objects of reference in her class). They also talk about experiences that can be interpreted as being influential in their knowledge and understanding (e.g. the teacher who tells of childhood experiences of disabled children in big prams and then later describes a pupil with pmld as a big baby). Eraut's (2000) work can be seen to offer a meta cognitive approach to the reflective process of Schon (1983) that offers another perspective to the complex meaning making relating to specialist knowledge:

"What becomes increasingly elaborated through professional experience and development is first the tacit knowledge base on which tuition relies and, second, the practice itself as the professional learns to make appropriate use of intuition and to take account its potential fallibility."

Eraut 2000 p259

There is also a school of thought that suggests teaching is a craft. A major proponent of teaching as a craft is the work of Eisner (1985) who emphasises the imaginative aspects of teaching, which itself is pluralistic. Cooper and McIntyre (1996) offer an illustration of the specialist craft knowledge of teachers in differentiating for their pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. They highlight particular and specific teaching strategies as instrumental in this craft knowledge. They cite for example, the wider use of pictorial prompts, ensuring the pupils know exactly what is expected through greater verbal clarification, and allowing some pupils greater time to complete activities. They report that the teachers talked about employing these strategies with different pupils at different time through the process of teaching and learning. Norwich (1996) questions the efficacy and integrity of dedicated strategies as tools for effective teaching of pupils with special educational needs. It could be suggested that the strategies employed by teachers in the Cooper and McIntyre research might actually be examples of effective teaching strategies for all pupils. The work of Askew, Brown, Johnson, Rhodes and William (1997) offers examples of strategies deemed effective for the teaching and learning of pupils with learning difficulties. They analysed the employment of these strategies across effective and less effective teachers and found the strategies were being used in both situations. When further scrutinized, strategies, believed to be apposite for pupils with special educational needs, were classed as broad and vague. As well as questioning the nature of the strategies as specialist, they also suggested that the employment of such strategies did not necessarily mean that the teaching was effective.

This led me to explore notions of pedagogy to help me to understand more why the teachers felt that what they were doing was different. Alexander (2000) suggests that it important to clarify the difference between teaching and pedagogy:

"It is that teaching is an act while pedagogy is both act and discourse."

Alexander (2000) p 540

He goes onto clarify that pedagogy transcends teaching. It involves the performance of teaching as well as the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform the teaching. This was an important milestone in my meaning making and helped me to clarify the difference between pedagogy and teaching in relation to specialist knowledge. Bray, MacArthur and Ballard's (1988) work discussed research linked to effective pedagogy for pupils with pmld and concluded that:

> "Interventions for pupils with mild to profound disabilities are increasingly approximating what is recognised as good 'mainstream' teaching practice that recognises the value of pupil initiations and of teacher flexibility."

Bray, MacArthur and Ballard 1988 p 213

The work of Norwich (1996) has recently applied a similar analysis of special educational needs. In exploring notions of efficacy he found that the issues were problematic and complex. This builds on the work of Slee, Weiner and Tomlinson (1998) who raised concerns that notions of effectiveness may be influenced by issues relating to the context of that evaluation. They subscribe to the opinion that the interests and inherent motivation of the professionals carrying out the evaluation influence any analysis. This may be seen to link to the social conspiracy theory of Sandow (1994) and the earlier sociological analysis of Tomlinson (1982).

Earlier work by Norwich (1996) developed a pedagogic framework, which allows further understanding of perceptions of specialist knowledge:

> "Three broad kinds of pedagogic need can be identified in this framework: pedagogic needs common to all learners; pedagogic needs specific, or distinct, to groups of learners; and pedagogic needs unique to individual learners."

Norwich 1996 p. 20

In doing this, Norwich shifts the discussion towards pupil learning as opposed to teacher teaching. This appears to be the model inherent in the QCA (2001) planning guidelines already discussed. Bruner (1996) has clearly contributed seminal work to the understanding of pedagogy. He discusses four main models of how children learn:

- Seeing children as imitative learners where the teacher leads the children through an apprenticeship to the expert knowledge of the teacher;

- Seeing children as learning from didactic exposure where the teacher espouses knowledge and expertise that the children take on board;

- Seeing children as thinkers presupposes the children can do and think things themselves and through a mutual relationship the teacher helps the child to develop their personal understandings into a shared frame of reference;

- Seeing children as knowledgeable where the teacher's role is to enable the child to transfer their knowledge into the culture of the time and place.

Considering the interviews and discussions in this research, it appears that the teachers appear to consider the pupils they teach as imitative learners, learning from the didactic exposure to the knowledge and expertise of the teacher. There is little evidence of the teachers in this study viewing the pupils as knowledgeable and contributing to a learning encounter where the teacher mediates or helps the pupil to apply their present knowledge into the cultural context of the society. The teachers do engage in helping the pupils to generalise what they have already been taught by the teacher at a previous time

Influences on the development of specialist knowledge

Possible reasons why specialist knowledge exists can be extrapolated from the literature, and has also emerged through my research. Sandow (1994) talks about the vested interest of professionals in the concept of specialist knowledge. This clearly links to her social conspiracy model. In his work, Finkelstein (1997) raises great concerns about specialist knowledge, particularly in the ownership of such knowledge, it's dominating principles of notions of normality, the notion of separate disciplines and through this the complex relationship of notions of cure and care. Mitchell and Weber (1999) also warn of nostalgia becoming a form of knowledge that precludes any challenge to the status quo of knowledge.

There is evidence that for some teachers in this study believe strongly in the need for specialised training for the specialist knowledge. Those that have completed specialist courses express their concern that such courses no longer exist:

> "It seems an impossibility to me to cover (4 years work) you just snatch at bits, teachers just don't understand these children."

This concern over the training of teachers to work with pupils with pmld is also present in the literature:

> "The complexity of the difficulties experienced by children now in special schools and units, combined with the impact of recent changes in legislation and provision, may have made the training currently available less relevant."

Ware and Julian (1998) p32

The professional training experiences of the teachers, along with their personal experiences, clearly have a role to play in the development and challenging of their knowledge base. The nature of the training that the teachers have experienced is an important influencing factor. Teacher training experiences are where teachers are introduced to the professional models of pedagogy. This influence extends to the nature of the specialist training courses dedicated to pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties. In this study, a teacher illustrates the influence of the psychological model when talking about the course she completed:

> "It was an excellent course. I think for all of us whether you had some background in special education or not it took you through the developmental process involved in, you know, child development and specifically related to children, whose you know, profile wasn't following normal lines."

Individual interview 9

The teachers in this study spoke very highly of the specialised teacher training courses that they had attended. Reflecting on the models and paradigms of disability it may be assumed that the specialised courses were influenced by the psychological/ individual models of disability (Corbett 1994, Sandow 1994, Barber and Goldbart 1998). The understandings of the teachers in my study may be seen to relate to the nature of their training experiences. This can be seen as problematic. Firstly, the domination of the medical/ individual/ psychological models in the pre service dedicated courses and the impact of this, as seen in the teachers in my study, particularly on their range of professional understandings. Secondly, the issue relating to the teachers perceiving what they are doing as being very different teaching to that which is being carried out

in mainstream schools. This is supported in the classroom based research of Haplin and Lewis (1996). In my study, these notions of difference can be seen to help the teachers maintain their identities as dissimilar from mainstream teachers. It suggests a distinct element of the teaching profession, which requires different specialist knowledge and different types of training from other teachers in that profession. There is also a problem with the rhetoric of legislation that can be seen to compound these notions of difference. Some legislation is calling for greater partnership and fluidity (DfEE 1997, DfEE 1998,) between special and mainstream education. However, there are also messages about notions of difference emanating from legislation (DfES 2001) that I believe to be problematic as they place an emphasis on differences in teaching to the detriment of similarities.

The story of teacher education for teachers who wish to work with pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities can be read as a tragedy and a plight (Miller and Porter 1999, Aird 2001). The impact of the White Paper (1985) was instrumental in moving any specialist training from pre service to in service. However, as the years have gone by, the in-service courses available have moved from undergraduate to postgraduate level, where they are mainly academic and theoretical in nature. It appears that teachers are not supported in applying and developing their pedagogic knowledge in a supported experiential context. One of the teachers in my study illustrates the impact of this lack of discrete training and accompanying experience that a pre-service course offers:

"A new teacher coming into the profession she's not gone through that before so she doesn't really know what to expect or what to say."

Group interview 2:3 p.2

Considering the teachers as learners, it appears that the group of teachers in this study may be perceiving teacher learning as imitative, needing a teacher to model and demonstrate expert knowledge. This is exemplified when the teachers talked about effective courses and training in the individual interviews:

" I thought that everything she said, you thought, yeah that's Johnny or Fred"

And,

"Linking theory to practice...courses grounded in practice"

It is clear that their perceptions of an effective course relate to the direct application of the course to their teaching, and the experience of the tutor relating to their context of teaching. There have been concerns raised relating to the nature of teacher education courses that rely on didactic and theoretical modes of delivery and learning. Stowitchek, Cheney and Schwartz (2000) illustrate how the experiential modes of teacher learning so evident in pre-service teacher education are lacking in in-service teacher education. They challenge the assumption that:

> "Practicing teachers have the ability to transfer information delivered in workshops, institutes and summer courses into applied use."

Stowitchek, Cheney and Schwartz 2000 p 142

This research found that teachers who were offered experiential learning opportunities, with supported mentor support, showed a greater rate of applying their new knowledge than those teachers who had not had this experiential component. The teachers in my study appear to be calling for greater experiential courses that are grounded in practice. Notions of teacher as reflective practitioner are present in the literature on teacher learning, Schon's (1983, 1995) contribution to this area is enormous. He has done much to advance our understanding of the role of reflection in practice in the process of teaching:

> " Perhaps there is an epistemology of practice that takes fuller account of the competence practitioners display in situations of uncertainty, complexity, uniqueness and conflict. Perhaps there is a way of looking at problem setting and intuitive artistry that presents these activities as describable."

Schon (1995) p 63

The influence of the knowledge of society

Some of the main understandings of how society makes meaning of this group of pupils and teachers help to make meaning of the knowledge base of the teachers themselves. A teacher in this study hints at the nature of society's knowledge:

> "There's a lot of myths isn't there? A lot of people seem to have myths about what happens in a school like this."

Another talks about the influence of her understandings of how society perceives the pupils she teaches:

> "There's just a view...is it worthwhile that it does that there is all of this investment into these poor people who actually can't give anything back to society."

The way society's knowledge is created and how this knowledge influences the understandings of teachers contributes to the meaning making of the teachers in this study by setting the context in which they work. This analysis began in an earlier chapter and is extended here. Corbett (1994) shows that, although there have been major developments in the way disabled people are understood, the historical legacy of the medical model continues to be the major influential model:

> "Despite the academic debates and civil rights movements of disabled people and their allies, the medical model of disability (as a dominant discourse) has not been dislodged."

Corbett 1994 p 33

In this exploration of the relationships between the teachers' understandings and some of the understandings related to disability, the difficult nature of the meaning making is highlighted. This is exemplified through an analysis of the contribution of the work of Sandow (1994) and Corbett (1994).

Sandow (1994) highlights the different models of perception relating to disability that have been historically inherent in society. She argues that each of these varying models have had different implications for the way this group of people are understood and perceived. She discusses seven main models: Magical (disabilities seen as acts of God or devil, children perceived as very different); Moral (disabilities

seen as child's own failure, due to the their willful nature); Medical (disabilities seen as something wrong with child, doctors emphasised causation); Intellectual (disabilities seen as IQ score that is constant); Social Competence (disability seen as dangerous with possibility of child 'contaminating' others); Disadvantage (disability seen as fault of family); and Social Conspiracy (disability seen as construct that is kept alive by professionals due to invested interests and professionalisation of disability). Each of these models carry different implications for the way society makes meaning of disabled people. Although there are subtle changes the main thrust of the models and implications appear negative. Table Seven illustrates this.

Table Seven
The implications of varying models of understanding (Sandow 1994)

Magical model	fear and superstition
Moral model	guilt, apathy and despair
Medical model	fear and prejudice
Intellectual model	self-fulfilling prophesy
Social Competence model	normalisation and segregation
Disadvantaged model	blame and compensation
Social Conspiracy model	marginalisation and vested interests of professionals

However, the work of Corbett (1994) offers another, historical perspectives of how children with special educational needs have been viewed. She suggests the emphasis of these models has been dominantly based on practice to the detriment of critical analysis. She offers a framework for understanding special educational needs that is linked to psychological, sociological, philosophical and political discourses. These, in turn, have implications for the way this group of children are understood and responded to. Table Eight highlights this connection.

Table Eight
The implications of varying models of understanding (Corbett 1994)

Psychology	normality and defining abnormality
Sociology	defining boundaries of normality
Philosophical	worthiness and normalization
Political	struggle for 'rights'

As discussed in Chapter Two there are also other perspectives that contribute to the understanding of society's view of disabled people and a particular issue here is the missing voice of young disabled pupils and their families and carers.

When reflecting on the interviews and discussions with the teachers in this study, it becomes clear that some of their meaning making can be traced to different models of understanding relating to disability. A teacher talks about her pupils in a way that appears to relate to the magical and psychological models. The pupil is perceived as coming from another world:

"They have to have the world brought to them."

Group interviews1: 2 p.13

The psychological and intellectual models appear to be particularly influential for one teacher:

"Cognitive component is for me critical...they are usually at a very early stage of development, pre symbolic, pre representational."

Individual interview 6

Another teacher talks about his perceptions of society's understandings of his group of pupils:

"You know, this country in general you know there is a big charity thing and that's again all about government, society and money and you know pictures of people, the blind dog and caliper."

Group interview 2:1 p 5

This teacher appears to be suggesting that because of the way society views his pupils, his role as teacher is even more important. This may be seen to relate to the social conspiracy model where the children are perceived as different, their differences are put on show and it is assumed they require something additional that is charity based. It can also be seen to relate to the psychological model where the 'non conformity' of the children to the 'normal' population is highlighted and the quest to make them 'as normal as possible' is made. Russell's quotation emphasises this in relation to the impact of the Children Act (1989), which was to require local authorities:

> "To provide services for children with disabilities that are designed to minimize the effects of the children's disabilities and to give them the opportunity to lead lives which are as normal as possible."

> Russell 1996 in Carpenter et al p 248

This is problematic in the context of my research. On the one hand, teachers express their views of the needs of this group of pupils as being highly complex and individual, and on the other, in the main, teach a curriculum based on normal child development. It appears that the teachers' notions of professionalism are directly related to specialist knowledge. Hoyle and John (1995) discuss notions of professionality in teaching. They discuss the need for a body of knowledge and skills a teacher must have, which can be seen as specialist knowledge relating to trying to normalise their pupils. This may also be seen to contribute to the meaning making about the teacher identity the teachers have with each other and separating them from mainstream teachers.

Through the analysis of the teachers' interviews and discussions it seems that particular models have more influence than others. There appears to be an emphasis on the psychological, intellectual and medical models. As illustrated by one teacher:

> "A child who has not got the ability for the messages to get through to the right parts of the body at the right time and are very jumbled up."

> Individual interview 7

This I believe to be particularly interesting, in relation to the models the teachers do not appear to subscribe to. For example, the political and social models that relate to the social paradigm have developed from the work of disabled theorists, whilst other, apparently more influential models, are models developed by non disabled people. This leads to the questioning of the fundamental drives of the other models. The models of disability developed by non disabled professionals could be guilty of Sandow's (1994) social conspiracy theory, in which the special needs industry is demarcated more and more, thus creating the need for increasingly more professionals in a segregated context. This may also help to explain the teachers' belief, in my study, that they are different from other teachers and the pupils they teach are different from other pupils.

However, it has to be acknowledged that the application of models in this way is problematic, individual teachers are influenced in different ways and express different ideas. This is illustrated when discussing the possible influence of the social conspiracy model (Sandow 1994). One teacher appears to subscribe to this and strongly states her case for the maximum involvement of a teacher in all aspects of a pupil's life in the school:

> "A child who would be dependent on an adult to meet their needs in all ways...somebody who is going to interpret, be an advocate for them."

<div align="right">Interview 2</div>

However, another teacher talks about the importance of developing choice making strategies for their pupils:

> "The most important thing is that these children have a choice...they are entitled to a choice in their life."

<div align="right">Individual interview 11</div>

To try to understand more about why these models influence and inform teacher understanding, it is important to consider the role of influential experiences. The influence of the personal and professional experiences of the teachers appear to be particularly meaningful to the their knowledge base. In the Individual interviews it became clear that personal experiences played a major part in forming understandings and perceptions of teachers. A common feature of some of these critical moments is

the fear and superstition that surrounded the events, be it in a church with children wearing oversized and drab clothing, or in the street where there were clearly feelings of fright and prejudice about disabled people. The professional critical moments that teachers talk about include examples of working and experiencing long-term hospital as the educational settings for this group of pupils. Marvin (1998) highlights the change in expectations from health care to education of people who work with pupils with pmld after the 1970 Education (Handicapped) Act. However, Tilstone (1991) indicates that in her research, in reality, there was little change to the practice of professionals working with children with severe and profound learning difficulties. This may help to explain the lasting legacy of the medical and psychological model.

Personal reflections

From a personal perspective, it became clear through this stage of analysis that my own teaching and understanding has been influenced by some of these models too, particularly the intellectual, psychological and medical. On critical reflection, it is the social conspiracy model that has probably been the least acknowledged by myself, but is, in fact, the model that currently helps me to make meaning of my own work. The words of Sandow (1994) were as salutary for me as they are for her:

> "Many people reading this book will have come to be involved in special education for humanitarian reasons, but it is salutary at least to consider how dependent we become on the existence of children with special educational needs."

Sandow 1994 p 10

My own professionalism is built upon the existence of disabled people. Without disabled children, I would not have a profession. Like some of the teachers in this study, my professional raison d'etre was to focus on individual children and try to make them as normal as possible; to fit in. Engagement with the issues relating to the social paradigm has helped me to challenge my earlier assumptions and beliefs, particularly the social creationist perspective outlined by Allan et al. (1998) that helped me to understand and appreciate the influence of environment and institutional barriers to the creation of disability. The tensions highlighted in an earlier chapter relating to the relationship between disability and impairment is also present in my own meaning making. Like Ware (1996) I would not wish to discount the social

perspectives in the creation of disability but neither should the impact of individual multiple disabilities be discounted. Through this, I continually grapple with my personal interpretation of the complex relationship between impairment and disability. This tension does create an ongoing struggle that I continue to engage with and reflects the difficult process of critical self reflection that Barton talks about:

"In the struggle for understanding there will be moments when we are unsure, and uncertain about what we do."

Barton 1999 p.4

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed notions of specialist knowledge, which is inextricably linked to theories of pedagogy and learning. The appraisal of specialist knowledge by Norwich (1996) concludes that, in his opinion, there are:

"Common teaching principles and strategies and different and practical ways of applying and implementing them for pupils with difficulties in learning is a crucial one."

Norwich 1996p 30

This chapter has shown the problematic nature of notions of specialist knowledge and the processes employed to analyse these notions. In relation to my own meaning making, pedagogic discussions in the light of work of Alexander (2000), offer a possible way forward that can help to clarify similarities and differences in aspects of pedagogy. There appears to be an historical concentration on the differences in teaching and learning that may have led to the myth of specialist knowledge and created the quest to obtain this knowledge. There also needs to be a process of evaluation that looks towards similarities in teaching and learning for all pupils and one that challenges the status quo of the knowledge base of specialist knowledge, but that supports teachers in the application of their knowledge in a range of contexts. There are already some examples of this occurring for pupils with pmld. In relation to sexuality, the work of Downs and Craft (1996) offers an illustration of challenging the status quo of the knowledge base. Similarly the work in self-advocacy and PCP planning highlighted by Lacey and Ouvry (1998) offers signs that this challenge may be occurring. However, the new forms of knowledge developing from disabled people

themselves must also contribute to the debate. A critical debate of pedagogy is called for. Mclaren (1997) talks about critical pedagogy that:

> "Calls for the construction of a praxis where peripheralised peoples are no longer induced to fear and obey the white gaze of power, where bonds of sentiment and obligation can be formed among diverse groups of oppressed peoples, where resistance can enable schools to become more than instruments of monitorisation and social replication."

Mclaren 1997 p. 526

The important influence of society's knowledge has been analysed, particularly in relation to the development and sustenance of specialist knowledge. Personal reflection has highlighted the influence of these issues on my own professional meaning making. Through this I have come to realise the importance of supporting teachers in continued professional development that enables them to engage in this critical analysis, one that involves the wider notions of pedagogy and one that looks for similarities in effective pedagogy for all pupils. However, I also realise the need to help and support teachers to translate effective pedagogy to teaching and learning in the classroom. This, I suggest, would most effectively occur through experiential learning opportunities.

Chapter Eleven

Reflecting on the process of research: discoveries and complexities

Introduction

This chapter analyses the decision making processes I engaged with during the study relating to the process of research. It highlights the revelations and complexities emerging through this process. The study has been highly personal in nature, both from the perspective of the teachers, where they became involved in discussions relating to their personal experiences and beliefs and from the perspective of my own meaning making. The problematic character of the process of the research is related to the complexity of meaning making. Meanings are highly personal to individuals. They are a product of social interaction and the process of meaning making is developed through personal interpretation. This presents difficulties and dilemmas, some of which I did not fully appreciate until the later stages of the research. Central to the complexity was my role within the research process and this chapter begins with a reflection of issues related to this. I then proceed to reflect on issues of social theory and the methodological decisions I have made.

Reflections on self reflections

The nature of the research evolved throughout the five years of its duration. It became much more organic than I had ever envisaged. At the outset I had intended to make meaning *of* the teachers but this developed to the meaning making *with* the teachers. This contributed to the research. It became much more holistic but it also presented dilemmas related to my role in the research process. Analysing ethical concerns associated with research into teacher thinking, Sabar (1994) highlights the tendency for the researcher to dominate the research process. The story of the research becomes the researcher's story rather than that of the teachers'. This is a concern that is applicable to my research even though I employed particular strategies from grounded theory, which ensured there was some synergy between data collection and interpretation. I drew from critical theory the importance of self reflection. This became an explicit part of this thesis and represents significant personal development

and meaning making. This proved to be a process that clarified and challenged my own assumptions, and most importantly, my own identity as a teacher of pupils with pmld. At times in the research I felt as if I had entered a hall of many mirrors and had seen myself from a different perspective: a process that proved to be personally difficult and challenging. Clough and Barton (1995) believe this to be a crucial part of the research process:

> "It is essential that we critically engage with our presuppositions and challenge disablist assumptions."
>
> Clough and Barton 1995 p 1

Particularly apposite examples of this were the moments of self realisation I engaged in: the realisation that the individual and psychological models of disability have dominantly influenced my own teaching; the realisation that the theories of disability emerging from the social paradigm had not been part of my understanding or practice; and the realisation that I was an integral part of the professional industry that surrounds disabled children. I could possibly be responsible for compounding their disabilities. Other contemporaries have also participated in this process of reflection (Byers 1996, Corbett 1994) and helped me to appreciate the value of these personal struggles involved in the research process that makes it a developmental (Cheliminsky and Shadish 1997) and dynamic process. Shepherd and Watson (1982) advocate this process of personal meaning making:

> "Personal meanings arise from events and relationships which a person interprets within his most basic frame of reference- his awareness of being an individual, conscious of personal agency and personal biography."
>
> Shepherd and Watson 1982 p 1

More recently this has been supported in the work of Hollis (1996):

> "The mind's construction is built around an understanding of self, and that is elusive partly because it changes with time and place, partly because we do not grasp it properly even amongst ourselves."
>
> Hollis 1996 p 91

Reflections on the contribution of social theory and my chosen paradigm of research

I chose qualitative research methodology at the outset of the study believing it would enable me to tease out the meaning making of a group of teachers about their pupils with pmld. I felt it offered my work a process to engage with meaning making:

> "The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined and measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially construed nature of reality...they seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning."

> Denzin and Lincoln 1994 p.4

Qualitative methodology allowed me to engage with meaning making. However, it also presented dilemmas for my work. The organic nature of the research has been complex. The decisions I made at key points in the research had a major impact on the evolving product and process, but these decisions could have been other ones. My thesis relating to specialist knowledge and teacher identity could have been different if I had perhaps made different decisions. An example of this was my choice to return to the individual interviews and complete a holistic and almost narrative analysis and the subsequent engagement with theories of social construction. Clearly, interpretation became a major aspect of my research. Hughes ((1990) believes that interpretavist social science allows notions of meaning to be explored. He analyses the complexity of interpreting meaning and his reflections on the role of language in meaning making struck a chord in my reflections on the struggles and dilemmas that I encountered:

> "Common meanings are embedded in the language of a community and in all the ways in which the members of that community are able to talk about, agree upon, disagree upon, make sense of, pray to... investigate the social reality constructed through that language."

> Hughes 1990 p117

The powerful and problematic role language played in my research process emerged as a complicating factor. I set out to interpret the frames of reference by which the teachers in this study appear to be influenced through the language they use to talk about their pupils with pmld. At the outset I had highlighted language and terminology as a potentially difficult issue, and intended to ensure my language was clear, and shared with the teachers. Considering the range of experiences my sample

group brought to the study this intention, in retrospect, was over ambitious. The work of Foucault (Barth 1998), Ball (1994) and Slee (2001) helped me to appreciate the power relations involved in the use and application of language and how language can maintain or challenge the status quo. The language I employed must have impacted on the responses of the teachers to the research. An example of this was when I asked teachers to define profound and multiple learning disabilities in the individual interviews. Although I was endeavoring to ensure notions of pmld were left open for the teachers to respond to, the term 'define' has historical baggage that may have encouraged the teachers to talk about their pupils in a particular and categorical way. Through my own meaning making I came to appreciate the problems of interpretation between notions of a discussion and a discourse, and my earlier application of discourse appeared naïve when reflecting back. Foucault himself clarifies this:

> "Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the power it carries with it."

> Foucault 1972 p 225

This highlights the potential influence of my own interpretations of language and the possible implications of the role of language as a tool that represents the world of the teachers (Herda 1999:22).

Three main approaches to social theory were drawn upon for this study at the outset. Grounded theory, symbolic interactionism and critical theory. Through my study, they have complemented each other and helped me to further my meaning making. However, it became apparent that I was becoming increasingly interested in the construction of meaning and I needed to go to understandings of social construction theory to support this. Through my emphasis on meaning making my overarching philosophy has had its roots in symbolic interactionism and grounded theory. Critical theory has contributed to my process of analysis, particularly from a wider perspective. I was encouraged to analyse why teachers develop particular theories, including the social and political influences that may impact on these. Critical theory had a role to play in my own personal meaning making. As already discussed, I encountered dilemmas that I had to work through on a personal level whilst engaged in the research process. This represents the developmental potential of research

(Cheliminsky and Shadish 1997), but also represents the difficult struggles that are encountered through the process of critical self reflection (Barton 1999).

Through my analysis of the construction of meaning making, the influence of social construction has played a role in helping me to:

"Highlight the essentially contingent nature of cultural meaning"

Erickson and Murphy 1999 p 146

It has encouraged me, along with critical theory, to ask why. An example of this is the complexity of the epistemology of specialist knowledge, and how this contributed to my own meaning making and also the organic nature of the research process. Social construction was also instrumental in my meaning making of teacher identity. The understanding of how identities are developed, sustained and challenged became focus of my work. The intricate character of the construction of identity illustrated to me how identity is a highly personal and variable concept that requires in depth analysis of each individual.

The methodology of grounded theory played a major role in the study. It offered a systematic and cumulative process of analysis that helped to ensure interpretations are continually clarified and checked out with the teachers themselves. The pertinence of Strauss and Corbin's (1994) discussions of grounded theory to this study highlights this contribution:

"Theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does so through continuous interplay between data collection."

Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.274

However, the process of clarification is itself problematic. In the spirit of qualitative analysis I adopted different levels of data management and interpretation that impacted on the different levels of analysis of the study. An example is in the individual interviews, where I initially completed a thematic analysis that reduced, organised and grouped data, then returned to the complete and whole interview transcripts. This allowed me to make different meaning from the first stage of meaning making. During the second level of analysis I was collating detailed personal

and professional histories of the teachers and felt that the almost narrative and biographical data presentation was central to this stage of my own meaning making. Goodley's (2001) belief in the coming of the age of biography was pertinent to this study and Pugach (2001) expounds the contribution of qualitative research methodology clearly:

> "It is typically through qualitative methodology that stories are told. These stories are anchored in real, local meaning and experience."

> Pugach (2001) p439

Although this level of analysis made particular contributions to my research, it did raise concerns about the research process. In the detailed analysis of these interviews, issues of confidentiality and anonymity emerged. I identified with the concerns of Kelchlermans (1994) who discusses the intricate research processes that are biographical in nature and the tensions that emerge relating to protection of respondents' anonymity and the need to employ extensive quotations to support interpretations. At the beginning, critical theory offered a process that attempted to understand the possible influences impacting on meaning making, and to place the understandings of teachers in a wider social political context. Critical theory was drawn upon in order to offer meaning to the teachers' meanings:

> "Critical researchers maintain that the meaning of an experience or an observation is not self evident. The meaning of any experience will depend upon the struggle over the interpretation and definition of that experience."

> Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994 p. 144

For me, critical theory has been a major influencing factor in the research. Its demand to look beyond and problematise the issues has allowed me to engage with critical and analytical processes that have greatly contributed to my own meaning making. As Kincheloe and Mclaren (1994) put it, there has been a struggle over interpretation of the data. The shared identity between the teachers and myself has been a constant influence in my analysis and, although critical theory made me acknowledge this and attempt to move beyond it, the influence remained throughout the study.

Reflections on the sample group of teachers

The fourteen teachers that made up the sample of this study represented a variety of ages, responsibilities in school, experiences and gender (although women out numbered men by eleven to three). All the teachers worked in segregated provision. There was a variety of contexts for teaching, including integrated classes in a special school, segregated classes for pupils with pmld in a special school, early years classes, to classes for young adults. The sample group presented a dilemma to the research. They may be representative of teachers working in segregated provision, but not teachers working in a more inclusive provision in mainstream education. When first thinking about the sample of teachers for this study, I chose two local education authorities (LEAs) and through contacts ascertained where the pupils with identified pmld were being taught. At that point in time there was no mainstream provision for this group of pupils. The six schools in the two LEAs offering provision for pupils with pmld were contacted via the head teacher. Issues of control by the head teachers emerged. I spoke to each head teacher describing my research project and they then approached the staff in school. I contacted each school to see if any teachers were interested enough for me to go to school and talk to them. Five out of the six schools invited me to a staff meeting to talk about the research and ask for volunteer teachers who would be willing to be part of the research. However, one head teacher said I could talk to his deputy only (who was a new appointment and not yet at the school). I later found out that other teachers in that school had expressed an interest to the head teacher, but he had decided, for reasons of his own, to offer the opportunity only to his deputy. As it turned out, the deputy did not join the study as he felt his new role in the school would be too demanding to take on any extra commitments. The fourteen teachers came from the other five special schools, two schools from one LEA and three schools from another. During the course of the research there was a major reorganisation in one of the LEAs, which meant that that the three schools reduced to two. All teachers in the study from this LEA moved to one of these schools. All fourteen teachers who began the research stayed in the research until its completion.

How did the questionnaires contribute to the meaning making

The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the professional life history of individual teachers in the study. It was indeed the starting block for the study and provided the first point of contact between myself, as researcher, and the teachers. This was important, as some of the teachers knew me very well as a teacher

and manager. Some of them knew my close relationship to the head of one of the schools. So, for me the questionnaire stage, which was completed on an individual basis following a group introduction, was a time for me to discuss ethics and my role as researcher. The questionnaire design was simple, structured and straightforward, something I felt was important as it would hopefully put the teachers at their ease and express to them how the research was interested in finding out more about their thinking and beliefs. The questionnaire was designed in a highly structured way, as Sapsford and Jupp (1996) say:

> "One in which the procedures of data collection are carefully laid down so that individuals...are required not to depart from them in any way."

Sapsford and Jupp 1996 p 96

This was done to enable the gathering of similar types of information about each of the teachers and was successful in this. There was a section at the end for other comments that the teachers could complete if they wished to add anything they felt was pertinent. This was included as a catch all, and to support a feeling of wanting to hear the teachers' thoughts. In the actual questionnaire completion, this section was not filled in by any of the teachers. Questions relating to the value of this section emerged. Retrospectively, it made me feel better that my highly structured questionnaire included an additional avenue for expression by the teachers, but it did not contribute anything to the quality of information gathered.

The pilot process of the questionnaire (on six teachers who work with pupils with pmld from a neighbouring local education authority) was beneficial and enabled fine-tuning of the questionnaire to take place. The questionnaire provided the information it set out to do by gathering some biographical information about the teachers and the beginnings of some thoughts about their teaching of pupils with pmld. However, the information gathered at this stage was mostly technical and did not engage in the intricacies of meaning making that later methodologies did. My analysis of the questionnaires was compiled and reflected back to the teachers. This was done on a group and individual level.

Individual interviews

The process of interviewing and talking with teachers has been shown to be an effective way of gaining understanding about teachers (Duckworth 1999). The interviews in this study were instrumental in engaging teachers in meaning making, although they presented difficult issues for the research. These issues were related to the possibly raised expectations the teachers may have had about the fact that they were contributing to this research project. The individual interviews allowed in depth discussions to occur which lasted for between 50 and 80 minutes depending on individual teachers. There was a structure to the interviews, a beginning and an end. The beginning stemmed from the completed analysis of the questionnaires, from a group perspective and an individual one. The group analysis represented my interpretations of the completed questionnaires of the whole of the sample group (although this analysis was cumulative as questionnaires were returned) and focussed upon the professional biography of teachers (qualifications, age, gender, years experience, work in mainstream schools, work outside of teaching, etc). This provided an effective starting place for the interviews as they reflected on the group analysis. The individual analysis related to their more detailed individual contributions to the questionnaires and helped to shift the focus of the interview from 'all' to 'you'. Particular guiding questions were employed to ensure the interview gathered some of the information I had earlier decided was important to the study. The problematic nature of these questions has already been highlighted and offers an example of the influence of my role in the process of research. The ensuing interview was helpful in engaging the teachers in a more intimate narrative about their own personal and professional histories. Although this proved to be a strong source of data collection, there are issues about the teachers being encouraged to reveal intimate information in the context of research ((Sabar 1994). This stage of the interviews was very free flowing and I tried to be there as an active listener, but for the teachers' voices to be the ones that were the ones to be transcribed from the tapes. The teachers talked about their professional and personal life histories. Some teachers talked about their wishes for future training, and I became concerned that their expectations had been raised. The nature of the training they were asking for included elements that I could not, in my new position at the University, possibly deliver. Although I made sure I mentioned this to them, I wonder if this was a possible reason why they had engaged in the research. The individual interviews ended with a small group of questions that had been designed to try to gather more information about pupil and teacher learning.

The shift to these questions occurred when the teachers felt they had no more to add about their personal and professional histories and varied between teachers by up to 5/10 minutes.

Group interviews

There were two group interviews. In the initial research design for the study, it had been intended to have one group interview and two individual interviews. It was decided to add a second group interview after the first group interview had been shown to be an effective strategy for moving the discussion away from me to the teachers. Also, the final group interview became a process of reflecting upon my interpretations of the teachers from a holistic perspective.

The first group interview was designed to elicit, amongst other things, some of the tacit knowledge that the teachers have. As noted already, tacit knowledge is not explicit, but I hoped it might be glimpsed through discussions between teachers about individual pupils with pmld. The teachers were asked to discuss their impressions and thoughts about three pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. They were shown three video vignettes of pupils with identified pmld, but who presented as different from one another. In talking to each other about these pupils, it was hoped that a depth of discussion would take place that would offer a deeper understanding of the meaning that they were making. This process of research methodology offered several challenges. Firstly, there was very little knowledge and understanding in the literature about this process of data collection. The work of Prosser (1998) had explored some of the theory and practice of photographic and film work with particular reference to educational research. However, while this offers a contemporary view of the range of research activities that are occurring in this genre, it does not include the use of video as a focus for discussion in group interviewing. Secondly, the choice of the pupils to be included in the video vignettes and the way they were filmed proved problematic. The pupils were chosen to represent a broad example of pupils with pmld, but there were just three and I chose the pupils. Therefore, the influence and direction of my personal understanding of pmld must, and would, have had some influence on this stage of the research. Technical difficulties beset the endeavour and one pupil's video vignette, when checked, was

without sound. This was discovered two days before the first group interview. The pupil was absent from school (which was over 80 miles away) and there was no way the video could be repeated. I chose to go ahead and use the soundless video and explain the situation to the teachers, as the young pupil had explicit sensory issues that were not apparent in the other two vignettes. This clearly had an impact on the group interviews and is a possible reason why the teachers talked a great deal about physical communication in this video vignette. This may have happened anyway, but the lack of sound perhaps led the attention of the teachers to this form of communication. The vignettes were filmed in a school context, and the nature of the provision became a source of discussion between the teachers, talking about resources and placement, etc. I acknowledged this and felt the need to manage the group interview to encourage the teachers to discuss the pupils' learning and the teachers' teaching. This presented a difficult tension for me, since there was some criticism of the teachers in the video. Although I realised some evaluation would include such a critique, I did not wish this to dominate the group interview, and it also raised ethical issues relating to the nature of the involvement of the teachers who had volunteered to be videoed for my research.

The research of Lewis (1992) related to group interviews acknowledged that participants would come along to the discussion groups with varying power bases. Because of this, I was alert throughout the interviews to ensure that all teachers had the opportunity to contribute. I acted as a chair to the discussion groups to enable shared representation of views and perceptions (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). It is important to be aware of how group interviews can prevent respondents from talking about personal issues and how some individuals may be inhibited from contributing information of a personal nature. In reflecting on this process of interviewing, it is important to be aware of this, and, for the purpose of developing this research methodology, it would be important to go back to individual teachers and ask them about how the group influenced their contribution.

The final group interview was one where I presented back to the group of teachers my major findings and also pursued some issues about which I wanted to try to gather more meaning. In the spirit of grounded theory this interview was an important part of the research design. Strauss and Corbin (1994) discuss the strong relationship between

theory generated and data collected, and also the importance of feeding this back to the people involved in the research:

> "We owe it to our subjects to tell them verbally or in print what we have learnt and to give clear indications of why we have interpreted them as we have."

<div align="right">Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.281</div>

In the context of this research it allowed the teachers to hear my interpretations of their interviews and the assumptions that I was drawing. My most vivid reflection of this stage of interviewing was the general acceptance by the teachers of my interpretations and assumptions. This raises issues of difficulty for the research. In retrospect I believe I may have prepared the teachers better, perhaps by sending them my interpretations before the group interview. Then they may have had time to read and digest my interpretations more fully, rather than reading them at the beginning of the interview and at the end of a busy day in school. My reasons for following the latter course, was my concern that the teachers would discuss my interpretations when I was not present. I would then miss valuable responses to my work. However, this raises the issue of who benefits from the research. At the outset of the research, part of my rationale was to involve teachers in a research process that was beneficial to them (Cheliminsky and Shadish 1997), but I now realise that, through the decision making I engaged in, these intentions were adversely affected.

Reflecting on the process of analysis

I read the strong words of Stangvik (1998) quite early in my research and was concerned that I did not become guilty to his accusations:

> "Special education research is abundant with examples of 'ecological fallacies' i.e. research in which data on one level are used to draw conclusions on another level."

<div align="right">Stangvik 1998 p 98</div>

Following the principles and strategies discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994b) relating to qualitative data analysis, I began to make sense of the data generated through data display and then through a process of conclusion and verification. Haggarty's (1995) work is an example how this methodology was applied to analysing the content of teacher and mentor interview transcripts. She applies content

analysis in her work in order to develop meaning. Herda (1999) describes this as a process and:

> "In this process the object is to structure meaning out of the content by applying a
> systematic process of coding."

<div align="right">Herda 1999 p 127</div>

Miles and Huberman (1994b) discuss the three levels of analysis in this way. The first level relates to summarising and packaging the data, the second level relates to repackaging and aggregating the data, and the third level is concerned with developing and testing out propositions. I can recognise these levels in the process of analysis that I employed. The codings I applied were connected to the questions that I posed to myself related to developing greater meaning about a particular set of data. I used a highlighting pen, in the first instance, on transcripts and then organised the data into themes. This is an example of Miles and Huberman's (1994b) first level of analysis. In the first stage of the individual interview analysis, the data was organised and collated into sections to help me to make some interpretation and meaning from it, which is an example of the second level of analysis. I then went onto develop some propositions that I wanted to reflect back to the teachers or explore more fully in the data myself. This process proved to be successful in developing meaning about themes that were pre ordained by myself, for example, information regarding the meaning the teachers made about courses they had attended. The employment of questions that I asked myself in the process of analysis helped to ensure I was indeed making meaning of the teachers. For example, in the thematic analysis of the individual interviews, I asked myself a set of questions that would help me to focus on the meaning making of the teachers:

- How does this analysis help me to make meaning of how the teachers perceive the pupils are learning?
- How does this analysis help me understand more about how the teachers develop their theories of teaching and learning?
- What may be the influences that sustain and challenge these theories?

Although this was helpful in helping me to make decisions about data management and organisation it was an example of my frames of understanding and research intention influencing the process of analysis. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) state, the qualitative paradigm of research enables a broad scope of analysis:

"Qualitative modes of interpretation run the gamut from "let the informant speak and don't get in the way" on through theme analysis, and to the elucidation of patterns, theoretical frameworks or models and theory formulated at various levels of abstraction."

Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.278

When I returned to the whole transcript analysis again, I highlighted themes but chose to keep the integrity of individual interview transcripts, thereby missing out on the second level of repackaging and aggregating the data. I wanted to do this in order to retain the context of what the teacher was saying, something I felt my previous data management had lost. This, although cumbersome, was successful in helping me to retain a more holistic view of the context of the teacher's quotations in the interview transcript. I retained this procedure in the analysis of the group interviews too, as I wanted to ensure I was aware of what preceded and what followed a teacher's thoughts and remarks. Even though I missed out on the second level of analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994b), I feel I replaced it with a stage of analysis that allowed context and place of data to be kept. This naturally led me onto the third level of analysis where I was able to develop propositions and construct some form of explanatory framework. When I returned to the original data from an individual teacher perspective, I came across ideas and concepts I was not familiar with. There were issues emerging from the data that were unexpected and needed me to attempt to make my own meaning, so that I had a frame of reference in which to try to interpret the meaning of the teachers. This was a dynamic process and one of the most exciting parts of the research, but it again highlights the tensions related to my influence on the research.

From grounded theory (and the warning of Stangvik 1998) the importance of raw data was crucial to me, and, in my analysis I tried to allow the raw data to be explicit and to retain its integrity. This is supported in the work of Richardson (1999):

> "Only careful and unprejudiced descriptions in the form of interview transcripts would provide access to the meanings of experiences and social situations for the participants (in research)."

<div align="right">Richardson (1999) p 64</div>

Through the process of analysis I found myself trying to formulate ways of understanding the meaning making of the teachers. In the first group interview I did not have anything so focussed, but, once I had almost completed the analysis I came across the work of Alexander (1996), which, at that stage, offered some confirmatory support that I was, perhaps, at least looking in the right direction. Alexander (1996) offers a framework to examine ideas, beliefs and values in educational practice. Inherent in his framework is a focussed, structured and systematic analysis of ideas, beliefs and values through the different perspectives of children, knowledge and society. He proposes the need to examine elements of each:

> "All teaching rests upon assumptions about what children can and cannot do, what they need, how they develop, how they learn, how best they can be motivated and encouraged, about their rights and entitlements, and, more generally about the nature of childhood itself. The second area concerns society. Teachers invariably have some sense of the demands and expectations, which emanate from outside the school, of the needs of society or particular sections of it, and of the needs of the individual in relation to that society. Finally, most teaching rests upon the views of the nature of knowledge: its structure, its character, its source and its content."

<div align="right">Alexander 1996 p 65</div>

The relationship between these elements is reciprocal and they each feed into and from each other. Clearly, the influence of Alexander must have impacted on my second group interview although I did not apply it directly.

Critical theory has influenced my analysis of the data in an essential way. It has helped me to look beyond my initial interpretation and reflection of the data and to consider the wider context of analysis. As already been highlighted, this presented me with personal struggles and tensions for the research. The complexity of this is hinted at by Kincheloe and Mclaren (1994) with their thoughts:

> "What we see is not what we see but what we perceive."

<div align="right">Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994 p.145</div>

Again, the need to try to understand the influence of my perceptions, my processes of meaning making was crucial.

Reflections on issues of validity

Issues of the validity of the research are of great concern. In the words of Scott (1996):

> "Empirical research is a social activity, and is therefore never likely to be coherent, reliable or valid."
>
> Scott 1996 p.64

The social activity I engaged in was a very personal one to me. I shared and identified with a great deal of what the group of teachers expressed. The journey of meaning making engaged with in this study was an interactive one that involved the group of teachers and myself in a shared interaction:

> "Obviously 'the story of life' as told to a particular person is in some sense a joint product of the teller and the told. Selves, whatever metaphysical stand one takes about the 'reality', can only be revealed in a transaction between a teller and told."
>
> Bruner 1990 p.125

The relationship between the researcher and the researched is acknowledged as having the potential to contribute to the development of theory building:

> "Truth is enacted: theories are interpretations made from given perspectives as adopted or researched by researchers."
>
> Strauss and Corbin 1994 p.274

This did create a tension, again relating to my own personal influence on the research. Harry (1996) ably describes my concerns as tensions in the research process:

> "The tension between notions of the researcher as a person compared to with researcher as a collector, interpreter, and conveyer of knowledge becomes central when the types of information are so personal and intangible as to be accessible only through personal interaction."
>
> Harry (1996) p 282

The awareness of this was very important and the contribution of critical theory helped to instil strategies in the research design that may have helped to combat the possible dominance of the personal influence and help to ensure integrity of the interpretations I was making:

"Critical theorists award credibility only when the constructions are plausible to those who construct them."

Kincheloe and McClaren 1994 p. 151

An example of this relates to the way I presented my interpretations back to the teachers in the final interview and illustrated to them how I had constructed my assumptions from the two stages of analysis of the individual interviews and also the first group interview. So, to an extent, the evolving nature of the research design with interpretations being fed back to teachers at each stage of the research process was helpful in developing a greater confidence in the validity of the research. However, in the research I found that, in the main, teachers in the study agreed and confirmed with my interpretations and assumptions. This may be reflective of the nature of the assumptions, but it may also suggest that the process of research did not enable the teachers to engage critically with my meaning making.

The quest for validity appears to be a quest for meaning, truth, justification and sincerity in research. I feel the contribution of grounded theory has also been influential in this by encouraging me to try to stay true to the data collected. For example, when I returned to the whole interview transcripts once thematic data reduction and analysis had taken place.

Through the different modes of data collection I engaged with: questionnaire, individual interview and group interview, some level of triangulation of the data and analysis was possible. There was some commonality between issues and themes emerging through the different stages of analysis (Table Two). This also helped to develop confidence in the levels of validity. Anderson and Arsenault (1998) suggest the process of triangulation offers another process of reducing the influence of the researcher:

"The relationship of the informant to the researcher tend to colour the interpretation of data. In practice researchers triangulate their data to develop levels of confidence."

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Reflections on the ethics of the research

On reflection, the ethical dimensions of the research have raised tensions as the research has progressed. The present research involved a group of teachers working with a group of pupils who, in the words of Detheridge (1996), are a very small and extremely variable group of pupils. In published research, these teachers have rarely had a voice, even more rarely have they been asked their perceptions, feelings and aspirations. Through the course of the research process, the importance of voices in the development of a discourse has been shown to be a crucial element in developing greater understandings. Ethical considerations, at the beginning of this research, were intended to be a perspective that would influence and inform every stage of the research process. Anderson and Arsenault's (1998) discussion, relating to the six most common problematic elements related to ethics in social research, was influential in helping me to make ethics an integral and inherent aspect of the research process. They highlighted the areas of the research topic: the research procedure, the sponsor, free and informed consent, obtaining more than what was asked for, and conflict of interest. At the very first meeting with the teachers an ethical code of practice for the research was developed through dialogue with them. This process was intended to set the tone for the whole research process.

The research topic was highlighted in the first meeting and the personal nature of the research process was discussed. However, as the research progressed, the intensity of the personal character of the research grew. This raises issues of ethical considerations in open ended qualitative research, which is organic in nature. Ethical concerns were discussed at the outset but, due to the changing nature of the research, the ethical issues also changed. Kelchlermans (1994), in his concern with ethics in research on teacher thinking, stresses the ongoing tensions and the need to engage in a continuous discussion relating to ethics. At the first meeting I set out the nature of the research, as I saw it then. This included talking to the teachers about what the research topic was. I recall telling them I wanted to find out more about what made them 'tick', their understandings of pmld and to try to understand some of the major influences. I did tell them that I wanted to inform the teacher education debate in relation to this

group of teachers. The teachers seemed comfortable with this and were happy to participate. In relation to research procedure the initial discussion with the teachers also included the expectations of myself as the researcher and themselves as the participants over the next five years. I was able to offer them very clear insight into how much of their time would be needed and roughly about when in a proposed timeline of research. Although I did have a maternity leave during the completion of this research, the time line of interviews remained very close to what was suggested at the outset. There were no sponsors for this research, but at the initial meeting I did tell them I would be sharing the data with my supervising team, particularly my director of studies. Once the discussion was over I developed a code of conduct for the research that I posted out to each teacher to sign and return to me. This was to become my evidence of informed consent. However, this raised an issue. As the progress of the research changed and developed, the informed consent of the teachers could be seen not to remain applicable. Retrospectively, it may have been more helpful for the concept of informed consent to be ongoing too.

The potential outputs of the research were clearly identified as possibly a thesis, articles, and seminar and conference papers. The issue of confidentiality and anonymity was something I wanted to stress, particularly considering the role I had with some of the schools in the study. I wanted to ensure the teachers had some level of confidence in my integrity around these issues, although at that stage it was theoretical. On reflection, issues of confidentiality have emerged. Throughout the research process I have divulged no information about particular teachers, even when directly asked. However, I have already raised the issue of anonymity about detailed analysis of data that verges on biographical narrative. This is an issue that continues to be present, as it will emerge when I pursue publication of articles. I feel that the nature of the research became so highly personal that I will need to return to each teacher and seek informed consent again regarding the further use of his or her stories. The teachers were not asked to give more than what was asked for in that initial meeting. The final data collection process was going to be an individual interview, but I changed to a group interview. I spoke to teachers about this before the final interview and they responded positively to the change.

It is the last of Anderson and Arsenault's (1998) ethical considerations that also proved to be highly problematic to me. A personal turmoil grew out of the notion of conflict of interest. The conflict of interests I refer to here relates to the interests of the teachers. I found that, through the process of the research, I naturally became more analytical and critical as my arguments and discussion developed. This involved taking a different perspective about the possible understandings of the teachers. I remember my director of studies warning me that I was being 'too nice' to the teachers. I know I was. There was conflict there. In my initial discussions with the teachers I never said I would take a critical stance (possibly against their beliefs and understandings) and at times, it was a hard for me to engage with a more critical analysis through this. At one stage I felt as if I was deconstructing the shared identity I had come to appreciate that existed between the teachers, and I personally found this difficult. However, as my own meaning making of critical analysis grew, I realised the difference between personal criticism and positive analytical critique that emerges from a thorough evaluation of the holistic issues that impact and influence the teachers' meaning making.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the dilemmas and discoveries that have emerged through the process of research. It has confirmed the complexity of the area of study and revealed the influence of the product of research by the processes engaged with. The analysis of the role of self has been a major issue in this chapter; it begins the chapter and permeates throughout. The methodological decisions made have been shown to be influential to the research in both a positive and problematic way. The employment of individual and group interviews proved valuable to my work, particularly the use of video vignettes, in encouraging the teachers to talk about their practice and professional understandings. Difficulties arose in relation to my role in the research, the methodological choices I made, and my role in the interviews. The complex factor of language and terminology has been analysed as problematic. The analytical processes employed have been in the spirit of qualitative research methodology, and although they have offered a process to engage with meaning making, the possibility of personal influence and the struggle to make my interpretations remain true to the teachers' stories has been an ongoing concern. The ethical considerations of the

research have been discussed as particularly problematic. It is argued that in qualitative research of such an organic nature, ethics should not be a finite stage at the outset of the research, but rather, ethical considerations should be ongoing and opportunities to discuss ethical dilemmas should be built into the research design. Notions of who actually benefits from the research have been briefly discussed and these will be further analysed in the concluding chapter of my thesis.

Chapter Twelve

Concluding analysis

Introduction

This final chapter draws the main conclusions together relating to the findings of my research, and returns to the initial rationale, I set five years ago, and reflect on how worthwhile this research has been. The first part of the chapter relates to the findings of the research. These specifically concern teacher identity and notions of knowledge including reflections upon how these developed, were sustained and challenged. Conclusions relating to the process of research that I engaged with are then drawn together including the role and process of self reflection. The second part of the chapter critically reflects on the initial intentions of the research and poses some difficult questions relating to its fundamental successes and challenges.

Teacher identity

Through the process of research, the role of individual and social identity appears to play a significant factor for the teachers in my study. The complex and diverse nature of identity, as I learnt through my own meaning making, has helped me analyse identity from different perspectives. The dialectical model of developing an understanding of identity was used as a framework to support my meaning making. Although this was helpful in its clarity, there are issues relating to the possible over simplification of the complex ideas inherent in teacher identity. It is clear that the teachers are embracing a role that is specialist, they have an affinity to other specialist teachers and some engage in some distancing from mainstream teachers. There are examples of the teachers engaging in this, thus giving an impression of a profession within a profession. In their discussions it was clear that the teachers are accepting a role as a specialist teacher through the ideology they appear to embrace. There appears to be an assumption between the teachers that all teachers who work with pupils with complex and profound and multiple learning difficulties share similar ideological beliefs. This, in turn, contributes to their ideas of shared identities as specialist teachers and feeds into the distancing from mainstream teachers to which they appear to subscribe. There are examples of these beliefs being confirmed through

their experiences in and out of school. It is also clear that there are key professional and personal influences that impact on and inform the teachers' individual and social identities. As a teacher educator I need to be aware of the influence that teacher identity has on the development, sustenance and challenging of teachers' understandings. The strength and force of the early personal experiences of the teachers was a surprising feature of the analysis. Through the stages of analysis, I have come to believe that, in engaging teachers in professional reflection, the influence of personal experiences must be appreciated, so that teachers may acknowledge and reflect on their possible impact on their current understandings. It appears that notions of specialist knowledge are an integral element of their identities as specialist teachers.

Notions of knowledge

Through my research I have found the continued practice of labelling and categorising disabled people has been shown to be influential in the way teachers and practitioners in the field of special educational needs understand and respond to disabled children. It has also been shown that the dominating influences on the range of understandings about disabled people emerge from the professional community. This is problematic in that some of the perspectives of parents and children have been shown to be different from those emanating from the professionals. The perspective of disabled theorists is becoming more apparent in the literature and leads the disability discourse. However, the impact of these perspectives, as yet, does not appear to be greatly influencing the literature in the field of teaching and learning for severe and profound learning difficulties. Moreover, it became apparent that these influences are not impacting on the group of teachers in this study. Issues related to listening to and representing the views of children with complex difficulties has been discussed as highly complex. In analysing the issues raised by the teachers I reflected on the initial conceptual framework that explored literature on teaching and learning for pupils with identified special educational needs and specifically pupils with pmld. In the literature I found an emphasis on developmental curriculum, particularly communication. From this perspective, the teachers' understandings are confirmed through the literature on teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs and more specifically, pupils with pmld. There appears little evidence that the understandings emerging from

the disability movement and perspectives of parents and pupils are impacting on the teachers' understandings.

In relation to the way the teachers appear to understand their pupils with pmld, the developmental curriculum is seen as crucially important for pupils with pmld. They advocate a central role for communication but also acknowledge the importance of cognition, personal and social education and movement. There appears to be a belief that there are differences in the way this group of pupils needs to learn and be taught. The teachers talked about issues relating to time and pace, the importance of ensuring pupils have motivating learning experiences with effective rewards being matched to individual pupils. The need to equate the activity to the ability level of the pupils was also highlighted. They talked at length about the much slower pace their pupils with pmld respond and the impact this has on the timing of the teaching and learning. Problematic issues emerged relating to situations where the pace of the teaching was too fast, or where pupils delayed responses were missed. Their discussions about physical positioning offered some insight into the potential tension that this presents for some of the teachers, and it can be interpreted that, in some cases, the teachers are not aware of why they are following particular practices of physical positioning. The need to present the learning in a highly structured way emerged as a theme, with the role of the teacher being to ensure clarity and consistency. It became clear, through this analysis, that the teachers in my study share the understandings of the literature in the area of teaching and learning for pupils with pmld. The differences in teaching and learning may impact upon the teachers' views of contexts for learning, particularly integration with more able peers. The perceived low developmental level of the pupils appears to dominate and contribute to the teachers' ideas of the need for a specialist teacher, a teacher with particular professional and personal qualities. Some of the teachers believe their pupils recognise and respond to these personal and professional qualities. This serves to reinforce the teachers' perceptions.

The teachers talked about professional development in a highly personal way that emphasised shared identity with course tutors and the practical implications of courses. The impact of colleagues and mentors on individual teacher development has been shown to be important to the teachers, and to a lesser extent, parents, pupils and other professionals. Through the individual and group interviews there was affirmation that the teachers believe specialist knowledge is needed and there

emerged issues relating to the nature of this knowledge. It is clear that some teachers believe this knowledge to be intuitive and difficult to discuss in detail, for others it is inextricably linked to a developmental and therapeutic curriculum. A particularly pertinent issue that emerges from this is the possible influence of the teachers' understandings relating to categorising their pupils with pmld. The teachers' frames of references appear dominated by this and must influence their understanding of notions of specialist knowledge. In this study, I have appraised the models and understandings of disability in relation to the teachers' apparent understandings and have found the tendency for the domination of the psychological model that falls within the individual theory of disability. The increasing debate related to the 'P' levels appears to offer the teachers a process by which they are actively engaging in a wider discussion about notions of specialist knowledge. As a teacher educator, I believe it is crucial to explore with the teachers, the wider understandings about disability, to help them appreciate more fully the models and theories that appear to influence their understandings.

The role of society's knowledge was analysed through the teachers' discussions in an indirect way, through their discussions of other issues. This served to highlight the potentially important influence of society's understanding and appeared to contribute to the teachers' notions of specialist teachers and specialist knowledge. The important influence of society's knowledge has been analysed, particularly in relation to the development and sustenance of specialist knowledge. The teachers discussed their belief that myth and misunderstanding pervade the way society perceives pupils with pmld and them as teachers. This serves to support their identity as specialist teacher and contributes to the idea that specialist knowledge is indeed needed. Personal reflection has highlighted the influence of these issues on my own professional meaning making. I have analysed notions of specialist knowledge, which highlight the inextricable link with theories of pedagogy and learning. A critical debate of pedagogy is called for. Through this I have come to realise the importance of engaging teachers in continued professional development that enables them to engage in this critical analysis, one that involves the wider notions of pedagogy and one that looks for similarities in effective pedagogy for all pupils. However, I also realise the need to help and support teachers to translate pedagogy in effective teaching and

learning for different groups of pupils in different contexts of learning. This, I suggest, would most effectively occur through experiential learning opportunities.

In relation to my own meaning making, pedagogic discussions in light of work of Alexander (2000) offer a possible way forward that can help to clarify similarities and differences in aspects of pedagogy. There appears to be an historical concentration on the differences in teaching and learning that may have led to the myth of specialist knowledge and created the quest to obtain this knowledge. There also needs to be a process of evaluation that looks towards similarities in teaching and learning for all pupils: one that challenges the status quo of the knowledge base of specialist knowledge, but that supports teachers in the application of their knowledge in a range of contexts.

There are already some examples of this critical analysis of pedagogy occurring for pupils with pmld. In relation to sexuality, the work of Downs and Craft (1996) offers an illustration of challenging status quo of the knowledge base. Similarly the work in self-advocacy and person centred planning (PCP) planning highlighted by Lacey and Ouvry (2000) offers signs that this challenge may be occurring. However, the new forms of knowledge developing from disabled people themselves must also contribute to the debate.

Process of research

The search for a framework based on social theory has proved to be a complex process for me. I came to realise the need to be eclectic and I initially analysed three different social theories and adopted elements from each: symbolic interaction, critical theory and grounded theory. Symbolic interaction, with its central focus on the intricacies of meaning making, appealed from the perspective of my engagement with meaning making. Critical theory appeared to offer a critical perspective that would allow me to adopt a more analytical approach to my work, one that continually encouraged me to ask the question why. Grounded theory presented me with a process by which I could practically engage in meaning making with teachers and try to ensure my research design remains sincere to their views. Through my early struggles with social theory, the interrelated issues of notions of knowledge became

increasingly apparent. As I progressed through the research, the influence of social construction became much greater in helping my meaning making. How and why the teachers construct their understandings became a major focus of my work.

Some tentative conclusions can be drawn that may help me to understand the sample group of teachers more. The teachers appear well qualified from the perspective of accredited specialist training, although some feel unqualified to teach pupils with pmld. The majority of the teachers in my study have over ten years experience in special education, which suggests that the balance of the group is biased towards older teachers with all of the teachers having upwards of five years teaching experience of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. The majority of subsequent training has been specifically related to special educational needs and profound and multiple learning disabilities. This all suggests an experienced group of teachers. The links with mainstream education are few, only one teacher has mainstream teaching experience, and there have been very few mainstream courses that the teachers have attended. Less than half of the sample has job experience outside of teaching, although those that have were in employment that involved caring for others. Half of the teachers had experienced specialist initial teacher training in the pre 1985 era of training. This study concerns teachers who have had a mixture of initial teacher training experiences, which offers insights from a variety of perspectives.

Qualitative methodology was discussed in relation to its contribution to the process of meaning making and the diversity of qualitative methodology clearly presents a challenge to this study. The fundamental principles of symbolic interactionism, critical theory and grounded theory along with the central focus upon meaning making have contributed to my decision making. It has confirmed the complexity of the area of study and revealed the influence of the process of research. The analysis of the role of self has been a major issue in this study. The methodological decisions made have been shown to be influential on the research in both a positive and problematic way. The beginning of an analysis of my personal reflections demonstrated the influence and impact of my own personal and early experiences and the need to be continually aware of the impact of these on the research project. The ethical considerations of the research have been discussed as particularly problematic. It is argued that, in qualitative research of such an organic nature, ethics should not be

a single preliminary stage at the outset of the research, but rather ethical considerations should be ongoing and opportunities to discuss ethical dilemmas need to be built into the research design. The problematic nature of issues related to questioning, ethics, reliability and validity have been discussed along with the role they have to play in my research. Due to the complexity of the substantive issues, a varied range of methodologies was chosen. Each methodology offered challenges and possibilities to the research. The adopted research methods: questionnaires, individual interviews and group interviews have been analysed from the perspective of their contribution to meaning making. Issues emerged related to the use of language in the research process and also the possible impact of my role on the teachers' responses. The use of video analysis as a research tool has been discussed, although there is very little literature pertinent to this in the field. This methodological strategy has proved to be effective but complex. It encouraged the teachers to discuss issues related to teaching and learning. They began with discussions of the video and then developed to reflections on their own work. There were ethical difficulties where there was a tendency for the teachers to be critical of the teachers on the video rather than analysing the teaching and learning, and I felt, at times, I had to steer the discussion. I conclude from this that if I were to carry out a similar strategy, I would decide some ethical ground rules encompassing the teachers who volunteer to be part of the video and for those who participate in the ensuing analysis. This is a further example of the need for a continuous development of a code of ethics.

In relation to analysis and reflection I set out my intention at the beginning, in the spirit of grounded theory, to search for patterns and regularities and ensure the generated data leads the analysis. However, this proved to be complex. For example, once I had completed this thematic analysis I felt that, through the employment of data management techniques, many important issues had emerged. Nevertheless, I felt that the wholeness of each individual teacher's interview had been lost in the process. In the spirit of grounded theory I returned to an analysis of each individual interview.

Successes and challenges of research

To reflect on the successes and challenges of the research I returned to my initial rationale and ask myself some fundamental questions relating to how worthwhile the research process has been.

One of my intentions at the beginning of my study was to develop a research project that placed teachers of pupils with pmld as a central focus. At one level this has been successful, the teachers have played a central role. They have participated in individual and group interviews that have encouraged them to discuss their professional understandings and the perceived influences on these. During the final interview stage one group of teachers commented that participation in the interviews had been positive for them. They expressed the view that they were discussing issues that, due to the pressures of the school day, they rarely had opportunity to discuss. From the perspective of Cheliminsky (1997), this is an example of positive developmental research where the participants benefit through their engagement in the research. The analysis of the substantive issues will hopefully contribute to the development of more effective teacher learning experiences. However, as already raised in my analysis of problematic ethical issues, the dominating role of my own meaning making could suggest that the benefits to myself are greater than that of others in the research process.

Another of my initial intentions for my research was to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning for pupils with pmld. Unlike the Ware (1996) research, my work was based outside the classroom context with no explicit and direct impact on the teaching and learning of the pupils. Through the teachers' discussions of their professional understandings, particularly in the light of other teachers' perspectives, the teachers engaged in discussions related to effective pedagogy and also possible frames of reference that they may subscribe to in their practice. This, in itself, has the potential to be beneficial to the pupils through the increased understanding of their teachers. However, from another perspective, my research may be said to continue to contribute to the dominating professional discourse, a complex issue my research has highlighted.

The research questions I developed at the outset of the study proved to be a starting point for my work. In reflecting back, my research questions have developed to reflect

my growing understanding. My first research question, "What are the current understandings of a group of teachers towards the pupils they are working with who have profound and multiple learning difficulties?" reflects this change. Back in 1997, as I embarked on the research, it is clear I was interested in finding out the 'what': the Holy Grail, as I came to refer to it. Although there has been some further exposition of the teachers' understandings, the main developments in the study relate to the process of meaning making with the teachers: the 'how' and the 'why' of their understandings and practice, and the processes I engaged with to try to understand these further. In my second and third research questions I wanted to find out more about the important milestones in the teachers' development. My work has been directly involved with the issues raised in these, and I have found that the relationship between professional and personal experiences is highly intricate and difficult to analyse independently. The last two of my research questions related to the teachers' views of effective teacher learning experiences and their future desires. During their involvement in the interviews, they discussed effective professional development and offered clear perspectives on these. However, because of the direction the research process took, the desires of the teachers were not explicitly addressed in the study. However, in the analysis of teacher identity and specialist knowledge, implications for future professional development were discussed. The process of meaning making has indeed been complex but the discussion of the substantive issues and reflections on research methodology has proven to be successful in furthering my understanding, as a teacher educator, of teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

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Pilot questionnaire
November 1998

THANKS AGAIN FOR YOUR TIME. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE
INFORMATION YOU GIVE IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WILL FORM
PART OF THE CONTENT FOR OUR FORTHCOMING INTERVIEW.

NAME:

PRESENT SCHOOL:

HOW MANY YEARS TEACHING?

MAINSTREAM:

SPECIAL:

OTHER:

TOTAL:

INFORMATION ABOUT PRESENT CLASS:
(please include anything you think important)

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU WORKED WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD?

CAN YOU PLEASE GIVE ME SOME INFORMATION ABOUT PREVIOUS
SCHOOLS YOU HAVE TAUGHT IN:

DETAILS OF QUALIFICATIONS:

(1) 1st: Place, date, specialism

Comments:

(2) 2nd: Place, date, specialism

Comments:

(3) Subsequent qualifications: Place, date, specialism

Comments:

PLEASE GIVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT INSET COURSE
SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WHO HAVE
PMLD:
(please include, ifyou can remember, name of course, year, length, who ran it)

Comments:
PLEASE INCLUDE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT COURSES UNRELATED
TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD THAT MAY HAVE
INFLUENCED YOUR WORK IN THE CLASSROOM:

What, why and how?

PLEASE GIVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF ORGANISED COURSES, RELATED OR UNRELATED TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD, THAT MAY HAVE INFLUENCED YOUR WORK IN THE CLASSROOM:
For example, voluntary work. What, why and how?

MANY THANKS,

Questionnaire
Spring 1999

THANKS AGAIN FOR YOUR TIME. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THE INFORMATION YOU GIVE IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE WILL FORM PART OF THE CONTENT FOR OUR FORTHCOMING INTERVIEW.

NAME:

PRESENT SCHOOL:

HOW MANY YEARS TEACHING?

MAINSTREAM:

SPECIAL:

OTHER:

TOTAL:

INFORMATION ABOUT PRESENT CLASS:
(please include anything you think important)

HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU WORKED WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD?

CAN YOU PLEASE GIVE ME SOME INFORMATION ABOUT PREVIOUS SCHOOLS YOU HAVE TAUGHT IN:

CAN YOU PLEASE GIVE ME SOME INFORMATION ABOUT PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT:

DETAILS OF QUALIFICATIONS:

(1) 1st: Place, date, specialism

Comments:

(2) 2nd: Place, date, specialism

Comments:

(3) Subsequent qualifications: Place, date, specialism

Comments:

PLEASE GIVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT INSET COURSE
SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WHO HAVE
PMLD:
(please include, if you can remember, name of course, year, length, who ran it)

Comments:
PLEASE INCLUDE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT COURSES UNRELATED
TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD THAT MAY HAVE
INFLUENCED YOUR WORK IN THE CLASSROOM:
What, why and how?

PLEASE GIVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF
ORGANISED COURSES, RELATED OR UNRELATED TO WORKING
WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD, THAT MAY HAVE INFLUENCED YOUR
WORK IN THE CLASSROOM:
For example, voluntary work. What, why and how?

MANY THANKS,

Appendix Three

Structured Interview

TRAINING EXPERIENCES:

1st Qualification:

RELEVANCE FOR WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD?

very relevant   relevant   unsure   not very relevant   not relevant at all

Comments:

2nd Qualification:

RELEVANCE FOR WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD?

very relevant   relevant   unsure   not very relevant   not relevant at all

Comments:

Subsequent Qualifications:

(A):

RELEVANCE FOR WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD?

very relevant   relevant   unsure   not very relevant   not relevant at all

Comments:

(B):

RELEVANCE FOR WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD?

very relevant   relevant   unsure   not very relevant   not relevant at all

Comments:

INSET COURSE SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WHO HAVE PMLD:

COURSES UNRELATED TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD THAT HAVE INFLUENCED WORK IN THE CLASSROOM:

EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF ORGANISED COURSES, RELATED OR UNRELATED, TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD THAT HAVE INFLUENCED WORK IN THE CLASSROOM:

EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF COURSES, UNRELATED TO WORKING WITH PUPILS WITH PMLD THAT HAVE INFLUENCED WORK IN THE CLASSROOM:

CAN YOU TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR WORK WITH PUPILS WHO HAVE PMLD:

WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, IS PMLD?

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN EDUCATION FOR PUPILS WITH PMLD?

IN AN IDEAL WORLD, TALK TO ME ABOUT YOUR IDEAL CLASS/SCHOOL FOR PUPILS WITH PMLD.....

WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOUR WORK WITH PUPILS WHO HAVE PMLD OVER THE YEARS?
Who, when, how.

Appendix Four

Teachers' theories of how pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties learn

Information about the study including ethical considerations

General information

This study is a personal research project which I am doing for my doctoral study at the University of Northumbria. My director of studies is Dr John Swain, Reader in Disability Studies at the University. I will discuss the study in detail with John as it is progressing. There are two other supervisors on the research team: Professor Hazel Bines and John Spindler, who will act as consultants and help with the final drafts of the thesis. It is hoped that the study will be completed within the next four years. The aim of the study is to develop a greater understanding of how teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties develop, sustain and change their theories of how those pupils learn.

It is hoped that the study will contribute to the debate about professional development for teachers working with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

It is also hoped that teachers participating in the project will benefit from the experience, reflecting on professional development and practice in an individual and small group context.

Methodology

There are a range of research tools that have been identified that may be appropriate for the study. The main thrust of the research is of a qualitative nature, trying to tease out and explore key issues that arise. Some quantitative information will be collected in order to gather information about the development of individual teachers' professional careers. Questionnaires, structured interviews, and small group interviews are the intended methods of data collection. These can be seen to fall into stages. The first stage will explore experiences and professional development to date and how this relates to current practice. The second stage will involve group interviews discussing videos of pupils with profound and multiple difficulties. The

pupils here will be anonymous to the group. The third stage will involve exploring future training and professional development for teachers working with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Expectation of participants

Busy and onerous school life can sometimes make participation in research projects the last thing a teacher may wish to do. At this point it is anticipated that over the three stages of the research you will be involved in:

completing a questionnaire (up to half an hour - Spring term 1999)

a structured interview (up to an hour - Spring/ Summer/ Autumn terms 1999)

a group interview (up to an hour - Autumn term 1999/ Spring /Summer terms 2000)

a structured interview (up to an hour -Autumn term 1999/ Spring terms 2000)
The interviews will be taped and transcribed. Hopefully this won't seem like too great a demand on your time over the research project.

Expectation of researcher

It is essential that as participants you feel as comfortable and positive as possible about the research. Confidentiality is a very important issue. Your contribution will be anonymous and your opinion and feelings will be listened to and valued. For example, you may say something in an interview that on reflection you are worried and unhappy about. It is important that you know you can discuss this with me and appropriate action on my part will be taken. I will arrange with you the most convenient time and place for the interviews and will respect your decision to withdraw from the project at any time.

Dissemination

A thesis for a doctorate will be produced and it may be that short articles and papers are developed for publication from it. As participants in the research I will do my best to keep you informed of publications as and when appropriate.

Contact

If you wish to contact me please do not hesitate to do so.

Phyllis Jones

Teacher Education Department

Coach Lane Campus

University of Northumbria at Newcastle

Benton

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE7 7XA

0191 2273171

E Mail Phyllis.Jones@unn.ac.uk

Appendix Five

Issues arising from analysis of questionnaire 1

14 questionnaires returned

Qualifications

Initial Training: Special – 7   Mainstream – 7

Additional qualifications: SLD/PMLD – 6   SEN general – 2

Experience

Mainstream experience: 1

Special school length of experience:

0-5yrs	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	16-20 yrs	21 plus yrs
2	1	2	4	5

Other employment: 5

Subsequent Inset – PMLD related

Objects of reference	Communication	Facilitated communication
Multi sensory	Intensive Interaction	Equals
Ace	Deaf / blind	Feeding
Halliwick	Sherbourne	Music
Sensory science	Curriculum development	Rebound
Aromatherapy	Alternative approaches to movement	

Subsequent Inset – Non PMLD related

High Scope	TEACCH	DLS
IT	Assessment	Conductive Education
Autism	Play	Makaton
Self esteem	Bullying	Classroom Management

Conferences 1 – 3 days with particular speakers or themes

Other experiences felt to influence teachers

Personal philosophy 3	Personal experience 5
Being a parent 4	Parents 3
Other professionals 2	Colleagues 2
Being a respite carer 1	Voluntary work 3
Playscheme / Beavers 2	Visits to other schools 2
Participating in research	Becoming reflective practitioner

Other issues

Demise of pre service training 2

'Caring' not enough 2

Feeling that 'on job' training most influential 3

May 1999

Appendix Six

Individual teacher analysis of interviews

Teacher One

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream school and then went on to do a B.Ed in mental handicap. She is a class teacher.

Making sense of ideology
For this teacher it appears that creative arts are important:

> "For all kinds of things, like the obvious things like display I suppose and just wanting things colourful and lots of creative ideas and I know about materials and texture and that kind of thing."

Interview 1 p.1

She develops this a little later when discussing elements of education:

> " I would like to see more creative experiences, more art, more hands in and on, paint, clay."

Interview 1 p.3

This is extended to include sensory experiences:

> "Sensory outdoor experiences, things like real beaches, sand pebbles you know, rose garden, that kind of thing, rolling on grass."

Interview 1 p.3

This teacher seems to be saying to me that practical, hands on, creative and sensory experiences are important in her teaching. This is developed when she discusses her ideal classroom, which she says:

> "Would be twice the size I've got now with permanent features like sand and water so you don't have to bother changing and a sound corner."

Interview 1 p.8

This teacher talked a great deal about how she perceives the pupils. It appears individual pupil needs and strengths are important to her:

> "Looking at the individual child, it's very individual...we do it instinctively, you work to the child's interests and strengths."

There is a hint that she feels this group of pupils are different. When discussing her perceived developments in special education she says:

" I mean we are doing IEPs (individual educational plans) every term, we're doing the National Curriculum *even* with my pmld children."

The use of the word 'even' suggests to me that this teacher is surprised that this group of pupils should be doing the National Curriculum. This notion of difference is developed a little later when she suggests:

"I think every one of these children is different, you know you get to know individual children."

She talks about how these pupils were not in education thirty years ago and now they are in school, taking part in group activities and joining their peers on trips. She returns to the notion of difference when she says:

"I do feel there is so much I don't know about these children because there is all the medical side and the physiotherapy side, it makes it all more complex."

This is extended when she suggests:

"We're looking at a huge baby almost but as babies gallop through the developmental sequence; mainstream babies, we have to nudge our children."

The reason she offers for this difference is sensory and physical 'blocks' that prevent the child from interacting and exploring their environment. My interpretation of this is that although this teacher talks about acknowledging the strengths of the pupils I seem to hear a fundamental tendency for her to understand the pupils from a deficit perspective. The pupil owns the difficulties that suggest she appears to be adopting the medical model of disability. She discusses the role of the environment in terms of how she as a teacher may facilitate and bridge the 'blocks' the pupils inherently have.

Making sense of identity

Throughout the interview the teacher talked about issues that offered a glimpse into the ways she may be identifying herself professionally and personally. There appears to be a strong message about her identity with other teachers who have completed 'specialist' courses. She discusses the demise of the pre service course:

"I mean it's unbelievable, it really seems a retrograde step that there is no specialist training. A general teaching course no where near fits you, no where near."

She proceeds to talk about how particular people may be drawn to these specialist courses:

" I think the people who chose to do that specialist training were half way there."

Because:

"I mean most people who work in this field really want to be there. Can't see themselves doing anything else. I think that is personal qualities and personal philosophy as much as anything."

There appears to be some identity with teachers who have chosen to follow this 'specialist' profession, not only an identity to the profession but also to the personal and philosophical qualities that she believes are fundamental to her work.

She talks at length about her identity to the parents and through this there appears to be some understanding of why. She says:

"These parents, they have such a raw deal, because of an accident at birth or a genetic disorder or something they are really up against it...they seem to have to fight for everything for these children. Things that should be theirs as a right. So when they come to somebody, I hope, like me who is, you know, speaking the same language and is on their side."

Through these words it appears she is almost on a 'crusade', to help the parents in their fight and she does this because she identifies with them and 'speaks their language'.

Making sense of influences on ideology and identity

The creative arts background that this teacher experienced when completing her initial teacher training appears to relate to her commitment to the valuable role of the arts, sensory and practical experiences. Her subsequent degree in mental handicap seems to have impacted on the way she views the children, as very individual and different people who have complex difficulties that require a child centered and assessment based curriculum:

" We used to do something called the jigsaw approach, we looked at movement, perception, cognition and communication...making it relevant to the children I was going to teach...it was a lot of early developmental stuff really"

She explains how, for her, this was revolutionary as her experience of these children had previously been in a hospital setting where 'education' as such gave way to medical care:

"Even the thought that there were things they could learn, roads they could go down, it seemed then, terrible really, quite revolutionary in 1978."

This sense of revolutionary thinking appears to also relate to her own experience as a child:

"I can remember growing up in a colliery village where they were a couple of downs syndrome children and it seemed that they didn't do anything. I mean they were actually in prams, big silver cross prams until about five or six."

This along with a degree course that highlighted an early developmental curricula may go some way to understanding why this teachers talks about pupils with pmld as 'huge babies'

The people who she talks about who have influenced her and her work appear to be positive, enthusiastic with an identity to a 'cause' which she herself can identify with:

"It was like listening to people who are really zealous about their method, who are absolutely convinced about their method."

And:

"I would like people at the forefront who are really making progress with these severe children...it's those people that we can learn from and it's those people that I want."

In the former quote she was describing the great impact a TEACCH course had had on her understanding and practice. Although these specialist courses are aimed at developing an approach to teaching that is for pupils with autism, this teacher felt the structure and organization of the approach helped her when managing a class including pupils with pmld.

Teacher Two

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream school and then went on to do a certificate in severe learning difficulties. She is a manager.

Making sense of ideology

Assessment appears to be very important to this teacher, particularly assessment linked to early child development:

> " It was all Piaget. In the days before we would use Uzgris and Hunt."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.1</div>

She goes onto say how the importance of assessment was strengthed through a subsequent course and suggests her kinship with it:

> "The emphasis was on assessment...their assessment is second to none from N."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.3</div>

Early developmental assessment was discussed as important:

> "It would have to be something to do with communication, behaviour, physical development and social development."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.10</div>

She seems to need to want to display this information clearly:

> " I don't like to see theory in such depth that I can't visualize it and I can't understand it. I like headings. I like to fill in boxes."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p. 4</div>

She talks about a definite move away from the behaviourist approach to experiential teaching and learning:

> "I actually went to talk to RM and he helped me bury the behaviourist approach to the back of my mind, it still comes forward, but to say the influence of the child learning through experience can be a much more natural process."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.6</div>

She seems to have a strong belief about the importance of a structured environment that enables children to know what is happening and offers them opportunities for engagement and reflection:

"The importance of routines for pmld children, any child, they get confidence through anticipating an event, taking part in it and recalling it through something. Symbols are brilliant for that and I have gone on and on developing symbols for lots of formats."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.9</div>

The importance of the environment being child centered, stimulating and challenging appears to be important:

"They are placed in situations that are as for normal children developing in an environment which is fun, which is colourful, which is not adult led. Child centered... The spontaneity of more able children in the ways they can relate with pmld children in an unpredictable way is actually part of the challenge for these children."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.12</div>

She seems to believe it is important for the pupils with pmld to spend time with their more able peers (*in the context of this discussion she was talking about pupils with severe learning disabilities*) However, she goes onto explain the importance of highly personalized timetables for pupils with pmld which would actually extract them from their peer group for therapeutic activities. She appears to be saying that she believes in a balance on individual and group focus.

Making sense of identity

Throughout her interview she talked on numerous occasions about how she saw herself as an agent of change who had a fundamental drive to improve educational provision for this group of pupils. This started very early in her career:

"As a young person I went in and really stirred up a hornets nest."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.2</div>

She appears to want to have an impact and relishes in her just success:

" I like a challenge. I like to make a difference...it's very firmly established that I did make a difference through my knowledge."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.13</div>

She seemed to know from the outset that she wanted to provide leadership and management:

"I needed to actually say yes I'm going to come out of the classroom eventually and I'm going to influence what goes on in a management role in a school."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.5</div>

Some insight can be gained into her reasons for wanting to influence the work of others through her identity to a 'cause':

> "I was able on that course to stand up for the children with special needs and to understand what the government was trying to do and interpret that for my mainstream colleagues."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.6</div>

It appears that this cause is verging on a crusade for her. She talks about being an advocate for this group of pupils and for special school education that may serve to illustrate the depth of commitment she feels to this cause:

> "I'm a strong advocate of special schools and blowing our own trumpet and I don't think people have done it enough."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.11</div>

She discusses mainstream colleagues as people who underestimate and do not appreciate the work being done by teachers of pupils with special educational needs:

> "I felt special teachers of special schools such as severe learning difficulty schools were not seen by mainstream teachers as not having the knowledge (*subject*)."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.10</div>

She talks about comparisons:

> "In comparison to a mainstream teacher it was something like you were second...because people perceived that the children weren't going to learn that much so they didn't need bright teacher."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.11</div>

Thus her identity away from mainstream teachers can also be seen to feed into her identity to a cause that justifies and celebrates the 'specialism' of teachers of pupils with special educational needs:

> "We can be a center of excellence and can support them (*mainstream colleagues*) and we do have a wide range of experience and knowledge."

<div align="right">Interview 2 p.11</div>

Making sense of influences

The behaviourist training which was very child centered and based on assessment was clearly an influence on the way she understands this group of pupils:

> " It was about 1-1 teaching. It was about behaviourist approaches. You know physical prompts."

She also identifies the reflective practioner approach of her training as being important to her:

> " I would say all of my training has led me to research and not accept what is the here and now, that there might be something else."

Through her attendance at a course for early years educators she came to question this very structured approach:

> "Highscope was coming on board. I went into classrooms that I recognized as classrooms that were much more hands on than the classrooms I had created. I had given too much direction because I was still influenced by my original qualification."

It appears to be important to her that any singular influences on her understanding and practice comes from people who she perceives to appreciate the specialist nature of her work and her pupils:

> "I listened to speakers who I could connect with what they were saying about the actual group of children we were talking about."

Her own early experiences seem to have been important in helping to form her ideology and identity, particularly to a 'cause'. She recollects a visit to a long stay hospital:

> "I can remember vividly as a young girl seeing dormitories, wards with perhaps, I can actually picture in my mind thirty cerebral palsy type young people lying in canvas cots. Twisted, I can remember the noise, I can remember seeing nurses I uniforms. I can remember seeing somebody with hydrocephalus that absolutely shocked e...they didn't get out of those wards in those days. I think I was stunned by the lack of, what they didn't get."

Later on in her second teaching post where she recognized she went into the class and stirred up a hornet's nest, she describes the class thus:

> "The actual context for those children was not education. I can remember three rooms filled with bean bags, mobiles and inactivity."

The first personal experience appears to have had a major impact on her, which she relates to during her teaching career.

Teacher Three

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream school and then went on to do an MA in special educational needs. She is a class teacher.

Making sense of ideology

This teacher talks a lot about the individuality of the pupils and the need for detailed assessment and observations, along with this she appears to perceive the role of the environment as being very important:

> "Absolutely individual responses to situations to the effects of the environment on individuals."

Interview 3 p.6

The place and role of multi sensory issues that may arise with individual pupils seems to be important to this teacher:

> " I think we need more on visual impairment and hearing and particularly visual impairment and hearing and I think we need more and more."

Interview 3 p.8

This view of the environment is developed when she discusses important elements in education:

> "Calmness in order to give you the calmness and security to move safely over there and do that work that's what you work on."

Interview 3 p.16

And:

> "Confident relationships, safe environments, routines recognizable, routines familiarity, consistency."

Interview 3 p.17

The way she discusses behavior offers another possible insight into the value she places on a calm and safe environment:

> "You have to start looking at behaviour and you have to treat it as the most important thing because if behaviour isn't right then everything else does not fall into place."

Interview 3 p.9

She does appear to place a lot of value on relationships and the development of a sense of community in her classroom between everyone in there:

" There would be a sense of community I suppose and a sense of responsibility towards each other... the teacher would be so highly trained that she would be able to provide a range of opportunities and experiences and see all the students as learning from each other."

Interview 3 p.18

Making sense of identity

There appears to be a strong identity towards colleagues who, unlike herself, have completed initial teacher training in severe learning disabilities. On the occasions when she talks about this she talks about her own perceived shortcomings:

"I felt frustrated that I did not have a background knowledge and I felt I needed that."

Interview 3 p.3

She clearly believes teachers who have experienced this type of training have something she lacks but would like:

"I didn't have it but I wish I had because I feel the people that had that intensity of training over that time are incredibly knowledgeable about so many, you know I might have been lucky."

Interview 3 p.13

And:

"I think you can float around in it though feeling you that you're knowing where you're going until you work alongside someone that's had that basic training...I've got a lot of experience and done a lot of courses but..."

Interview 3 p.14

She seems to be identifying with a group of people who represent highly specialized knowledge, which although she acknowledges her own great experience, does lead her to have feelings of inadequacy. There is a sense of an identity to a 'cause' that begun early in life and sparked her interest in this area of disability:

" I happened as a young person to go into some institutions and think what the heck is going on here and why didn't I know about this?"

Interview 3 p.11

Making sense of influences

The emphasis on early years in her first ITT course appears to have influenced her:

"Thinking about what motivates and stimulates very young children, that was actually very helpful I think."

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She went onto focus on psychology and counseling at Masters level that may be where her view of community and relationships developed more:

> "I thought it helped me understand where everybody's coming from...it was quite a political course, it was about the place of people with special needs in society."

She talked at great length about a multi sensory distance learning course she completed in a way that suggests she enjoyed the 'specialist' nature of the information:

> "Completely focused. Absolutely I found it one of the most helpful courses that I've ever done because of its emphasis on the impact on visual and hearing impairments...the sorts of approaches that have been developed for deaf/blind and multi sensory impaired students are entirely relevant for pmld, entirely."

Her personal experiences appear to have had an impact on her, she talked at length about various experiences that occurred when she was younger and there is an immediate sense that they had begun some questioning and interest in her. She recalls a story of when she was nine, returning home from school with a friend, when an adolescent boy with learning disabilities chased them and scared them with a pretend gun:

> "You know I was frightened but it didn't have that effect on me, it just felt like where, who is he, why is he like that, what's he, you know I guess there must have been an interest."

The impact of institutionalization and the importance of community appears vivid as she recalls another story from her childhood relating to a family friend who was sent into an 'institution' at an early age and one day when attending an unusually early catholic mass she met her again:

> "So you got this perception of people being separate and why and when they were separate, they had to wear gabardine macs and their hair cut in pudding shapes and sometimes their clothes were all the same."

Whilst completing her ITT a tutor shared his perceptions of life with a son with pmld who was placed in an institution:

> "Because of the effects on the family and I suppose looking back, I just listened to him talking and found him very interesting."

Through this connection with her tutor she went onto spend time in long stay hospitals.

As already mentioned the influence of colleagues who had completed specialist training appears to have influenced her understanding and practice. She talks about the impact of such colleagues on her understanding and practice:

" I have had to learn from others around me who are more focused."

She also discusses individual pupils and the way they have influenced her work:

"Just had to make an approach for him that was different because it was just not working and his behaviour escalated and it was down to 'OK, he needs to know every minute of the day what he is doing' and I basically created an area in the classroom that was his, with his things."

Teacher Four

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for children with severe learning difficulties. She has also finished a distance-learning course in multi sensory impairment. She is a manager.

Making sense of ideology

This teacher talked at length about her belief in the importance of developing communication:

"Obviously communication, anything to do with communication has got to be the most important factor with profound and multiple learning difficulties."

She also talks about the context for communication being crucial:

"It's always about using the context in order to be able to communicate and once you're communicating, you're off then aren't you, you're surfing but effective communication is fundamental."

It appears that after communication it is this teacher's belief that movement is very important:

"Because after communication, movement is so fundamentally important to the and I know I'm averaging here but of the average student as we understand about PMLD student to be because there's almost certainly gross motor problems or difficulties that need to be assessed and then accounted for and the comfort factor of course is so important."

Personal, social and emotional issues also appear to be important to this teacher:

" Underlying any approach to teaching and learning for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties there's got to be the watertight attitude by anybody working with them to start off with and that attitude has got to be about promoting dignity, self esteem and personality and I think that's your starting point."

Although she talks at length about the particular nature of the range of possible difficulties a pupil may have she also shows that she also takes a wider social view of the situation:

"We're constrained by schooling …I would want a person with profound and multi learning difficulties not to have to be seen with any sort of label other than person just like any other person in that classroom …a person who a) has a personality and character and b) has like all of us learning needs and those needs by definition as with all of us are lifelong."

The role of the school in wider society plays an important factor in her view of education for this group of pupils, the school may be seen as a community meeting a range of needs:

"For me the school is about meeting the needs of the students and families and society at large at the end of the day as best we can with the resources available."

Making sense of identity

There is a definite and clear identity to and with colleagues working in the field of pmld:

" The various responses from the PMLD sector our voice was being heard and a credible voice, our credible professional voice is being heard I'm pleased to say."

She talks about the pleasure from learning from colleagues in the field and explains her feelings of joy and identity as:

"I think it's a shared enthusiasm and commitment to the field in general in which we find ourselves and it's nothing to do with wages or jobs or mortgages, it's like a fundamental commitment and a personal drive."

<div align="right">Interview 4 p.9</div>

And:

"A shared vision and that's when you find colleagues that have got it and you're like magnets drawn to each other."

<div align="right">Interview 4 p.9</div>

This identity is strengthened to a colleague who has completed the ITT severe learning difficulty training she has:

"That there is an understanding and an easy dialogue that can take place between myself and my deputy just because we've both done that same course, we were trained in the same way in the same authority, so we think the same way."

<div align="right">Interview 4 p. 8</div>

There is also some insight into her commitment and identity to a 'cause' when she says:

"I've become increasingly interested in the outer edges yes of society and people and development and that which is more difficult in a sense, that which is struggling with life."

<div align="right">Interview 4 p.9</div>

This is also linked to her commitment to leadership:

"I think to a certain extent we're all pioneers in the field and the cutting edge."

<div align="right">Interview 4. p.10</div>

The way she talks about herself as a leader it is clear she wants to affect practice and influence other teachers:

"In terms of my management role now, I hope that I can affect that practice as well by supporting other than pressurising but there's got to be a bit of both, but supporting the workers at the coal face, namely the teachers and teams within the classroom. In-service training has always been and will always remain top priority as far as I am concerned as a manager."

<div align="right">Interview 4 p.7</div>

Making sense of influences

Her initial teacher training experiences in the field of severe learning difficulties have clearly impacted on her understanding and practice, she recognizes this herself when she says:

> "I've got to say it was a fundamental influence and initial by definition, I was introduced to the whole world of profound and multiple learning difficulties and I do feel retrospectively that it was a very, very useful tool and obviously by definition therefore a very good course which has informed by thinking and action in the field that I found myself staying in since 1983."

Interview 4 p.1

In further discussion she highlights the assessment, profiling and teaching elements of the course. Other subsequent training also appears to have been influential to her, namely Conductive Education and the TEACCH approach. She was involved in the development of Conductive Education in a previous school and it appears that elements of it continue to influence her:

> "The fact that the brain, different aspects of the brain could take areas of, the brain can take over, you know that was quite a breakthrough and of course that was from the Conductive Education."

Interview 4 p.7

She appears to relate to the structure of the TEACCH approach as being appropriate for some pupils with pmld and also an example of 'good practice' (Interview 4 p.7) in teaching and learning. Her own philosophical approach to life appears to have had an impact on her development and understanding:

> "I mean I've been very fortunate to have developed that childhood sense of wonder rather than the opposite as I've got older and I love it, I love the fact that I, you know that I've retained that and developed it because it's something fundamental to me in my life that's part of the magic of life and part of the privilege of being alive."

Interview 4. p.10

Her own experiences of being a parent also appears to have been a fundamental influence in her work, particularly in relation to early communication:

> "I was a full time mother and because of the experiences, personal experiences that I had to tussle with, I think that gave me a lot of experience and practical experience to actually call on in terms of retrospective examination of the complexity of a baby and young child and by themselves, mother and baby or you know carer and baby interaction and child to child interaction."

Interview 4. p.10

Colleagues have clearly been important to her development, which is illustrated when she says:

> "Just through discussion and dialogue and you know staff meetings or whatever, so often I come out the wiser and the better for it and it's kept my grey matter ticking over and I can even relate it to our school development plan."

She appears to enjoy engaging with issues at a theoretical level as well as a pragmatic one.

Teacher Five

This teacher has less than ten years experience, completed his initial teacher training for mainstream school and then went on to do a post graduate certificate in special educational needs. He is a class teacher.

Making sense of ideology

Early on in the discussion assessment appears to be very central to this teacher:

> "the first thing I think is really really important is some courses on assessment. How to use assessments, what to use, who to use them with. Where to go to find them 'Cause I found that you 've no idea, you've got a little about assessment on PGCert in SEN but when I came into the classroom."

He goes onto talk about the value of assessing particular subjects, which moved him into talking about his strong belief about communication:

> "Communication and that's really important as well. Not just signing, but symbol language as well, and objects of reference, the whole thing as a package."

Later on in the interview he links communication with notions of choice and control:

> "I want to give them choice and I want to give them control and I want to give them communication skills."

He develops this to talk about control and through this issue of power:

"Again I think it's a basic human right that you want to control things that are around you otherwise you're just completely powerless aren't you? And nobody likes that feeling."

Throughout communication remains central to him and he comments on the tendency of adults to make assumptions about what pupils may be communicating:

"Yes, without communication you can't do anything. How would you know unless you're psychic or something, which I think some people think they are... I know what he wants... I'm sure you do."

When he talks about his pupils who have pmld he does acknowledge the multiplicity and profound nature of their disabilities:

"I would say it's somebody who needs a lot of help to do most things - some people need a lot of help to do simple things that most people take for granted, I would say. Things like having a drink, making yourself understood , asking for something, using something, going outside, making choice. People who need more help than anyone else to do those things."

And,

"people with complex physical disabilities or people with like sensory impairment as well as you know as well as a learning difficulty, as well as a severe difficulty."

He hints at his natural tendency to relate to normal development and behaviour which he feels difficult about:

"I suppose you're always comparing to a norm whatever the norm is and I suppose it's measured from that I feel really uncomfortable saying that but actually that's the truth."

Pupils being part of a wider social group appears important to this teacher which becomes apparent when he talks about organizing his sld/pmld class:

"They need to be integrated. That's what I'm, sorry I haven't explained very well. I don't want them, I don't want them now and I don't even want them in an ideal classroom to be separate from what we're doing anyway. I can't see the point of somebody having to sit in a corner seat at one side of the classroom when everybody else is either at the sink doing something ...but it needs to be an inclusive

environment. If you say it's inclusive, you need to include everything in it as well not just the people."

Making sense of identity

When this teacher talked so passionately about his beliefs related to control, choice, human rights and communication there was a sense of an identity to a 'cause' coming through by the strength of his argument. This is illustrated when he says:

"If you've ever stayed at your parents' house and you've been forced to drink sherry over Christmas you realise how important choice is. It's just a basic human right, isn't it, to have choice over the things that surround you every day."

There also appears to be a definite move away from mainstream teachers. He completed a PGCE because he saw that as the only way of entering special education at the time when he trained. When he talks about this experience there is a 'distancing' between him and the mainstream course:

"I wanted to train in SLD, PMLD, it was really irritating. I just couldn't, It's like, well how am I going to work in a school if I'm not going to get any training? They did employ me but it was like, you know, you have to be working before you could get any training."

This extended to his peers on the course who he acknowledges were supportive of him but perceived him:

"Differently, I think because obviously I wasn't in the same. You know when they were all in the schools, I wasn't particularly interested being you know like the star - - getting on and applying for jobs. It's very, I don't know what it's like in Newcastle but in Liverpool it was like a cattle market, you know, in your practice you can see people weighing you up and thinking; jobs in the offing and all that smiling and that."

Through this it appears that from the outset working with pupils with pmld is perceived as very different and has more difficult entry points and the this teacher purposefully shunned the access procedures into mainstream that his peers had entered into.

There is an identity towards colleagues that work in special schools; there appears a willingness to actively engage that was not there in his mainstream experience:

"I would say every single member of staff that I ever worked with in a special school has influenced me in some way negatively or positively"

Making sense of influences

There appears to have been a range of influences that have made an impact on this teachers understanding and practice. These can be divided into formal courses and professional and personal experiences. In the formal courses his first degree in Creative Arts is a course he struggled to say influenced his work and finally said:

"I mean maybe in terms of like texture and colour and things like that, people's reaction to it. Maybe it informed me slightly about where to look for those kind of things but apart from that I don't really think."

Interview 5 p.1

His PGCE in mainstream was an experience he talks about as having to complete in order to begin work in special schools and finds it hard to talk about how it has influenced him. He completed a postgraduate certificate in generic special educational needs but again felt that the pragmatic teaching skills for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning disabilities was missing. He acknowledges:

"Well I think it was more broad based on special educational needs as a whole it was interesting to talk about policy and you could you relate that to the work that, the policies that you are developing in school around PMLD."

Interview 5 p.3

It also appeared to fuel his interest in assessment:

"The thing is I found it really useful. Assessments as well even though there wasn't anything on the course about assessments, cause I chose to write about it. It gave me a chance to go and look."

Interview 5 p. 4

The two courses that appear to have had some particular influence are TEACCH and Highscope. Both course appear to have met his need for practical pedagogy and he talks about them as 'lifesavers':

"High Scope and Teach... they were a life saver for me as a new classroom teacher and when in my first year of teaching I did High Scope and then I did Teach the year after and they, they were just like a God send just telling how I can ...I had not a clue what to do."

Interview 5 p.6

He talks about his professional experiences with other staff in the special school context as being influential. Team teaching was an experience he talks about very positively:

"I worked my first year as team teacher and that was so helpful just for everything that you're doing you know from physio positioning that you have to learn about from

scratch. But even people, just having that understanding that somebody who might be speaking clearly to you might not actually have any cognition about what they're actually saying to you. But when you first come in you, I had no clue at all about anything like, obviously there was no training for me anyway but actually working on the job, I think it was the best definitely."

He appears to be advocating that this experience was in fact his 'training' for the teaching he now does. When he talks about colleagues that have influenced him it is the practical example of role modeling in an area that appears very important to him:

"Positively when somebody's really enthusiastic and is communicating well I'm always eager to steal ideas for communication."

His personal experiences seem to have been particularly influential. His career change came when completing his degree in fashion:

"I went to do some work for the John Morris Foundation. It's in Liverpool. And they do, they organize the school's fashion show and obviously the school that I went to help work for was a 16 to 19 SLD unit. Before my PGCE, yeah. I just went in and I really liked it so much I thought I like this better than actually doing the fashion stuff, I'd rather do this."

He also worked as a volunteer:

"I did a lot of work with people with mental health problems, and   survivors, and I think working with those people formed my views about, don't know if inclusion's the right word. Do you know social role valuisation? Where you value that everyone has their own role in society and that role needs to be valued for who they are."

This experience can be seen to impact on his strong beliefs about inclusion and human rights. He also had a short personal experience of disability, which helps to explain his passionate belief in choice and control:

"I know when I hurt my leg and I was in a wheelchair in school for a day. My God. It's so revealing being at a different height level and being whizzed past sharp objects within a ☐millimeter of my head. And people say do you want to go outside now as they force me out the door. No! Stop, stop I don't want to go in here. And that's from me whose got enough skills to make myself plain."

Finally, he socializes with disabled friends and through this he gains some insight into discrimination:

"I would say friends who have visual impairment and hearing impairment have influenced the way I've worked in talking to them and their experiences of school and how frustrated they were and even just like being out with them in a pub and seeing people if you're signing with someone and watching people) and people think that I'm deaf as well 'cause I'm signing. You can hear them talking about us and actually I'm not deaf. I can hear what you're saying."

<div align="right">Interview 5 p. 20</div>

Teacher Six

This teacher has over ten years experience, completed her initial teacher training for severe learning difficulties. She is a class teacher and a manager.

Making sense of ideology

This teacher talked about the importance of 'early' development focused on the pupil several times through the interview. At the beginning she talks about the elements she values from her first qualification that specifically relate to her current work with pupils with pmld:

"Early development, early theories and, theories of early development particularly I would say for me the cognitive and, you know, communication, early development is highly significant."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p2</div>

Later in the interview she goes onto discuss the issues of age appropriateness and again her belief in the importance of tapping into the very early stages of development she perceives her pupils to be operating on is apparent:

"I would have sand with a 19 year old, how you do it matters but if somebody else has got, if that student has got profound and multiple learning difficulties, he's 19, he's enjoying sand and has no concept that it could be babyish then it's other peoples perceptions that could be babyish that make that an inappropriate situation."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p21</div>

Through this emphasis on early development there does appear to be a central focus on communication:

"There's a communicative element in anything I'm doing. That would be the absolute starting point...the whole thing. I think everything we do in teaching, and in life is about communication."

Behaviour is also a major issue for this teacher and she links behaviour with communication. She talks about how she needs to look at communication and behaviour in a highly structured way using formal assessments and that the whole process is very complicated:

" I still find it a practical way to start looking at the, at the behaviour and interactions, and everything to do with the student who's 15, 16, but so, you know way outside of normal development, and working at that early stage, and I think people find that a really complicated thing."

The complex nature of the work calls for a multi disciplinary team that can respond sensitively to the individual needs of pupils. She goes onto say how schools may not be the best place to offer this provision:

"I've often thought that schools are the worst places to begin, to educate and develop -
- cause there're too rigid. They're too, especially when you're talking about early stages of development where you can't section out these subjects or these bits of, how do I know they're someone with profound or multiple learning difficulties, if they suddenly want to communicate, if we're in the middle of assembly, or out so be it, that's when we start."

This suggests this teacher would like teaching to be opportunistic and pupil centered. She talks about the importance of the development of close relationships with the pupils and reflects on her belief in the relationship between mother and child:

"If I was a mother, if I had a child with profound or multiple learning difficulties, I would be convinced that I was the best educator, because I would have the closest relationship. I would know intimately that person who would know me, we could lead each other and develop, and we could do the going out through those such early stages of development where you're learning from pure exploration."

She talks about being inspired by parents because of the quality of their relationship with their children and there is a sense that relationships with pupils are a personal drive for her. Talking about her early experiences of first meeting people with pmld she recalls her wanting to:

"Find a better way to be with a person who had learning difficulties to make it more, to make it better for both of us. To have a relationship because I would sit there, I

remember so many of those people so well and I would be talking, and I didn't know if they could understand, I probably didn't know if they could see, I didn't know anything. I was frightened, I didn't know how to behave, but I knew I wanted to have a relationship."

There appears to be an explicit belief by this teacher that her pupils are learners:

"Everybody can learn and everybody should learn, so everybody will learn, that identifying and working with - - student's level of development in terms of their cognitive and communicative level of development is critical."

From this it seems that this group of pupils can be enabled to learn through the focus on their perceived early stage of development in a highly structured and organized way. She makes clear statements that she believes her students should be actively engaged in their learning and she talks strongly about teaching situations that leave them as passive observers or recipients:

"Yet I again believe passionately that they, everybody should be actively involved in a way that offers them interest and choices and communication and learning opportunities."

She goes on to reiterate this reflecting her strength of feeling:

"Just being a passive experience is wrong and it's easy to have your students in wheelchairs around the sides watching, with the occasional all right there and you know like that to them 'did you find that funny' and I think that's wrong and I'm not, I will say hang on, I do it myself at times and it appalls me when I do it."

This teacher seems to have a personal drive to improve and develop a situation and through this there appears to be a belief in the value of engaging with problem solving and searching for solutions. Talking about assessment as a tool for supporting this process she says:

"They're not the solution, they're not the answer, but they gave you something concrete to go in with for assessment that you could then work out what you wanted to teach."

Making sense of identity

This teacher talks a great deal about her identity to the field of special educational needs teaching as a specialist teaching provision:

"I wouldn't begin to deny that there's not an awful lot that we learn from mainstream and we're part of the whole thing. It's not so, it's not segregated. It's part of the whole thing, but I think it's a specialist field."

She repeats this statement later on in the interview and when talking about a generalist LEA training event relating to the National Literacy Strategy she again appears to assert her identity to a specialist field:

"You don't just do it because we're not...it's not possible, it's not relevant, and it's not right therefore."

There seems to be a feeling of difference between specialist teachers and mainstream teachers and whilst on the one hand she appears to distance herself from mainstream teachers she appears to identify strongly with the four year specialist training course she completed:

"Let's never be critical about those mainstream teachers although I will, but I think they're, as I said, they're being asked to learn something that I did four years to train to start, and I think it's an impossible task and I think because of that pupils are not getting the education they have a right to."

Talking about colleagues who have completed mainstream teacher training and entered the field of pmld and have 'trained on the job' she says:

"But they don't really have a choice, you know, because I would say that's also been very influential for me, learning on the job, I've changed phenomenally, but I have the, I had it, I had this stuff there to start with."

There appears to be a strong identity to a 'cause' to 'making a difference'. Talking about her early experiences this identity became strong from an early age, working on play schemes and visiting long stay hospitals she says:

"I loved it, I hated it, I hated, you know, all these institutionalised things and all the horrible things going on that weren't the fault of anybody probably, but I knew, that kind of like I was passionate about it all...and was desperate to find ways to make it better."

There also appears to be a strong identity with the pupils and she talks about this in a highly personal way which seems to reinforce her commitment to a 'cause':

"It's a selfish thing. I get such a lot out that I enjoy these people. These people, it sounds awful. I don't mean that. I enjoy having these relationships with people, generally, and I don't know if there is something more desperate about it when there are learning difficulties and, it's not, it's not the feeling well there's something trapped inside. I don't mean that I just mean I know there will be a way, and I need to try and find it, and I mean, as a 14 year old, I didn't have a clue."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p 10</div>

Making sense of influences

Her initial teacher-training course appears to be very influential for her, she says herself:

"It gave me, I think, a very secure foundation in, in lots of the essential skills and knowledge and theories to start me out."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p 2</div>

She acknowledges these essential skills to be related to a developmental curriculum and assessment for teaching. This appears to be related to the medical model of disability that places the ownership of the disability with the pupil and does not view disability from a wider social perspective. She talks about the TEACCH course being particularly influential to her that is a specialist and structured approach to teaching pupils with autism.

It seems that another great influence on this teacher is the personal experiences she has had, particularly when she was younger:

"Going to P. Hospital, 14 year old, doing voluntary work through school. It was just one of those Oh yes, what are we doing, not a clue in the world, terrified out of my mind in that place, but, incredibly moved by the whole thing. Horrified, horrified by hospital and, I suppose I just felt, will always feel and everybody probably in this field does, just that the importance of human life, and communication and dignity and that first and foremost."

<div align="right">Interview 6 p 9</div>

This may be the place where her commitment to a cause and identity with people with pmld first began, the fact that it was a highly institutionalized context might help to explain her belief in this field of education being highly specialized. When discussing others that have influenced her work she talks about people in terms of their commitment to the 'cause' she clearly identifies with and also people who display good practice in the areas talks strongly about. Someone showing commitment to her 'cause' is an academic who she has heard talk and impacted upon her thinking:

"He had all of those real passionate, personal beliefs and philosophy I think that he conveyed, very objectively in a way but still sensitively but he wanted to take it on from just caring into doing

Talking about a person she encountered early in her teaching career she says:

"Working with her and seeing her passion you know for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. I mean I was kind of quite probably a cocky probationer when I knew J. you know, probably disagreed with her at times and that's fine but I could sense her commitment, and that affected me, you know, and she was doing all this kind of incredibly extensive detailed research."

She also talks about parents in this way too:

"Seeing those parents, umm belief in their children's rights, and interests and personalities and all those things, touched me enormously."

It is apparent from this that the people who may have influenced her understanding and practice are people who she perceives as sharing the highly specialized field of teaching.

Teacher Seven

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for children who were severely subnormal with a one year mainstream focus. She is a class teacher.

Making sense of ideology

Through the discussion it became clear that this teacher viewed her pupils with pmld as highly individual and how they are different:

"It's different for our children to have say a deaf/blind child because they haven't got the ability to send the messages, the messages don't go through the same way."

This difference manifests itself in all areas of need and provision, there seems to be an idea that this group of pupils need something extra to extra. When talking about an ideal staffing ratio she says:

"It would be one to one, one to one with extra support for the actual physicality of it."

It becomes apparent through her use of language that she perceives the pupils as 'handicapped' and 'damaged':

> "It's a child who has not got the ability for the messages to get through, to the right parts of the body at the right time and are very jumbled and they're crossed and sometimes, they completely cross over."

<div align="right">Interview 7 p.8</div>

She talks about one of her pupils as:

> "A poor little mite."

<div align="right">Interview 7 p.10</div>

He is eight years old who, on a home visit, was clearly being treated as a baby. The teacher felt strongly that he was not a baby and talked about the indignity of the situation.

These different needs impact upon how she perceives the teaching and learning to be. She talks about consistency, calmness, and a distraction free environment that is underpinned by a sensitive time factor:

> "But they definitely need the time, which you can't give them, the time, what I mean is time to react. Time to just to respond."

<div align="right">Interview 7 p.8</div>

The important role of the environment is clear to this teacher, she talks about a highly specialized environment based on early years experience and mutli professional input. She sees her pupils with pmld needing to be with others with pmld and for any integration to work from this basis:

> "You see I think they would probably all be profoundly multiple but you would import or export for the integration."

<div align="right">Interview 7 p.9</div>

Indeed she finds the integration/ inclusion debate a personal dilemma:

> "It's like a dilemma, it's a constant dilemma. I mean I'm all for integration, I mean I've written thesis on it, you know I've done all the research and all the rest of it but when it boils down to it they still need a different sort of day."

<div align="right">Interview 7 p.7</div>

Making sense of identity

<div align="right">302</div>

Through her first year mainstream focus on her initial teacher training she appears to have developed a commitment away from mainstream teaching:

> "I don't know that it influenced me other than the fact I realised I did not want to work with 30 odd children at a time."
>
> <div align="right">Interview 7 p.2</div>

In her training she appeared to make a conscious decision to choose modules that related to pmld:

> "I mean even when I did my BA Honours, you know my interest really, was in PMLD."
>
> <div align="right">Interview 7 p.3</div>

She seems to see the role of teacher of pupils with pmld as highly specialized requiring knowledge and understanding:

> "You've got to be very careful that you know what you're doing and not just dabble."
>
> <div align="right">Interview 7 p.4</div>

Flexibility and adaptability is something she also identifies with:

> "It is how you adapt it that's the important bit isn't it."
>
> <div align="right">Interview 7 p.4</div>

There appears to be a strong identity to a 'cause'. Talking about a recent home visit she says:

> "I could have just sat and cried, I thought oh, you know but it's lack of understanding and just the fact to them he's still their little baby because he's in nappies, he's still a baby. So things like that you feel like sort of to be able to influence I suppose without being imposing."
>
> <div align="right">Interview 7 p.10</div>

Making sense of influences

Her own expressed view that her experience of mainstream training informed her commitment to special education has already been mentioned. From this it is clear that she views them both as being very different from one another. Her focused training on the education of children who are 'severely subnormal' appears to have focused on psychological aspects:

> "We did a lot of theory, a lot of theory on psychology and syndromes that were then known."
>
> <div align="right">Interview 7 p.2</div>

She seems to enjoy the pragmatic element of course that may be seen to relate to her vision of the teacher as a flexible and creative adaptor:

"I mean theory is OK but you need the practice to back it up."

The subsequent courses she has attended that she identifies as influential have this practical element. TEACCH and Highscope are both approaches that offer very practical advice to the teacher about classroom management and organization and ones she has identified as influential to her own practice. She also talks about an occasion that helped her to directly reflect on her own practice through the use of video techniques from a multi professional perspective:

" I found that a really valuable experience."

Being a parent and respite carer herself was discussed as being important in influencing her understanding and practice. Her own parenting was seen to equip her with the skills and strategies for working with very young children and the notion of 'normality':

"Knowing the development of children, I think that's very important, it gives you a vision of where normal children go which will obviously help you with the way you look at the children you work with."

She talks of her experiences as a respite carer allowing her an insight into the difficulties and problems parents of this group of pupils face.

Teacher Eight

This teacher has less than five years experience, completed an undergraduate degree and then went on to do a PGCE for mainstream school and then continued with a Post Graduate Certificate in Special Educational Needs. He is a class teacher.

Making sense of ideology

For this teacher there is an importance assigned to creative and flexible thinking:

"I mean the practical side of it, the practical process of thinking, of looking magically through decision making kind of helps in some ways. I mean I don't know if that's something that's especially taught in the degree or whether it's just kind of how you are but I think being creative generally is a good asset and kind of being able to quickly change things you know."

This relates to how he views spontaneity too:

> "You plan a lesson and plan for this person, we'll do this with that person and it doesn't work that way because something falls off the table and you get a response and then you know, obviously you start, you know you start going into the thing falling off the table rather than what you've planned for them."

<div style="text-align: right">Interview 8. p.8</div>

In his interview there are some insights into what is important to him in his teaching of this group pupils as well as talking about nursing and medical needs he highlights the importance of:

> "Play and communication and you know, movement and just feeling comfortable."

<div style="text-align: right">Interview 8. p.4</div>

And:

> "You know that is very relevant, assessment is something that still you know, we are working a lot on. As far as finding, getting the right level of sort of cognitive stage of developmental stage so things are gauged, you know activities are at the right level."

<div style="text-align: right">Interview 8. p.5</div>

The importance of assessment relates to the significance he places on the fundamental need to place communication as central:

> "It's fundamentally all about communicating and that's where you know, assessments and monitoring and recording is important, it's finding as many different ways of getting a response."

<div style="text-align: right">Interview 8. p.6</div>

Along with communication comes the importance of relationships, not just adult pupil but also between pupils:

> "You know a lot of the very close relationships that you can observe in a school comes from their peers, you know and that's, you know and that's great."

<div style="text-align: right">Interview 8. p.7</div>

He seems to believe in the importance of parents and teachers working together in a reciprocal way, not only to share understanding and expertise but also for the direct benefit of the pupil:

> "That's very important I think and for the, you know the students to be with their parents in school as well, to hear them in their other environment."

<div style="text-align: right">305</div>

Making sense of identity

There is a clear identity to working with pupils with special educational needs that is apparent when he talks about his professional training:

> "I didn't really have any desire to become a mainstream teacher ever, I was just told that was the best way to get into it at the time."

This develops to a discussion about what he enjoys about his work, and it is the relationship with the pupils:

> "I'm saying really, that the interest for me is that it's a very special, like special moments."

He also appears to have an identity with colleagues , who work in the field, and again it appears to be the quality of relationship that he identifies with:

> "I think it's when people, you know there's some people who they'll approach something where they kind of consistently get a response, I mean it doesn't happen 100% of the time but there's some people that just, you know you can be working in a certain way and someone can come and just by their approach, their physical presence I'm picking up on things and taking them that step further but kind of consistently is quite impressive to me. I mean it doesn't happen to everyone."

Making sense of influences

In discussion it becomes apparent that his first degree in dimensional design has been influential to him. The logical, creative, flexible and practical emphasis is something he identifies as important processes in working with pupils with pmld. His personal interest in music is something he identifies as important to the development of his understanding and practice. Apart from the creative element he discusses the role of technology and the technical discipline of music:

> "I mean my interest in music aside from work, using kind of technology to sort of sample sounds and playback and look for responses, that is good and it gives a few ideas of things."

A TEACCH course appears to have been influential to his understanding and practice. The emphasis on organization and structure with the fundamental underpinning of the central role of communication:

"The TEACCH approach with people with PMLD... I think the environment, there's the you know, there's a lot of emphasis on the environment and structure, communicate, you know what comes next when something's finished, you know that is very relevant."

He talks about the importance of the practical implications of theory and how he has learnt a great deal from colleagues. Talking about influences to his understanding and work he says:

"Largely just other staff over the years in the school. I'm not a great academic, I can't say I've read a book that's completely changed my whole philosophy of special educational needs, it's been very much learning through doing from and with other people."

Teacher Nine

This teacher has over ten years experience, completed his initial teacher training for children with severe learning difficulties. He is a manager.

Making sense of ideology

The individuality of pupils appears to be important to this teacher with a sense of these pupils being 'different':

"The importance of observing, recording, evaluating and tuning into the need of the pupils whilst at the same time giving the benefit of, as I say, seeing the normal child."

The way he perceives the pupils illustrates his belief that they are very different and also overwhelmed by the world:

"they're living in a world that's very, very confusing and they're receiving rather than being able to actively influence because more often than not they're physically disabled... they're going to be frightened, you know different people coming towards them they've never seen before, moved from one place to another without any concept of what's happening and you're talking about children who you want to keep relaxed and you want to try and meet their physical needs."

This difference and sense of confusion appears to stem from some notion of damage that the pupil has:

"Their processes of thinking are impaired by significant damage to different parts of their brain as are their communication skills and the impact of that on being able to

you know, make sense of the world and to be frustrated by not being able to communicate with the world."

It appears to be the medical model of disability that this teacher is applying. The role of the environment and adults within it is about relieving the frustrations and confusion of the condition itself. Hence, the environment must be structured with consistency and routine as important. The adult becomes an advocate and interpreter for the pupil:

"It's got to be to do with someone being able to interpret the world for them, to be able to make choices at their level, to be able to communicate effectively, for them to be able to do that consistently, to be able to you know meet their physical and emotional and social needs but in a way that makes sense to them."

At times this advocacy verges on protection:

"It annoys me to be honest because I just think you're playing with your own theories on these children's education and somebody should be somewhere saying hang on a second and challenging them on why you're doing that with that child, you know what's he getting out of that and where's your theory for it."

Theoretical and well-researched underpinnings of any work with this group of pupils appear to be important for this teacher. He talks about the classroom and school environment in a way akin to early years provision where there are discreet areas for different aspects of the curriculum and also areas that provided the specialist input he sees as essential for the pupils:

"You know you might have another area that was just like a quiet time, if you were having you're physiotherapy and relaxation and aromatherapy and there would be a separate area obviously discretely out of sight that was for your personal hygiene routines and again that would all be coloured in to the same structures so that you'd have your objects of reference so you knew where you were going, you knew what was going to happen to you."

A central theme running through the environment is the familiarity of structure and routine, possibly to help make the world less confusing for the pupils.

Making sense of identity

There is a clear identity already talked about to a 'cause', not only to be an advocate for the pupils in terms of communication etc but also to be a sort of protector from the

possible 'charlatans' who may wish to carry out experimental work with the pupils. He also appears to have another drive to have an impact on the education of this group of pupils:

"I mean it's what we're doing it for to give an impact of having the child learning."

Interview 9 p.13

There also appears to be a strong identity to other colleagues who work in the same field particularly those that followed similar ITT training:

"I still see friends of mine and colleagues who have had similar backgrounds who say similar things and when you meet teachers who've not had that background who come into special from a mainstream background, you can see their anxiety when they go into a classroom because they literally don't know where to start."

Interview 9 p.1

There is a strong identity to colleagues who are clearly knowledgeable and are successful, this began when he was very young and new:

"I watched and admired. You know I can remember admiring them then when I was 16 and 17, thinking God you know how do you do that with her and just watched and watched and watched and watched and trying to pick up on what they're were doing."

Interview 9 p.13

As he has developed he now identifies with the need to influence the work of others and be a leader in the field too. He seems to want to do it through role modeling, working with teachers, in a way he has found personally valuable:

"But what I'm trying to do is actually to get into classes and just do a little bit of work with teachers."

Interview 9 p.9

Making sense of influences

The initial teacher training qualification that he completed has evidently influenced his subsequent work, he himself says of the value of the training:

"It was an excellent course. I think for all of us whether you had some background in special education or not it took you through the developmental process involved in, you know child development and specifically related to children whose, you know profile wasn't following the normal lines."

Interview 9. p.1

The experience of being an external evaluator for a course appears to be very influential to him:

"It was challenging for me to be, you know the assistant to evaluate the project as well and the rigor of doing that and making sure your reports were accurately reflecting was going on as well."

He has clearly experienced a range of in-service courses and each time evaluated them in terms of value to his classroom and teaching. For example a course on rebound therapy was received very positively:

"You know that was quite influential because I thought yeah it does work and I can see it working and it's worth doing."

Whereas he became angry at a conference where he suspected:

"There are far too many people trying out their own theories or philosophies on profound and multi-learning difficulties children and I think it's wrong and I really feel strongly that somebody needs to say this is bull shit and you need to rethink it up."

This latter experience supports and feeds his ideological stance that this group of pupils must be protected from unfounded experimental work. Early personal experiences at school seem to have been particularly important for him:

"My comprehensive school was approached by a voluntary group to use their facilities for a play group initially on Saturday morning and they wanted volunteers to come along. So to be honest, me and a few friends wanted to have a laugh and thought, oh what's this, you know the spaka bus and all of that kind of thing and we didn't know any better... I use absolutely hooked from the first morning I went, there were children there who were profoundly disabled."

He talks about this being the beginning of his interest and commitment and he proceeded to find more and more opportunities to spend with people with learning disabilities. The people who have influenced his work have been those that have demonstrated to him they can be successful with the pupils. Who are able to demonstrate that they can have an impact on the children. He talks about a course tutor:

"He was one of the few tutors who actually worked with children and he went in a classroom and he sat down on the floor and got these two twins who were very difficult and he did these sort of funny things with them and he played with them in a very direct way that was having an impact."

Teacher Ten

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream with a specialism in RE. She is a manager.

Making sense of ideology

This teacher clearly views the pupils as different, there is use of language throughout her interview that suggests this and also suggests she feels they are damaged in some way:

> "Little people who have been damaged usually at birth or sometimes by an accident, you know a major head injury."
>
> Interview 10 p.5

There is a notion that this group of pupils needs something additional or different from their peers in mainstream. Talking about her attendance at a LEA assessment course she recalls:

> "Obviously they weren't relevant for our children at all so now we have moved on."
>
> Interview 10 p 3

This difference appears to manifest itself hierarchically when she talks about mainstream children being 'higher':

> "I would really love to take our children up to mainstream and I would really like to bring mainstream children down."
>
> Interview 10 p 5

This comment was not related to the schools being on a hill or incline but appears to illustrate the teacher's view of the difference between the children. Talking about the National Curriculum she highlights the importance of staff picking and choosing appropriate bits for the children:

> "The reading and everything in the National Curriculum doesn't matter but there are things in the NC that we can pick out."
>
> Interview 10 p.6

She seems to be making a strong statement that the National Curriculum in its entirety does not apply to this group of pupils. Developing out of this there is also a feeling that she believes that those who work with this group of pupils are specialists who have specialist knowledge and skills that enable the pupils to:

> "Think, they can think but they need to be helped to think clearly and they need lots of help, physical help."

Although she talks about the value of the pupils being with more able peers she is definitely pro segregated provision in a special school context. She justifies this:

"Mainly because the mainstream pressures are so great that I don't think they would be able to provide the care that is needed properly."

There appears to be an emphasis on care here that apparently requires specialist provision. The teacher does not seem to believe that an appropriate level of care can be provided in a mainstream school of today.

Making sense of identity

This teacher clearly sees herself as an advocate for the pupils she teaches:

"I've made it one of the most important things I do, when you introduce strangers to the children to make sure that they know, they don't sort of talk about them as if they are stupid."

There is a feeling of personal identity with the parents and through this to a 'cause' related to the pupils themselves:

"It must be the most awful thing having to cope with a child with pmld and it's vital the parents really become proud of them and want to love them."

This teacher talks about the specialist skills she feels teachers of this group of pupils need to have, we have already heard about the need to make decisions about particular parts of the National Curriculum. She also discusses the importance of the teacher taking on the 'care' role with the children and says:

"Everybody has to do every job and if you're not prepared to do that it's a waste of time coming. I'm quite good at changing nappies now."

This view extends to other children, her experience as a guide leader and seeing disabled children included illustrates this:

"She can't eat so they help to feed her and I think it is absolutely wonderful watching other children work with our children...they're sort of very blasé about it, they don't even think they are caring."

Although the children themselves may not see their interaction as unusual this teacher appears to view their natural interactions with the child as something special.

Making sense of influences

The initial teaching experiences of this teacher appear to be significant; she worked in a context where pupils with pmld were segregated from the rest of the special school:

> "When I first started working at a special school...they had no pmld classes integrated, they had separate units."

<p align="right">Interview 10 p 1</p>

Not only did they have separate units but also the pupils stayed in these classes throughout the day so there was no interaction between them and the rest of the school. This teacher does not know what went on in the classes but it may help to explain why she thinks they need specialised and different provision from other pupils. This scenario seems to have developed a particular view of the pupils, which the teacher herself says, was negative, this view was only challenged when a change in school organisation meant the pupils were more integrated into the school:

> "Not working with them you just really regard them as children who did nothing and it was quite worrying once you realised how much they can do and how much they can respond but not in the way you expected."

<p align="right">Interview 10 p 1</p>

This may also help to explain why this teacher now sees herself as an advocate for the pupils and how she does not want people don't treat them:

> "As if they're stupid"

<p align="right">Interview 10 p 1</p>

Something, perhaps she feels she did. People who this teacher talks about as important in developing her own understanding and practice are people who she relates to in a personal way:

> "Obviously has oodles of experience with pmld children and you feel you can trust her."

<p align="right">Interview 10 p 2</p>

She appears to need people who have a great amount of experience and there is an element of confidence required that it applies to this particular group of pupils. This may help to explain her dismissive approach to generic LEA courses and the apparent value she places on learning from others in the segregated special school sector. She talks about a colleague she learnt from who demonstrated his ability with the pupils:

"He was just absolutely brilliant with the kids."

She also talks about talks about seeing practice in other special schools as being influential to her and discussion with other specialist colleagues:

"I've worked in a lot of different special schools and I think that the way you get to know a lot of different methods and ideas just talking to people really and you think oh that's not a bad idea I'll try that and things work."

A particular parent who showed great belief in her child as an integral member of the community appears to have been significant for this teacher. It may have been an example of how she would like to be in her role as advocate for the children:

"Was brilliant. This little girl was taken everywhere, didn't matter what happened and then everybody else just accepted and I thought well you know this is what we've got to aim for."

Her personal experience of having a godson with Downs Syndrome appears to have contributed to the way she perceives children with disabilities and her commitment to a 'cause':

"Our little godson's Downs and you can see from him all the problems and you know what you've got to sort out. The things that worry people, worry the parents, and you know you've got to wear nappies until you are three and a half and you can't get this."

Teacher Eleven

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream with a subsequent BA in multi sensory impairment. She is a class teacher.

Making sense of ideology

This teacher appears to view pupils with pmld as different to the other pupils; she talks about a pupil in her class with pmld as "Little Miss Special" (p.7). She talks about these differences in terms of: the specialised provision required, different teaching and learning strategies and the central importance of communication. She discusses this specialised provision more when she talks about her ideal class:

"In a perfect world children in my class with pmld would have access to physiotherapy everyday which they do not have now...they would have access to more hydrotherapy, to aromatherapy, sensory room."

She goes onto discuss the classroom and expands the notion of specialist when she says:

"Much bigger classroom, far more specialised equipment, you know tables and chairs, the tables that lower and raise and ladderback chairs."

Along with this specialised equipment, there is a necessity to work on personal care routines with the children. She goes onto talk about the importance of staff who are able to work with the pupils in a dignified way:

"I'm very aware of the fact there are certain times in the lives such as feeding and toiletting times, that have to be enriched for them...you're given dignity, dignity is a very important thing."

The teaching and learning styles she talks about relate to the sensory and physical experiences she seems to believe are important for the pupils and also the importance of allowing more time to enable a response or reaction to occur. The role of communication appears to be of crucial importance to this teacher:

"Communication. That's one of the most important areas, well the most important area."

It appears that the work on sensory, physical and communicative experiences all feed into the notion of choice and control which is infact a matter of entitlement:

"They are entitled to a choice in their life as much as anyone else and the only way you can do that is to give them as many experiences as possible."

The idea of entitlement is mentioned again when she talks about the children 'deserving' a level of quality. She talks about the importance of valuing children and building up her pupil's confidence:

"It's really really important to value children because if you can you know, build their confidence up you can certainly help them."

This teacher appears to believe in the importance of working as a team in the classroom. She talks about the value of the exchange of views and perceptions between teaching and auxiliary staff. However, she is clear in her view that she as the teacher is very much in control:

> "I get what I want but we do it in a way where I direct but we talk about, we try to meet regularly, once a week, why, they have anything to say about the children."

Teacher eleven p.5

To her consistency is important and teamwork may be a way to achieve this. The idea of control appears to impact on her views of parents where she seems to view their involvement as possibly problematic. The problems are around the potential differences in opinions and reinforces her belief in consistency:

> "I encourage my parents to come in, you know I'm very into home/ school liaison...I think the only problem is with parents, their approaches can be different."

Teacher eleven p.9

During the interview there appears to be a tension between segregated and integrated provision, she talks about the individuality of the children as learners and the need for constant 1:1 attention by an adult. She talks about her views on integration:

> "I feel it's very important that the children are integrated. I can see the absolute positives, but the disadvantages you know really we could do with more people there are not enough people."

Teacher eleven p.6

The need for the high level of contribution by the adults to the pupils may be related to the defect and problematic way she views the needs of the pupils themselves. An example of this is when she says:

> "It may be that they can't hear what you're saying, it may be a visual difficulty but we the teachers, have to help these children as much as we can to find out what the difficulties are and see if we can get some agencies in to help."

Teacher eleven p.3

Making sense of identity

There is a strong sense of an identity to a 'cause' and this is very related to the pupils she teaches:

> "I manage in the very best way I can and ensure that my children get you know, the maximum that we can offer for them which you know isn't easy."

Teacher eleven p.4

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There appears to be an element of entitlement and struggle within this. She is also committed to simply being with the children:

"I just thoroughly enjoy being with the children, I really enjoy it and get so much satisfaction from any small steps, which we know are very small. If I can help in one tiny way to better the children's environment and the choice and direction in their lives."

<div align="right">Teacher eleven p.10</div>

It is apparent in the discussion about her ideology that she seems to see herself as a leader and manager of the classroom context who has overall control although she is willing to listen to the views of others. There is a great sense of identity to the job:

"I just absolutely love my job, I really really do, I never ever wake up and think, I've got to go to work."

<div align="right">Teacher eleven p.9</div>

This identity began when she first started working with pupils with pmld:

"I very quickly realised that I just wanted more, I wanted more involvement, so that's when you know I got a full time position and I have never never regretted it."

<div align="right">Teacher eleven p.10</div>

Making sense of influences

When this teacher talks about valuing children she includes a personal perspective:

"Self esteem well, I know what its like if people you know value me and I think it's important to value everything."

<div align="right">Teacher eleven p.5</div>

This may suggest that she herself has had a significant experience of being valued or even of being valued. Her Multi Sensory Impairment training may have contributed to the emphasis she places on sensory experiences and physical interaction of the pupils themselves. The central core of her work appears to be around communication and this may have been influenced by the work she developed on this course. The TEACCH course seems to have made a particular impact on her work she herself says:

"I actually worked with a boy with a boy in our school who had pmld and he was really really I found the TEACCH was excellent."

<div align="right">Interview 11 p.4</div>

She talks about the importance of the structure and the consistency of the approach. When talking about what has influenced her she talks about her colleagues and the practice of others:

"It's the people who I have worked with I mean I have seen good practice, I've seen some terrible practice."

Teacher Twelve

This teacher has over fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream with a subsequent one year diploma in mental handicap. She is a class teacher.

Making sense of ideology

The way this teacher appears to view her pupils is from a deficit and problematic perspective. When she talks about the importance of sensory experiences:

"The sensory input, sensory is very important as well because they haven't got an awful lot else really that can stimulate them by their senses."

The problems manifest themselves in multiple ways and include physical, medical and personal needs. Communication appears to be a very important aspect of her work:

"Communication, communication is very important, to be able to communicate with the children and fort hem to be able to communicate with you."

This teacher views her pupils with pmld as being very different from other pupils. Talking about her conductive education training she remarks about her own context:

"I mean they were a different group of children completely, you know they weren't as able and they weren't you know as physically able, the majority would never walk as such whereas in Hungary at the Institute they did expect them to walk."

This illustrates the difference in expectations she has too. Although she talks about the importance of one to one teaching she has, post conductive education training, she talks about the value of group work:

"I mean the idea was to get the children sitting and looking around the room and I thought it was lovely because they were like working as a group, they were altogether and they could see each other."

<div align="right">Interview 12 p.3</div>

This interaction with others appears to include other children in the school:

"That's one good thing of this school they are able to integrate with the other children on the social side so they've got other children coming and talking to them, doing things with them, encouraging them."

<div align="right">Interview 12 p.8</div>

The importance of allowing pupils with pmld time with an adult to enable them to respond appears to be important for this teacher:

"You need to be able to spend time with them for them to get the benefits as well and I feel so guilty because its K who gets left."

<div align="right">Interview 12 p.7</div>

Making sense of identity

It appears important to this teacher that she identifies herself with other teachers who have completed specialist training:

"Teachers come into school on supply and they have very little training and they haven't got a clue what to do, they haven't got any idea and that's a shame because I still think they need teachers for those kids."

<div align="right">Interview 12 p.6</div>

As part of this specialism is the need to be an 'adapter' and this teacher seems to see herself as a teacher who is able to adapt. Talking about her conductive education training she says:

"We knew that couldn't be used with our children, we weren't going to do that and plus we couldn't leave them unattended sitting on the chair in case they fell but we got round that by adding straps to the chairs."

<div align="right">Interview 12 p.3</div>

Making sense of influences

The initial training focussing on mental handicap and the problematic nature of the pupil's handicap and the apparent specialist provision this group of pupil's need:

<div align="right">**319**</div>

"There was an awful lot more on dealing with children with special needs and profound and multiple handicaps, methods of teaching them, ways to work with them and things like that."

The conductive education training appears to have been of particular significance, particularly in its emphasis on physical patterning and group work and in her 'ideal' classroom she talks about the role of specialist furniture from this approach even though its use may be need to be adapted.

Her own experience of the Health Authority being responsible for the education of this group of pupils:

" When I first came to special education it was very different, I wouldn't have said what I was doing then had a lot to do with the teacher training I'd had prior to it...I mean it was just coming out of like Health authority to Education, it was very different then."

Her experience of other colleagues and the practice of others appear to have been important to this teacher. Talking about one particular colleague it is appears she recollects the experience as a sort of apprentice experience:

"I mean I didn't know an awful lot about pmld children and I mean I wanted to say she took me through the first six weeks really in what to do."

Other people do appear to be important to her, talking about the influence of the practice of others she says:

"I mean it's picking up ideas from other people, if you see something different being used you know that you've never used and you think 'Oh, I could use that in school'."

The importance of being able to relate new ideas to practice appears to be of value to this teacher. Sometimes this creates tension An example of this is where she discusses an LEA IT course she attended which she acknowledges was difficult for her:

"I found it useful, the only thing with that really was I would come back to school with all these ideas and and things we could get for the children and it all came down to money, and you knew you couldn't get the equipment because of the money problems."

Teacher Thirteen

This teacher has more than fifteen years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream with a subsequent course in special educational needs. She is a class teacher and part of the senior management team.

Making sense of ideology

There appears to be a sense of this teacher perceiving the pupils with pmld as very different:

"Well they do learn in very different ways and things that you think they should know because they can do this they should be able to do that but it's not necessary the case...before I even went into pmld, I had to relearn and rethink everything."

Interview 13 p.1

There is also an idea that her expectations are different and the pupils often surprise her:

"I think the biggest thing is that they do amaze you and the things you feel they're not going to be able to do they end up doing them you know far better than you'd ever hoped."

Interview 13 p.1

And:

"I certainly wasn't aware of how much they could do."

Interview 13 p.2

She talks about the children as very complex individuals:

"I think children who have a very, a lot of whether it's physical or developmental learning difficulties and children who need a lot of, not just one professional to help them in their development."

Interview 13 p.7

The need for developing some shared communication appears to be important to this teacher and for that communication to be on the pupils' terms:

"Some form of communication, whichever form it happens to take, some form of communication."

Interview 13 p.7

She goes onto say she believes communication to be the biggest need of this group of pupils. She also talks about the importance of sensory experiences and for these to be stimulating:

" You know they need lots and lots and lots of stimulation."

The value of early year's practice appears to be important for this teacher with her ideal classroom organised like an early year's classroom with discreet areas of activity. She also seems to value integration with more able peers. Her ideal classroom would be integrated with the children doing similar activities. It seems to be important to this teacher for her to feel easeful in the classroom and with the children. She talks about an approach to teaching she considered and dismissed because:

"I thought I'm not going to be comfortable with it then I can't you know, I need to be comfortable."

She returns to this later in the interview when she is talking about colleagues:

"I mean over the years I've found it's been very important that you are comfortable with who you work with."

The importance of teamwork within a multi professional team appears to be valuable for this teacher, including physiotherapists, speech therapists and aromatherapists. Members of the team keep within their own boundary:

"I think if you can work closely with other professional to make a team, working team, you know you can say that's their area and they're quite happy to keep it."

She talks about the value of parental involvement. She talks about the importance of parents of pupils with pmld spending time with more able children in the class or school:

"I think it's nice for them to spend time for them to work with more able children...doing something completely different they didn't have the opportunity to do with their own child."

This suggests she feels it is important that the parents do different things with different children and possibly suggesting they are not happy with what they do with their own child.

Making sense of identity

Throughout this interview there is a great sense that this teacher has an identity to a 'cause'. She seems to believe she is doing something other colleagues do not want to do:

"I only went into that because nobody else would take them, you know, take the class on."

<div align="right">Interview 13 p.1</div>

Through this she is working with children who are unpopular and perceived as extra difficult. There is a great commitment to the pupils:

"I think the children themselves you know…just the sheer fact that you know I was going to get back more than I was actually putting in and I think that kept us driving."

<div align="right">Interview 13 p.2</div>

The teacher talks about this commitment as an investment that offers her positive returns. The 'cause' of the plight of the pupils comes across strongly when she talks about a course she attended and on return to school she initiated a development:

" I then went to the speech therapist and said look you know, come on we've all got to get our fingers out and get something done."

<div align="right">Interview 13 p.3</div>

This 'cause' extends to the parents of the children and she sees herself as a mediator for the parents in the midst of a multi professional team:

"I think I've been kind of a half way house as well, I think if you're used to parents ringing up school and using you as an aid to getting to other professionals in, I mean, I have found that useful especially for pmld children."

<div align="right">Interview 13 p.5</div>

There is also a sense of an identity to a specialist profession, herself as a specialist teacher and the need for specialist training. Discussing her concerns about the demise of this training she says:

"I think if the training is not there then people become wary of pmld children and it's almost like they have to be treat separately."

<div align="right">Interview 13 p.11</div>

Making sense of influences

Her initial teacher training in severe learning difficulties was an experience she feels was too general. She talks about it being:

> "Right, well it wasn't very relevant at all... the first year was mainstream teaching and then went off into for the next two years for special schools but within that two years we covered the whole range of special school children. So we went from children with moderate learning difficulties right through to PMLD children and when I look back now I thing we only touched on every aspect of the special child and really I think the PMLD was only probably a block of about three months."

It appears that this teacher feels that training for pupils with severe learning disabilities is different for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities and there is a hint of disappointment in the course she completed for not going into the specialism of pmld in more detail. She talks in a positive way about the course in that it helped her to challenge her own low expectations of children with severe and profound learning disabilities:

> "I think the first and foremost, I think to never pre-empt what they're going to do and not to say things like well because of this they're not going to be able to do ... I mean I think the biggest thing is that they do amaze you and things that you feel they're not going to be able to do."

There appear to have been two subsequent courses that this teacher has attended that she believes to have been particularly important to her. The first is a communication course which was very practical and related to the individual needs of one of her pupils. However, she describes her frustration at attending a course, developing new knowledge and understanding only to be faced with problems in the school that affect the translation of this new knowledge into practice. This teacher appears angry and cynical when she recounts this experience:

> "The Facilitated Communication was the best course and the worst course I've ever been on. I think first of all it gave me something to think about in the fact that this one little boy who I knew could communicate but had no means of communication at the time and I went in and it was about facilitating his communication but then all the issues that surround it about you know, if you start it and then for some reason you know, other people don't pick up on it, you've given that child some, you know you're going to take way that child's means of communication, so it is right to start it in the first place. I mean there was a whole load of issues so it was a bit sad."

A science course was the second course she talks about. Again, it was of a very practical nature and the tutor on the course was influential to, enthusing this teacher to go back into school and try things:

"I think when I went on her course, it was the enthusiasm to get on and do it and not think about it too much and it didn't matter if it went wrong, just to try again and get it right."

Professional experiences with colleagues also seem to have been important. Particularly classroom assistants. This teacher talks a lot about team work with classroom assistants influence this has had on her practice. She summarises this when she talks about her first teaching post and the two assistants she worked with:

" They were so relaxed with the children. Obviously after years of working with them and so relaxed with the children and receptive to me as the new teacher going in, as a teacher going into a new situation and it wasn't a case of well you're the teacher you should know that."

Through this she seems to be saying she appreciates experience and acknowledges the importance of role modeling. It is interesting that this teacher experienced working with this group of pupil's pre 1970 when 'Health' were responsible for the pupil's education. This medical model approach to educational provision must be significant in forming and shaping this teacher's ideology. She recalls that many of the pupils were in long term hospitals and she simply did not experience them:

" A lot of the children that were in P hospital then would be in school now, we would have them in school. So the range of PMLD children wasn't there, there weren't the whole group of PMLD, they were probably the better PMLD children that were in school."

Her personal experience of working in a segregated unit for pupils with pmld in the context of a special school appears to have had an impact on her. It appears that she acknowledged this as wrong and struggled to do something. However, this struggle was long:

"I did feel when I went in there that the children, you know they were in a unit and they didn't come out particularly very much and were seen to be an annex of the school when actually physically we weren't. So I think that was probably the first thing that I did, you know we went to assemblies and we did you know, although I never got them into the dining hall, I actually never got them there but we did use the cookery room so they were out of the class they were in into the cookery room but it was hard, it was very hard."

She talks about the responses of the children impacting upon her. Her experience before teaching this group may have given her they message that they were not capable of learning (hospital context). When she began to teach them she was surprised by their capability. This illustrates the low level of her expectations but also how their behaviour influenced her. However, there continues to be an underlying feeling that they are very difficult pupils to teach:

> "I think the children themselves you know, I think the feedback from them and watching them you know if you changed the class around, realising that they were searching for what they'd lost you know because you'd changed it and I think just the shear fact that you know I was going to get back more than I was actually putting in I think kept us driving and also I mean it's things that keeps you going because you can't stop."

<div align="right">Interview 13 p.4</div>

Teacher Fourteen

This teacher has less than ten years experience, completed her initial teacher training for mainstream with a subsequent course in special educational needs. She is a class teacher and part of the senior management team.

Making sense of ideology

It appears that communication is central to the work of this teacher:

> "Communication, I think it's the first step in working with these children."

<div align="right">Interview 14 p.4</div>

She also talks about the importance of understanding child development. She laments that her initial course did not cover this in-depth, she states the importance she feels this knowledge to be for teachers working with pupils with pmld and she explains as:

> "I think to understand what level the children are and to progress"

<div align="right">Interview 14 p.2</div>

This suggests she believes levels and stages to be important for this group of pupils, particularly early developmental ones. She talks about the pupils as being very developmentally young and because of this different to their mainstream peers:

> "You're taking things back to a very early developmental level which I don't think in mainstream schools you would do."

<div align="right">Interview 14 p.11</div>

The way she talks about what the children need illustrates her view of the importance of a clear structure in the environment. An illustration of this is:

<div align="right">**326**</div>

"The children respond very well to structure. They like to know what they are doing, they like to know what is coming next."

She talks about the importance of objects of reference in helping to structure the activities and also her belief that this group of pupils may not respond in an explicit way:

"I don't know whether they would show (a response) to such an extreme but I would always show them a symbol or an object of reference to tell them where they are gong and explain to them what is involved."

This she seems to believe this approach is entitlement for this group of pupils and they should be treat in a similar way to their peers:

"And why shouldn't they be any different to the rest of the children."

Although she has a lot of experience of this group of pupils being in segregated provision in the special school context she talks about her present more integrated context very positively:

"I much prefer the children to be integrated ...they do need to move on and have change like everyone else...I think the interaction with the other children, the social aspect of it is fantastic."

This teacher talks about the medical aspects of the pupils being a great concern of hers and she seems to believe that the complexity of the pupils can be frightening for adults and children alike. She recalls a young boy with pmld joining the class:

"The children were very very scared when he came in which I'd never seen a reaction like that with the children before."

Although she says she was not affected there are signs of unease when she says:

"It didn't affect me. Medically I felt quite unsure because there was a lot of medical aspects."

However, recalling her first experience in a special school highlights her own personal feelings a little more: