MY LIVING THEORY OF

LEARNING TO TEACH

FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:

**How do I enable primary school children with
specific learning disability (dyslexia)
and myself as their teacher
to realise our learning potentials**

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Abstract

My living theory of learning to teach for social justice: How do I enable primary school children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and myself as their teacher to realise our learning potentials

Caitríona McDonagh

This thesis is a narrative account of how I have improved my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), as a resource teacher in a primary school, thereby generating my living theory of learning to teach for social justice, within a context of normative theories and practices, which prevent the realisation of my pupils' and my own learning potential.

I link my research commitment to my Christian values of justice, freedom, equality, an ethic of change for a better social order, and the recognition of the uniqueness of the individual. These embodied values inform my life and work, and have become the living standards by which I judge the quality of my research.

I explain my self-study action research methodology as a living transformational process. My findings about my pupils' and my own learning offer new conceptualisations about the capacity of pupils to learn in their own ways, and about reconceptualising metacognition against normative theories in contemporary literatures. I have deepened my understanding of learning and knowledge creation processes through dialogical interactions, and developed new understandings about forms of theory and logic, and the relevance of living theory to changing practice.

I am claiming that the significance of my research is grounded in my capacity to show how I can enable children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to learn through person-centred pedagogies. This has potential implications for new forms of practice and theory in teaching children with special educational needs. A distinctive feature of my account is my explanation for how my Christian values have transformed into my critical epistemological standards of judgement, and the development of a living theory of practice that enables me to account for my educational influence in my pupils' and my own learning.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION – CONCERNS ABOUT MY TEACHING OF PUPILS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY (DYSLEXIA)

Foreword

I am a teacher and a researcher, and this thesis is my explanation for how I have generated my own living educational theory of learning to teach for social justice. I make this claim on two counts.

First I can show how I have enabled children with specific learning disability (dyslexia), who were previously marginalised, to celebrate their value and come to see that they have a contribution to make in the public domain. 'Specific learning disability' (dyslexia) is a term used to categorise some children who have difficulties learning the 'three Rs' – reading, writing and arithmetic. In the words of the Department of Education and Science, these children are described as:

- being of average intelligence or higher
- having a degree of learning disability specific to basic skills in reading, writing or mathematics which places them at or below the second percentile on suitable, standardised, norm referenced tests.

(Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002a, p.6)

The second count on which I claim to have generated a living theory of learning to teach for social justice is that I have also achieved justice for myself, in that I have found my voice through pursuing my research into my teaching practices. My research began with my questioning of the policy that labels some pupils as 'disabled learners' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999a, p.2; 2002a, p.6), so that they can access additional tuition within the primary school system. This concern developed into further questioning of the literature, theory and research in the field. By challenging current thinking I took a first step in a larger transformational process of my thinking and practice.

This thesis is about how I transformed that personal thinking and practice, as I began to develop my own new living theories about my practice. In order to see if I am justified in the claims I am making I have invited on-going critique of my work. Critique has become an integral and on-going part of my professional life. Consequently, I have come to realise that my practice is not static, and my reflections on it will not end when this programme of studies is completed.

The developmental nature of my research began when I asked, in my masters studies (McDonagh 2000), 'How can I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability in the area of language?' Having gained accreditation and a degree of confidence in my professional abilities, I came to my present research programme out of a sense of injustice on behalf of my pupils and myself. I was concerned that pupils who were labelled as having specific learning disability (dyslexia) were not being treated fairly. I was also concerned that I was not being treated fairly because, as a practising teacher, I had been denied a voice in policy debates. Linked to this were my own feelings of inadequacy. Within my own practice, I felt unable, as a teacher, to prevent certain pupils from failure, particularly in the areas of reading and spellings. I also felt unable to facilitate my pupils to achieve within their own terms, by which I mean to learn using their own learning strategies, abilities and strengths.

The three short quotations below, taken from school diaries that I wrote during 1996 –1997, give a flavour of the difficulties that some of my pupils experienced, which gave rise to my frustrations as a class teacher at that time. The three pupils I wrote about below were in a class of 38 pupils, aged 10 years, and all three pupils functioned at what is deemed to be age-appropriate levels in reading and mathematics, yet had significant difficulties with written language.

> Pupil M* works so hard. She reads well. But why can't she write? She can't even copy words accurately from the board into a copy on her desk. She leaves out and reverses letters and words. She can spell the same word in three different ways in the one paragraph.

> (19 Nov 1996, reflective journal in data archive, Appendix 2.1a)

Pupil C* can't even write one word from his textbook into his copy correctly. Only he can read what he writes. But he has great ideas. He is a good problem solver; inquisitive. How can he be so clever in all these ways and useless at writing?

(12 Feb 1997, reflective journal in data archive, Appendix 2.1a)

Pupil P* never has the right book open at the right time. He is always pretending to be looking for a book – is his disorganisation an avoidance tactic?

(23 Mar 1997, reflective journal in data archive, Appendix 2.1a)

(*The pupils are identified by initials in order to ensure anonymity for ethical reasons (see Appendix 1) which I will discuss in Part Three.)

In this thesis I explain how I overcame my own learned helplessness as a teacher of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Thereby, I have also enabled the children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) whom I teach to do the same by overcoming their learned helplessness. I took action to transform what I perceived at that time as failing situations into successful learning experiences, by engaging in action research. I understand successful learning situations in terms of my own values as I relate them to my work in a primary school as a resource teacher, who is supporting the special educational needs of pupils. The practice-based values that I came to articulate during my research were to do with, first, enabling children to exercise their own ways of learning; second, having those ways of learning valued by themselves and others; and third, having the pupils' capabilities recognised by themselves and others within their school community.

My living theory of learning to teach for social justice is grounded in this practice. Within this form of theorising I am constantly asking, as Whitehead (1989, p.45) does, 'How do I live my values more fully in my practice?' So it is a living form of theory rather than a propositional form of theory that exists only at an abstract level, because the term 'living educational theory' incorporates describing, explaining and theorising the changes that I am making in my teaching as a living transformational process.

The ideals of valuing the individual and the learner have informed both my career path in teaching and my interest in research as a form of professional development.

These principles stem from values of justice, freedom of choice, the ethic of change for a better social order and the recognition of the uniqueness of the individual. I believe that all humans have the capacity to learn, regardless of their social or academic positioning, as I have written and spoken about in McDonagh (2004a and 2004b). I was concerned that the value of fairness as a form of justice (Rawls 2001) was denied daily in my classroom when pupils, with average intelligence, failed to master key literacy skills because of the ways in which I was teaching them (McDonagh 2000). My classroom practice fell short of my ideals, and I came to understand how pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) were further denied justice by the dominant pedagogies in many classrooms. This understanding is supported by a Government Task Force on Dyslexia, which reports that some class teachers are

> not sufficiently familiar with dyslexia to identify students who may be at risk of developing difficulties, and therefore may not be in a position to provide appropriate support or seek additional help.
>
> (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b, p.36)

It was clear to me that children's rights were being denied in my practice and also in other classrooms according to the Task Force report above. Justice was not being done, in that appropriate education was not being provided for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Schools appeared to be failing in their duty, which, according to Section 9 of The Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998), is to

> provide education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, it shall, as far as resources permit (a) ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with special educational needs, are identified and provided for.
>
> (Government of Ireland 1998, p.13)

This apparent denial of appropriate teaching for pupils with specific learning requirements raised issues of social justice, which I considered might begin to be redressed by critically reviewing my understanding of the practice of a resource or special educational needs teacher, namely myself.

By claiming that my living theory of learning to teach for social justice is grounded in my practice, I mean that it is about helping pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to find ways of negotiating their way so that they are not disabled by their contexts, or their inability to make sense of words. This includes helping them find their own ways of learning spellings and producing intelligible writing. I am therefore claiming that my living theory of learning to teach for social justice is grounded in my deepening understandings about individual and unique ways of learning.

This thesis describes how I did this in research cycles of action and reflection during my teaching of three separate groups of eight pupils – one group per year – over the course of three years, 2001–2004. I collected a large amount of data over those years. The data is in my data archive and is listed in Appendix 2, while Appendix 1 contains my ethical statement and samples of the permissions I received to carry out this research. The Department of Education and Science had granted those pupils who participated in my research resource-teaching hours under the criteria of Circulars 09/99 and 08/02 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999a and Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002a). The boys and girls in the groups were aged between 8 and 12 years and were in mainstream classes at 3rd to 6th class levels. The numbers and gender-balance of the pupils in my research reflect national statistics for specific learning disability within primary schools. The eight pupils, whom I engaged with during each year of my research, represented 2% of my school's population. This concurs with the report of the Special Education Review Committee (Ireland, Department of Education 1993, p. 88), which estimates that 1–4% of the general population experiences a severe level of specific learning disability (dyslexia). Of the twenty-four pupils who participated in my research, eighteen were boys and six were girls. This gender ratio of 3:1 is consistent with the findings of the Special Education Review Committee (Ireland, Department of Education 1993, p.88) and the Government Task Force on Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b).

I experienced many key learning episodes that contributed to the main claims that I am making in my research. In writing about them, I have conceptualised and

organised my ideas by means of a metaphor of waves of expanding influence. The metaphor is drawn from the novels of Coelho (1992 and 1997). These waves are transformational, and have gathered momentum as I have worked my way through the research. I see myself as a person standing in the sea of life, water up to my waist, waves and currents tugging me away from and towards the shore. The first large wave is my commitment to my work. The second wave that crashes against me and tugs at me is the pervasive contradiction of the experience of living every day in the society in which I live. This society, although founded on aspirations of freedom and democracy, continues to reproduce forms of dominance and injustice that contribute to the marginalisation of people. The third wave that buffets me challenges the practical significance of the theoretical base of my work, by which I mean that my work as a resource teacher is influenced by traditional theories of teaching, learning and disability, whose relevance I question. I find that these theories are of limited practical use, so I seek a form of theory generated from my living practice that also has the potential to contribute to a knowledge base for teachers (Zeichner 1999). The fourth wave has the rising white foam and troughs of the successes and failures of my teaching. It also represents my attempts at helping other people, such as pupils and colleagues, to address how possibilities may be expanded in our lives and in the communities in which we live.

I use these four waves of influence to frame the first four chapters of this thesis in which I introduce the conceptual frameworks of my study. I identify these as identity, justice, teaching and knowledge. At the moment I remain with abstract conceptualisations, for the purposes of analysis, in which I present the metaphor of waves as static entities. I proceed later to explain that the waves are dynamic, and so the metaphor of waves itself becomes dynamic. These frameworks are not discrete areas, but, to continue the metaphor above, they are intermingled in the living water of life. During the course of the research reported here, the four waves combine to gather sufficient momentum to generate a fifth wave which I describe in Parts Four, Five and Six, that has the power to incorporate and transform the first four waves.

~ **The organisation of this thesis**

My thesis takes the form of an action enquiry, in which the underpinning question is, 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead 1989). I tell the story of my research

in a dialogical form, by posing critical questions for myself and by addressing them through the form of my text. In Part One I ask 'What was my concern?' I address my question with an explanation of why I engaged with this research. The first chapter in Part One opens up the substantive issues that encouraged me to take action. These issues are around injustice, and how the pupils whom I teach are unfairly treated because they are labelled in terms of their difficulties, mainly in reading and spellings. I also feel unfairly treated in that my voice is silenced. I am concerned that both the pupils and I have learned to be helpless, which denies our capacity for agency. In Chapter Two I consider the background to my research, in particular the clash between my values in relation to teaching and social justice, and existing social practices around teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). This chapter sets out the conceptual basis of my research. I explain that I want to get to a point where my pupils and I can celebrate our humanity together and be seen by ourselves and others as valuable people. For my pupils, this means learning how to negotiate their difficulties with spellings. For me, it means finding the best ways to help them.

In Part Two I examine the question, 'What are the core issues that concerned me and why did they concern me?' I am troubled because I believe that the pupils and I are valuable humans. I believe in the worth of the individual and I believe that people need to be free to develop themselves in terms of that worth (see Sen 1999). I am concerned that current systemic constraints prevent the realisation of my potential and the potential of the pupils I teach. I examine the contexts of my research, which include current normative theories and practices around teaching and learning for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). In Chapters Three and Four, I tease out the philosophical frameworks of my research, and I show how I have developed insights that will enable me to generate my own living form of theory (Whitehead 1989).

Part Three deals with issues around methodology as I pose the question, 'How can I show the situation as it was, and as it developed?' My developing understandings around the forms of theory, logic and practice in which my research is based in turn inform my research methodology. I discuss my research methodology over two chapters. Chapter Five deals with my journey towards understanding using a self-

study action research methodology. Chapter Six explains the processes that I engaged in to develop educational and practical theory from within my practice of teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

Part Four explains how I theorised my practice by addressing the question, 'What did I do?' and 'What was the importance of my actions?' Chapters Seven and Eight contain data from research episodes, which are analysed and critiqued against the literature. My findings contain descriptions and discussions of my learning and that of my children. In this way I show how my findings offer new insights and strategies when placed against the criteria and standards of judgement that informed my research, and also against current normative theories from existing literatures. Chapter Seven contains my claim to have developed a practical living theory of learning to teach for social justice in relation to pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Chapter Eight outlines how I developed new understandings about the nature of the capacity and individuality of those pupils, and how I refined and deepened my ideas about metacognition.

In Part Five I tell how I continuously checked, 'How can I ensure that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?' throughout my research process. This required my explanation of the grounds of my claims. First I have grounded my commitment to relationships of equality within my ontological and Christian values. I link the idea of the value of the person with the idea that people must be free to realise and exercise their value. So I claim to have developed a just practice in terms of human equality. Second, I have developed a critique of my own stance in relation to my pedagogies, as well as in relation to dominant practices of teaching children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Third, I have come to understand that personal and social practices are informed and underpinned by specific ontological and epistemological values.

In Part Six I ask myself, 'How did I modify my practice in the light of my new learning?' I explore the significance of my research and its implications for other colleagues' learning, and for new practices in teaching children with special educational needs. I reflect on how my new insights have significance for me, for the pupils who participated in my research and for teaching colleagues. I claim that I

have developed an epistemology that explains how personal learning can occur through reciprocal interactions and I claim that I have deepened my understanding of how learning and knowledge creation can take place through dialogical interactions.

The thesis ends by explaining that my claim to have generated my living theory of learning to teach for social justice is not the end of my research but a beginning of new possibilities.

CHAPTER ONE: Introducing my Concerns

1.1   Introduction

In the first year of my research programme (September 2001) I wrote in my journal,

> Another year begins. I have been allocated eight pupils because they have specific learning disability (dyslexia). I feel good about this. I know that by the end of their time with me these pupils will be able to blend sounds that will help them with spellings and decoding new words. I also know that with my help, these pupils will have shortened the gap between their reading ability ages and their chronological ages. I know that I will have taught them visual strategies to help them read texts by scanning for word shapes and commonly occurring strings of letters. Yet I am not content with these improvements. I am unhappy because I teach by rote, making pupils practise skills over and over again each day, each week, each month. The time the pupils spend with me cannot be enjoyable for them either. But the rest of their time in school with their mainstream class must be even less enjoyable because the pupils are doing so poorly and they must experience a sense of despondency. I am also unhappy about the fact that I am teaching all my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in the same way. I think that some of them are able to learn quicker and easier than others. But in order to get through teaching the skills, I don't have time to check out what pupils can do on an individual basis.
>
> (5 Sept 2001, reflective journal in data archive, Appendix 2.1.b)

I have written this thesis as an action research report in which I ask myself problematic questions about my practice. In this chapter, and following McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p.39), I ask,

What is my concern?

Why am I concerned?

How do I show the reality of the current situation?

What could I do about it?

My responses include the following. I am concerned that pupils are being unfairly treated under existing provision because they have difficulties in reading, possibly by the system in mainstream classrooms and by my teaching of programmes that are recommended for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I show that the reason for my concern is that my pupils have been silenced. I am also concerned that I have been unfairly treated and silenced because of the reality of working in a system of education that prioritises objective knowledge at the expense of individuals', including my children's, personal ways of knowing. Finally I describe the action that I decided to take to improve my learning about how to improve the situation.

1.2   Pupils were being unfairly treated because they have difficulties in reading

When my eight pupils were granted resource teaching, I withdrew them from their mainstream classes for a half-hour daily, as was common practice. According to the Minister for Education (Dáil Question 806 9978/05, 2005), the Government has dramatically increased the number of resource teachers in primary schools since 1997 and, since April 2005, nearly 2,500 resource teachers have been employed to provide additional resources for children assessed with special needs. These full-time resource teachers, including me, are required to take responsibility for providing individualised tuition to address the needs of these specifically assessed children. This provision includes the practice of withdrawing children from mainstream classes daily for thirty to forty minutes (Nugent 2006, p.102). I became concerned about this practice of withdrawing children with specific learning disability on the grounds that it could lead to their marginalisation.

I had three initial concerns:
   (i)   Is the label of 'specific learning disability' accurate?
   (ii)   Are normative teaching practices in mainstream classrooms contributing to the disabling of pupils who are labelled as having specific learning disability?
   (iii)   Dominant pedagogies for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) generally engage with behaviouristic teaching approaches. My

view is that pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) need differentiated personalised teaching approaches.

I address these concerns in turn and in relation to my thinking about my teaching at the beginning of my research.

~ I am concerned about the form of words 'specific learning disability' (dyslexia)

In McDonagh (1999a, 1999b and 2000) I explained my developing professional understanding about the field of specific learning disability, which led me to query the accuracy of the form of words 'specific learning disability'. I am referring here to the fact that the terms 'specific learning difficulty' and 'specific learning disability' both appear in the literatures on reading difficulties, and in policy statements used by education systems in Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. I prefer the term 'difficulty' to 'disability'. My concern is that in Ireland we are marginalising children by labelling them as having a specific learning disability when they may have learning difficulties rather than a disability. In the United States of America and Ireland, for example, the term 'specific learning disability' is widely used. In the United States of America that term is enshrined in the Individuals with Disabilities Act of America (United States of America, Amendment of 1997, s 602 [26], p.13), and in Ireland since 1975 the Department of Education has 'put in place a range of supports for children with specific learning disabilities (including dyslexia)', according to the Task Force on Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b, p.3). By contrast, in Britain's Code of Practice (Britain, Department of Education and Employment 1994) and in Northern Ireland's Code of Practice (Northern Ireland, Department of Education, Education Order 1996, p.71), the term 'specific learning difficulty' is preferred. Both terms include dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b, p.26).

~ I am concerned that normative teaching practices in mainstream classes may be contributing to the disabling of pupils who are labelled as having specific learning disability (dyslexia)

In querying whether the system in mainstream classrooms is a disabling factor for those children with specific learning disability, I am supported by a recent report of a

government Task Force on Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b). This report proposes changes in school practices and calls for a whole-school, multidisciplinary approach to catering for all those with dyslexia across all levels. This recommendation means that the Task Force recognises problematics in current teaching practices of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). So what is the relationship between current provision and my workplace? The reality of my working life was exemplified in the work and conversation of the children with whom I researched. An eleven year old pupil of mine wrote, 'Tunk you fro youre hepl' on a thank you card (archive item 20 June 2001, see Appendix 2.2a). Many teachers would focus on her errors in spelling – which are often a feature of specific learning disability – but the meaning and sentiment of her note inspired me to concentrate, through my own passion for compassion (Naidoo 2005), on the child's abilities rather than her difficulties. Naidoo (2005), who works within a nursing context, uses the term 'a passion for compassion' when she describes the emergence of her living theory of inclusional and responsive practice. This thesis tells how I responded to situations in my practice out of compassion for the pupils I taught. The research documented here shows how the young person who wrote the thank you note, and other children with specific learning disability who participated in this research, were enabled to move towards an awareness of their capacities for independent thinking and learning.

~ I teach by rote, making pupils practise skills over and over again each day, each week, each month

At the beginning of my research, I was using teaching programmes that were recommended for my pupils by educational psychologists. This was because a report from an educational psychologist on a pupil, necessary in order to access resource teaching for specific learning disability (dyslexia), is sent to the Department of Education and Science. When I was allocated a pupil who was designated by the Department of Education and Science with specific learning disability (dyslexia), first I looked at the psychologist's recommended programmes or strategies, if any had been offered. Many of the programmes recommended by psychologists require a behaviourist style of teaching and learning that focuses on stimulus and response and an emphasis on repetitive practice of new learning. This learning style includes over-learning, which involves intense practice of newly learned information until it is

thoroughly learned (Slavin 2003, p.194); and rote learning, which requires the memorisation of facts or associations that might be essentially arbitrary (Slavin 2003, p.199). In this style of teaching, learning is explained in terms of observable behaviour. Less visible processes of learning are ignored, such as 'concept formation, learning from text, problem solving and thinking' (Slavin 2003, p.163). Yet, from observing pupils with specific learning disability in my classes over many years I query over-learning and rote learning as the most appropriate forms of learning for pupils with specific learning disability. Therefore, in my research, I am pitting my experiential knowledge as a teacher against dominant theories of teaching and learning.

1.3   I had been unfairly treated because I was silenced

My voice of experience is silenced within the education system in which I work because the system is steeped in an epistemological tradition that prioritises abstract objective knowledge over personal experiential knowledge. I believe that this system is unfair to me, as a teacher, for the following reasons.

The planning and evaluation policies currently dominant in primary schools are practical examples of the epistemological stance of a normative education system. This stance can be gauged by considering how improvements in learning are measured and how teachers generally plan and evaluate their work (Reflective Journal 2001-2002 see Appendix 2.1b). Rule 126 of the Primary School (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005b) requires teachers to prepare 'scéimeanna seachtaine nó coicíse' (weekly or fortnightly short term plans), which comprise plans of proposed aims, work and inter-subject linkages (comhtháthú) for each class level and for each subject area of the curriculum. Targets attained are recorded in a 'Cuntas Míosúil' (monthly report) that is retained by the school principal and may be removed for scrutiny by members of the Department of Education and Science Inspectorate during whole school evaluations. In my practice I have continually found major discrepancies between the targets I planned and externally assessable learning attainments. By externally assessable learning attainments I mean those outcomes that could be demonstrated to the satisfaction of a Department of Education inspector should s/he wish to assess my teaching during a

whole school evaluation, in accordance with the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998, s.13. 3a 111 p.16).

The linking of the transmission and evaluation of knowledge to the effectiveness of one's teaching raises core issues for my research. For example, if I stated in my monthly report that a child knew x, and subsequently that child cannot demonstrate knowledge of x, the following questions could be raised: did I, as the teacher, teach x as claimed? Did I teach x inadequately? Was x taught but the pupil no longer recalled x? Was the method used to assess x appropriate? These questions demonstrate the need to establish acceptable criteria for the evaluation of learning. In citing the scenario above, I am making the point that learning tends to be assessed by those outside the learning process. These outsiders are positioned as experts and tend to use normative criteria and standards of judgements. These criteria and norms usually appear in traditional quantitative forms of assessing learning such as standardised tests for English reading vocabulary and comprehension; examples of those used in my context are the Drumcondra Primary Reading Tests (Education Research Centre 1994), the Mary Immaculate College Reading Attainment Test (Wall and Burke 1988) and the Non-Reading Intelligence Test (Young 2004).

The outside expert's evaluation is valued above those directly engaged in the learning process, as in the case of the protocols for assessing if a pupil has a specific learning disability. The Department of Education and Science, for example, requires an educational psychologist to administer IQ and standardised tests for the purposes of labelling a pupil as having a specific learning disability so that the pupil be granted extra tuition provision. This requirement of external assessors is in contrast to the Department of Education and Science's own guidelines in curriculum documents, which state that testing is an integral part of teaching (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999b). In my opinion this requirement could appear to imply that the state body governing education views teacher judgement as suspect because teacher judgement is excluded from the assessment process.

In addition to planning and evaluation issues, policy decisions also impinge on how I teach pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and on how they learn. When practice is seen as the implementation of agreed policy and curricula rather than

being pupil-focussed, resource teaching can be influenced in the following ways. The voice of the learner and resource teacher can go unheard and resource teaching can focus on systemic functions of enabling fuller participation in the mainstream class curriculum rather than enabling pupils with specific learning disability to exploit their capacities for thinking and learning. Since the Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland 1998, s. 16d p. 20 and s. 21 p. 22), schools are required to have policies and conduct planning as guidelines of practice in all aspects of education, including learning disabilities. Although policies are intended to be locally agreed and are formulated by the partners in education – parents, teachers, school patrons and local community representatives – they do not seem to have had the expected democratising effect on the learning of pupils. This appears to be the case because policy-driven planning and teaching has swamped many schools in Ireland (Nugent, Mary 2002 p. 99; Nic Craith 2003) since the 1998 Education Act was passed. In practice this means that I, like many other teachers, engage with what, how and where teaching happens rather than focusing on the learning of pupils, which represents for me a denial of my values of social justice in that an active exploration of how pupils can be involved in their own learning is systematically discouraged. There is evidence of the detrimental effect of an overload of paper work on schools in the recently published whole school evaluation reports (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2006), where schools are now recommended to match learning tasks to pupils' needs and abilities, in an instrumental correlational way.

1.4 My pupils and I had all learned to be helpless, which denied my capacity to exercise my agency

I also question the wisdom of minimising – to the extent of ignoring – the knowledge gained by those in closest and most extensive contact with pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Those with the most extensive contact with such pupils are their class teachers, learning support teachers, the school community and the pupils' parents. Yet, the Department of Education and Science (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999a and 2002a) bases the entitlement of 2.5 hours of weekly resource teaching on an educational psychologist's report. I believe

that this form of outsider evaluation is inadequate to appreciate the wide range of needs and abilities of individuals with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

In doing this research I aimed to develop different kinds of criteria and different forms of standards of judgement that approach the valuation of teaching and learning from a perspective which is different from traditional ways. I seek to develop criteria that demonstrate change in educational practice and in learning. It is pleasing to note however that the forms of assessment, recommended within the Primary School curriculum (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 1999b), have already gone some way towards this stance. It advises that pupil portfolio work, where pupils select and retain samples of their best efforts, be added to ongoing, cumulative and summative teacher assessment. Therefore, a methodological shift has begun that moves the centre of power from the outsider – for example, me as the teacher, as an expert who assesses learning – to the learner, who is encouraged to exercise their own voice in the process of their own assessment. My research is grounded in the idea that learners should be so involved, and therefore contributes towards the legitimation of a shift in the epistemological base of educational practice that values personal knowledge as much as objective knowledge.

1.5   Summary

Because I had been thinking deeply about these issues, I decided to take action to see if I could improve the situation. My pupils and I had all learned to be helpless, which denied my capacity to exercise my agency. Now, by asking, 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead 1989), I was beginning to take action. My reasons for undertaking this research became crystallised as I developed greater clarity around linkages between teaching and how knowledge is viewed. In my research I began to question the strong emphasis on objective knowledge and assessment in current teaching approaches. In this thesis I explain how I support my challenges with evidence generated through 'rigorous enquiry and validated research' (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995, p.5).

In this chapter I have outlined my concerns about the marginalisation and silencing of my pupils and myself. I have come to articulate these concerns because of my

commitment to my work. This commitment acts as the first wave of influence on my research.

In the chapter that follows, I articulate the beliefs I hold that influenced my concerns. I then go on to explain how I interrogated the approaches that I used in my teaching prior to my research programme. I did so in order to understand how I could improve my teaching and possibly improve the learning experiences of all pupils with specific learning disability. In my role as a researcher, I analyse the background to my work in the light of current literature on three fronts: first on practical issues of specific learning disability, whole school planning and pedagogy; second on social research about inclusion and marginalisation; and third on the fields of policy, provision and research into specific learning disability.

CHAPTER TWO: Reasons for conducting my research

2.1   Introduction

In this chapter, and following the action research methodology I have adopted for writing this thesis, I offer reasons for my concerns. I set out the background to my research and the substantive concepts that informed the formulation of my research question, 'How do I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability who are within my care as a resource teacher in a primary school?'

I want to begin by describing my reactions when I received reports on pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) from educational psychologists in the early stages of my research. On one such occasion, I wrote in my reflective journal (2001):

> A psychological report arrived today. Great excitement! Does it entitle our school to extra teaching hours? Will the hours help us maintain current staff? Will we be employing an extra part-time teacher? Quick! Check the IQ scores. Are they in the average range? Yes. Check the reading, spelling and comprehension scores; are any of them below the second percentile? Yes. Yippee. Now, do I see the words 'this pupil has specific learning disability'? These words must be in the report, in addition to the appropriate scores if resource teaching is to be provided? Double Yippee! They are all there.
>
> Next I turn to the psychologist's recommendations on the last pages of the report. Good it names strategies and commercial programmes such as Alpha to Omega (Hornsby et al. 1999) and Phonological Awareness Training (Wilson 1996), Wordshark and the Multisensory Teaching System of Reading (Johnson *et al.* 1999). I will definitely teach these programmes.
>
> Now I look at the IQ scores. A full scale IQ is given and it is broken down into a verbal IQ and a performance IQ. The pupil has a significant difference of 23 points higher in verbal than in performance IQ scores. This discrepancy is very useful. It tells me that this pupil will learn better when new information is presented orally rather than in written form only. When I am explaining the report to the child's parents, I can emphasise that the pupil has strengths above his average scores in verbal areas. I will also point out that this difference will be very helpful for him in career choices later in his life. His lower scores in performance IQ explain why he is having so many difficulties in school where most of the work is written.
>
> (29 Sept 2001, reflective journal in data archive, Appendix 2.1b)

My reaction to the psychological report focuses on existing policy, in relation to what I teach, on how I understand specific learning disability (dyslexia) and on how I explain it to parents of pupils. I have omitted to say what I tell the pupil about whom the report was written and who has spent time doing tests for the psychologist. This is because I did not tell the pupil anything about the results of the tests. In my experience educational psychologists also do not inform primary school pupils of the results of their assessments on them. In the previous chapter, I have spoken about how I value each individual, yet in practice I have denied this, as demonstrated by my responses to the report. This is an example of how I was denying my values in my practice (Whitehead 1989).

In this chapter, I set out my educational and social values and how I saw these values systematically denied in my practice as a resource teacher. These ideas about the contradictions between societal values and my own educational values were new understandings for me and, in making them explicit, I came to recognise that my professional values were rooted in ideas to do with justice and forms of knowledge. Discrepancies between social values in the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and the practical experiences of my workplace correspond to the second of the four waves of influence on my research. In Chapter One I have described this second wave as the pervasive contradiction of living every day in the society in which I live. This society, although founded on aspirations of freedom and democracy, continues to reproduce forms of dominance and injustice that contribute to the marginalisation of people.

I analyse the discrepancy and the clash of values in my practice under three headings.
- o   How policy influences my practice
- o   I show mistaken understandings of dyslexia in my practice
- o   I say that children should have a voice in offering their own explanations of how they live their lives and how this is obvious in my practice.

2.2 A clash of values exists between policy and the social practices concerning the education of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia)

Policy for the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) is currently dictated both nationally and at a local level by the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998, s. 9 p.13 and s. 13. 3a 111 p.16), the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act (Government of Ireland 2004a), the Equal Status Act (Government of Ireland 2004b), the Disability Act (Government of Ireland 2005), Department of Education and Science Circulars (Ireland, Department of Education and Science1999a, 1999b, 2002a) and my school's entrance and learning support policies. Consequently, policy in my context is influenced both by the discourses of disability and by the persistent practice of labelling pupils as having disabilities in order to access additional support. As well as the dissonance that I have described above, between my values and what was happening in my work, I was further frustrated by the labelling of certain children as disabled in order to access extra teaching provision within the primary school system. The aim of my research was to get to a point where the pupils and I could celebrate our humanity together, and still receive support, as I now explain.

When I asked, 'Does it entitle our school to extra teaching hours?', I was saying that a diagnosis of specific learning disability focused my attention first on provision of additional teaching hours. A diagnosis of specific learning disability can focus parents' attention, as well as the attention of many educational professionals, who support pupils who have this label, on the word 'disability'. When this happens, the second criterion by which the Department of Education and Science categorises pupils as having a specific learning disability seems to be forgotten. This criterion is that the pupils have average intelligence. In addition, the form of academic testing used to adjudicate on the remaining criteria for specific learning disability (dyslexia), ignores the pupils' abilities in areas other than English reading, comprehension and spelling. The practice of focusing on the disabilities rather than the abilities of pupils is a practical example of the discriminating discourses of labelling that permeate the practical contexts of my research.

Discourses of disability and the practice of labelling pupils with specific learning disability reveal many societal values that are contrary to the explicitly stated aims of both the Primary Education curriculum and the Special Education curriculum in Ireland. These curricula primarily aim to:

> Enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual.
>
> (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999b, p.7)

> Enable the student to live a full life and to realise his/her potential as a unique individual.
>
> (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2002, p. 3)

I endorse the value of respect for the capacities and uniqueness of the individual that underpin those policy statements. However, there is slippage between the rhetoric of the curriculum and the practice of its rhetoric. I address this slippage in my research by working towards practices that promote access and widening participation by individuals in their own learning. My actions are grounded in my own value around the unique potential of the individual, which is in keeping with the kinds of educational values that inform the curriculum aims that I have cited above. Having achieved such changes in practice I then hope to show how I can potentially influence others to do the same. I began this process by explaining how I developed a personal understanding of specific learning disability (dyslexia) and the labelling of pupils 'with' this disability, as I now describe.

2.3   My developing understanding of specific learning disability and the labelling of pupils as 'with disability'

My understanding of the nature of specific learning disability (dyslexia) changed during the course of my research. I described, at the beginning of this chapter, how I accepted unquestioningly 'the psychologist's recommendations of strategies and commercial programmes.' I also accepted that a discrepancy in various aspects of IQ scores was an adequate explanation of 'why a pupil was having so many difficulties in school where most of the work is written' (see my journal entry above). The

change in my thinking began as I tried to articulate and make sense of how current discourses of disability and labelling relate to my practice. Here is an excerpt from a letter to my research supervisor in which I write about my confusion around these issues.

> My gut feeling is that I was a 'disabled teacher' as far as teaching children with specific learning disabilities (dyslexia) (SLD) were concerned at the beginning of my research. I took out the box of knowledge about learning disability. I shovelled as much of that knowledge into me as I could from that box.
>
> And there it stayed – inside me. I tried to implement commercial *programmes* to alleviate SLD. They didn't work in a class of thirty plus children where at least 3 children had SLD. So I changed my job and became a learning support teacher where I would teach 4 children at a time. I rummaged again in the box of knowledge on SLD. I got a bigger box and filled it with more knowledge from courses about SLD – Diplomas in Learning Support, MA in Education and Dyslexia Association courses. I tutored individual children with SLD and set up and worked in a workshop for children with SLD. The individual children I met in my various teaching roles astounded me. They were often so articulate, very imaginative, artistic, industrious, and had long memories. This was in contrast to the main features of SLD as seen by class teachers and psychologists who cite poor language, difficulty visualising, laziness, untidy writing and poor memory skills especially for spellings as features.
>
> (30 Feb 2003, correspondence to research supervisor,
>
> original in data archive Appendix 2.1c)

This data shows the state of my thinking in the early stages of my research. By comparing this early data with the ideas I am expressing in this thesis, it is clear that my thinking has changed considerably. I moved from understanding my teaching as a process of 'fixing' those with learning difficulties to an appreciation of the capabilities of those I taught. I also altered my understanding of knowledge as only objective, reifiable and transferable to also valuing the knowledge-creating potential of the individuals. These changes influenced the form of theory I developed in my research, as I discuss in Part Three. The correspondence above also signals the beginning of my search to understand models of disability as they relate to specific learning disability in my context. Ware (2003) names these models as a medical

model, an educational model and a psycho-social model; all of which hold relevance for my context. In the following paragraphs I offer an analysis of these models.

~A medical model of disability

Dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyspraxia, among other disorders for which resource teaching is provided, are treated within a medical model of disability when fatty acids, fish oils, and specific neurodevelopment or primary movement exercises are prescribed as cures. The medical model works from a perspective of diagnose, prescribe and cure. This implies that the person being cured has something wrong with them. In this way the disability is placed within the person. So to a large extent the interactive educational and environmental influences on an individual are ignored. Research into the success of these prescriptive approaches is not conclusive (Doyle 2003). I would consider that this is because the linkages between behaviour, diet, and visual and motor skills are complex and become problematic within traditional quantitative forms of research, where evidence is limited as far as possible to one variable at a time. The commercial, intensive remediation programmes recommended in psychological reports, such as the one I described at the beginning of this chapter, represent a medical model of disability. I describe these programmes further in Appendix 4.1. They involve a model of teaching that treats the child as an object rather than as a unique individual. Claiming that the child is being treated as an object may sound harsh, but I am convinced that the form of words is accurate in that the child who is being 'trained' is not regarded as the thinking, feeling, constantly developing human that I believe he/she is. I would also argue that this focus on the child as an object of study rather than as a human being is at odds with the aims of the primary curriculum in Ireland, as set out above.

During my teaching career I have become increasingly aware of the humanity of my pupils. I have noticed their capabilities as people rather than focusing only on the teaching of reading and writing. I have personally come across those who are labelled as having specific learning disability (dyslexia) yet who are, in fact, able learners in many fields such as physics, mathematics, sport, and art. My experiences are supported by Davis (1994) who writes that successful adults with dyslexia develop strategies for learning and concludes that they have a gift for being able to

think in a three-dimensional fashion, unlike the rest of the population who, he claims, usually think in a two dimensional way. The adults he writes about were handicapped by the structure of the print-rich environment of schools. He theorises that two-dimensional printed words are easy for most people to grasp, but those with dyslexia (who are three-dimensional thinkers) see print three-dimensionally. By this he means that each letter can appear as a standing object, which can be viewed from above, below, front, back, the left or the right. This can make reading difficult for those with dyslexia and provides an explanation for letter reversals, which are frequent for those with dyslexia.

~An educational model of disability

At the beginning of this chapter I described how I explain to parents that their child with specific learning disability (dyslexia), who has strong verbal scores, demonstrates oral and aural abilities and 'is having so many difficulties in school' because 'most of the work is written', will thrive once she or he leaves school. In saying this, I am stating that school is probably having a disabling effect on pupils because my observations concerning pupils with dyslexia, and also the findings of Davis (1994), suggest that competent and successful adults with dyslexia were neither competent nor successful while they were in school. This approach exemplifies an educational model of disability, as Ware (2003) explains it. Within this model pupils can become potentially disabled by the interaction between themselves and the environment. An educational model of disability places structures, curricula or institutions in a position of power over pupils in ways that can negate their abilities and have a disabling effect on those individuals while in school. I believe that education can also become a form of social control to eliminate troublesome and non-conformist elements (see Bernstein 2000; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Let me explain further. In my work situation, when pupils are withdrawn from their mainstream classes for the provision of individual resource tuition, this action is undertaken partly because they do not conform to the stereotype that children of average intelligence progress at age-appropriate levels in reading, comprehension and spellings. The common practice of the withdrawal of pupils for resource teaching is in keeping with provision under an educational model of disability in that those who do not succeed in learning in normative ways, are eliminated from mainstream classes for part of each day. It can be argued that this

practice is an institutional structure to facilitate teachers rather than pupils. This concurs with the findings of Kerr (2001) who states that 66% of teachers in his study 'showed considerable disempowerment' when faced with a student with dyslexia (Kerr 2001, p.80).

~A psycho-social model of disability

A form of language that uses terms such as 'full scale scores', 'verbal and performance discrepancies', and 'multisensory teaching systems', as I described in the psychological report at the beginning of this chapter, are part of the discourses of a psycho-social model of disability that exists in my workplace context. This model focuses on specific groups with disability, and, within this model, special education again appears to become a form of social control, which is maintained through the interests of education professionals, including psychologists, and educational and medical administrators. For example, the definition of specific learning disability (dyslexia) in popular use is grounded in the criteria currently used by the Department of Education and Science. This definition is accepted probably because it is convenient for the appointment of staff whose task it is to deliver extra tuition. It is an example of a system controlling the people within it and is reminiscent of Habermas's (1975) philosophy that the system can be prioritised over the life world. A further example of this model of disability is that no child in mainstream schools in Ireland received resource teaching for specific learning disability (dyslexia) prior to 1998. It could be presumed from this fact that specific learning disability (dyslexia) was not recognised prior to that date. In 1999 when the Department of Education and Science established an automatic response granting resource teaching for specific learning disability (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999a), there was a dramatic increase in the number of pupils labelled as having specific learning disability (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b, p.39). The absence of such services prior to 1999 appears to be due to lack of institutional or policy provisions rather than being an indication that pupils' difficulties did not exist.

All three models of disability present in my workplace are at odds with my belief in the need for education to enable the student to live a full life and to realise his/her potential as a unique individual. My personal educational beliefs cannot be

dismissed as individual opinions because they are commensurate with national decisions in Ireland such as in the Primary Curriculum (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999b, p.7) and in the Primary Curriculum for those with Learning Difficulties (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2002, p.3).

Returning now to my omission of pupils from my description of my reactions to a psychologist's diagnosis of specific learning disability at the beginning of the chapter, I want to explain some possible consequences of labelling for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my context. In particular I want to highlight how those children perceive themselves and how others see them.

The label 'with disabilities' is currently considered more politically correct (McGee 1990 and McGee 2004) than terms previously used, such as 'handicapped' or a 'dyslexic person'. These changes in emphasis in the wording of labels over time reflect societal changes. To address these issues, I chose to focus on specific learning disability as a learning difference. In doing so my research aims to reflect the views of Dillon:

> Labels (in Special Education) were intended to be usefully descriptive rather than dangerously prescriptive. Our challenge is to create learning environments, which celebrate a range of talents and abilities and thereby to ensure that we do not conflate the label with the person.
>
> (Dillon 2001, p. 37)

Labels can also affect self-esteem as when, for example, in my context, labels can influence how children perceive themselves and how others see them. I am aware that the children in my research often build identities to 'hide insecurities and emit an image of calmness and being in control' (Hudak and Kiln 2001, p. 51) as coping strategies for their loss of self-esteem. These understandings are disturbing because they raise issues of power, violence and identity, and the existence of these issues can limit a pupil's ability 'to realise his or her potential as a unique individual' as set out by the aims of the primary curriculum (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999b, p.7). The work of Bourdieu is also instructive here, as he explains how language itself can become a form of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1992).

I am concerned about the current form of labelling for two reasons: it can lead to an erosion of personal identity and can influence the development of self-esteem. I have come across instances where labelling is used as a power strategy, and this use of power raises issues of equality and justice, as I explain in the following brief example. In a recent postgraduate course of study, a lecturer referred to me as 'my little student'. Being classed as somebody's little student, I felt a loss of power and a sense of being controlled by the other – a dismissal of my personal and professional identity. I understand my loss of self-confidence on that occasion as a reaction to a form of violence. In his analysis of institutional violence, Block (1989 cited in Hudak and Kiln 2001, p.47) also describes how 'our interactions with objects (that is events, objects and people) define who we are'. Labelling can become part of our identity formation.

~Why these understandings were disturbing in relation to my values

When I said at the beginning of this chapter that it was 'Good' when a psychological report 'names strategies and commercial programmes' and that ' I will teach them', I was making a decision to teach in a specific way because of the label a child had received. So in addition to the marginalisation attributable both to the discourses of disability and to the practice of labelling pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), I became concerned during the course of my research about the appropriateness of forms of teaching for those pupils. I have also become concerned that pedagogy is often perceived as knowledge transmission and how this understanding of knowledge informs how learning is evaluated. These concerns have given rise to a long list of personal questions: for example, why I had chosen to research this field. I was asking, 'Why am I, as a practitioner, concerned about forms of knowledge? Why am I concerned about particular issues in my practice? Why have I tried to address these concerns through research? Why do I aim to move towards greater justice for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), to address the marginalisation and effects of labelling? Why do I aim to facilitate the realisation by pupils of their potential as unique individuals capable of learning in order that they will develop in both self-esteem and learning?'

The questions above are key to the aims that I have chosen for my research; first, because they are about enabling rather than disabling other human beings; second

because they focus on the abilities rather than the disabilities of the individual; and finally because I want to offer opportunities for the pupils in my care no longer to perceive themselves as having a learning disability. My research is driven by a concern for those placed at a disadvantage and by a personal response to an intellectual challenge posed by teaching those with special educational needs. I hold values that have changed the way in which I perceive my context and have helped to focus the aims of my research. These personal values are:

a) Respect for the individual, including ideas about human dignity and wholeness;

b) Respect for the individual's ability to learn, including issues of equality and freedom;

c) Issues of social justice.

I will now explain the meaning and importance of these values in my context and then relate them to the literature.

(a)   Respect for the individual

My current research grew from a concern that objective and externally evaluated forms of knowledge pervaded my circumstances as a resource teacher. My concern was that the individual was being overlooked within these forms of knowledge. For me, this was a denial of respect for the individual person and was contrary to my ideas about human dignity and wholeness. Respect for other individuals has always been an integral part of my teaching. In McDonagh (1999a) I wrote about how I valued the individual by providing differentiated learning provisions for those with specific learning difficulties in my class. The benefits of this approach were that I gained a new perspective on the implications of self-esteem in teaching and learning and how to promote self-esteem in pupils (McDonagh 1999b). I was encouraged by this experience of articulating my values in practical terms. This has influenced both my current research question and research methodology.

I have based my research in the everyday, lived experience of those who participated in it. I was aiming not only for deepened understanding but also I wanted to make a difference for good in the world through teaching and learning. By making a

difference for good I mean changing situations in my practice so that they became more just. This required making opportunities in my study for dialogue between class teachers, resource teachers, pupils and myself. To gather the data for my research, I used dialogue rather than interviews because dialogue, for me, is a co-operative activity grounded in respect for educative relationships. This concept can be compared with the Freirean idea of helping the oppressed to move beyond their culture of silence (Freire 1970, p.15 and Freire *et al.* 1998) through a form of dialogue that involves people working with each other rather than one person acting on another. Opportunities are also afforded through dialogue to demonstrate respect for others' ways of thinking. Relating philosophies of justice and freedom with pluralistic ways of coming to know, underpins the practical approach I adopted in my research.

Because I trusted and respected the learner I shifted my understanding of the role 'of the learner from being the subject or recipient of education' (Carr 2003, p.4) towards being active agents in their own learning and education. My personal and professional values moved my thinking beyond the practical circumstances in my context towards a Freirean idea of education. Freire (1970, p.55) argues against the 'banking' model of education in which the educator makes 'deposits' in the educatee and argues for the exercise of personal agency in learning. In later chapters I explain the implications of this stance in my research.

(*b*)   *Respect for the individual's ability to learn*

The second significant value that informed my research was respect for the individual's ability to learn. This meant that I wanted to avoid issues of power and control that can exist in the relationships between pupils and teachers, where the concept of 'teacher knows and pupils learn' is prevalent in normative forms of pedagogy. I sought a different concept of the teacher-pupil relationship so that issues of equality and freedom of choice could be included and addressed. This occurred in my research when I provided opportunities for children to learn in ways that were appropriate for them; for example, I examined the appropriateness of the ways in which I taught and came to understand that I needed to expand opportunities for socially created learning (McDonagh 2000). I understand socially created learning as people constructing new knowledge together. My research built on these ideas and

became, in part, an exploration of the nature of relationships between people as they generate knowledge together. I wanted my research to avoid oppression and domination within teacher–pupil relationships because, as Young (2000, p.45) argues, such controlling influences are the founding principles for the formation of injustice. In developing a form of knowledge that was grounded in dialogue, I wanted my research to demonstrate an epistemological and methodological stance that was consistent with ideas of social justice.

The work of Young (1990) offers a useful perspective to begin to understand what I mean by social justice in my research. In her critique of dominant conceptual forms of theories of justice, Young is concerned with social justice not so much as 'having' as with 'being'. Her theory of having and being is based on the thinking of Fromm (1976). Social justice as having can be related to the concept of social justice as equal distribution. The concept of social justice as being can be seen as a development of Freire *et al.'s* (1998) ideas of being and having. Young is interested in the relationships between people that produce social structures and in how some forms of these social structures can allow injustice to flourish. I, on the other hand, aimed to facilitate the development of relationships between people – pupils and teachers – that could encourage social learning. These relationships would allow a living form of social justice (Sullivan 2006) to flourish by respecting the abilities of all those involved.

As part of my discussion I want to question the links between the idea of respecting the ability to learn of the pupils participating in my research, and current forms of assessment of that ability. I consider that Plato's view that all 'knowledge is recollection' (Plato Meno 380e) was the basis of much of the early training I received in teaching in the late 1960s and the basis of all forms of examining knowledge at that time. I believe the idea of knowledge as recollection is still the underlying principle of standardised testing. The most common form of standardised testing in schools is summative rather than formative in nature. Summative testing aims to test in a prescriptive format by relating pupils' learning to prescribed objectives. On the other hand, teachers carry out formative testing daily in class through monitoring what and how pupils learn in order to inform their next teaching activity. These performance-indicator-based and standardised tests are grounded in

ideas of stimulus, response and reinforcement. This form of learning has been described as behaviourism by educationalists such as Thorndike in 1917 (see Hilgard and Bower 1996) and Skinner (see Iversen 1992). Eysenck and Evans (1998), Binet (see Siegler 1992) and Wechsler (1992) built on the idea that behaviour can be changed by external stimuli, and they developed a form of psychometric empirical testing to define the processes of human intelligence. From my perspective these theorists laid the groundwork for grading processes. The Wechsler Intelligences Scale for Children (Wechsler 1992) is commonly used as part of the diagnosing process for specific learning disability and dyslexia in Ireland today. My concern is that standardised testing offers little to the learner although it facilitates the sorting, grading and categorising of pupils for the benefit of school management, research measurements or policy formation. These tests do not measure pupils' developing understanding nor do they measure pupils' capacity for creativity in thinking. Furthermore they do not measure how pupils are learning. My research has brought me to an understanding of alternative forms of assessment of both my pupils' and my own abilities to learn.

(c)   Issues of social justice

Social justice is the third important value, which influenced the aims and procedures of my research. My understanding is that dominant forms of educational systems consistently deny social justice when children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) are perceived as having a learning disability because of their difficulties with certain curricular areas. Through my research I want to develop more just situations for these pupils. I am not talking only about an inclusive form of justice as teaching in ways so that these pupils can take an equal part in mainstream schooling with their peers. This would be a form of distributive justice, where justice is explained in terms of all getting an equal share. Nor am I not talking only about a form of justice where extra teaching is provided for those with the greater identified learning needs. This form of justice positions justice as fairness (Rawls 2001) in that those with greatest need are given more. I am talking about a living form of justice, which I contend is more socially just, because the abilities of the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my research, which were masked prior to my research, will be recognised and valued publicly. Later in this chapter, I speak about

a contributive form of justice where all are enabled to make their contributions in the public sphere and have their contributions valued.

I want to tell why I am convinced that my pupils have unrecognised capabilities. My stories are based on my personal experiences and on reading about the life experiences of others, such as Albert Einstein, who is reputed to have had specific learning difficulties. One example of the capabilities that I believe that pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) have is that they think laterally and in innovative ways in order to develop coping strategies. Their engagement in coping strategies is an attempt to hide their difficulties, as the following research vignette shows.

During my research a pupil, who was ten years of age, explained to her class teacher how she (the pupil) avoided being humiliated by being required to answer factual questions aloud in front of the class. I will describe in Chapter Eight how this explanation happened following a report by the pupil to a group of teachers on how dyslexia affected her in class. The pupil had stated that she could not recall answers when a lesson had been conducted orally because she needed visual supports such as diagrams, sketches, mind-maps or cue words to help her recall. The pupil said to her class teacher,

> I avoid eye contact with you. I hold my hand and arm up straight.
> When my arm is up, you think that I know the answers. I don't wave
> my arm. You think that I am confident that I know the answer. I don't
> make eye contact. You look past me and pick on somebody else to
> answer.
>
> (3 March 2003 Tape recording and transcript,
>
> in data archive Appendices 2.4d and 3.1)

The teacher agreed that the pupil was correct in her understanding of the teacher's techniques for selecting pupils to give oral answers. The pupil's coping strategies demonstrated a perceptiveness and innovative reasoning which would be uncommon for her age.

My understanding is that pupils with specific learning disability may have different perspectives on learning and ways of innovative reasoning. This idea is reinforced by biographical information that I have read on Albert Einstein. Einstein thought in a particular way that worked for him, as history shows. Although he was a great mathematician and physicist, his learning difficulties were obvious in his failure to learn mathematical tables. His personal coping strategy for these difficulties was to write the tables around the walls of the room where he worked (Dyslexia-at-bay.com 2005). My personal experiences of teaching pupils with specific learning difficulties over many years has convinced me of their abilities for developing coping strategies – like Einstein and his tables – within an educational system that does not suit them, as the vignette above illustrates.

My second research story describes my understanding that each unique pupil with specific learning disability (dyslexia), in my care, can have intuitive knowledge and skills in specific areas that are beyond what is often demonstrated by their peers who have not been given this label. The following is an example of what I mean. A pupil with dyslexia wrote a piece of text on a computer in word-art. It was illegible to peers because of its size or colour but particularly because of its unusual shapes – as in the example below. However the pupil with dyslexia read it without any difficulty.

The writing says, 'Famous people who were dyslexic'
(26 January 2003, Pupil's Report, see Appendix   2.6c)

A second example of my understanding deals with the ability of a pupil with dyslexia to tackle mathematical problems in innovative ways. He could explain the unusual mathematical processes he engaged in but not why he solved mathematical problems – both numerical calculations and concepts – in those ways, by saying,

'I just know.'

(20 March 2004, Pupil P's journal, in data archive Appendix 2.1g)

In further reading about Einstein, I realised that he, too, had an intuitive awareness in that he had hit on his theory of relativity intuitively (as it appeared to him) at the age

of sixteen, according to Polanyi (1958). Quoting Einstein's diary, Polanyi describes how it was

> 'From a paradox I had already hit at the age of sixteen'…after 10 years reflection he wrote up his famous formula.
>
> (Polanyi 1958, p.10)

The process of reflection and metacognitive awareness of his personal ways of thinking was vital for Einstein's formulation of his theory of relativity – a process that took him ten years. I aimed to question if the pupils who were engaged in my research might also have an intuitively clear view of the world of learning. I was asking if these pupils had discovered personal and unique ways of learning. I also questioned if pupils could make their ways of learning explicit. These questions are about pupils and teachers explaining their ways of learning or knowing to each other and are part of my reasons for choosing to locate my study 'with' rather than 'on' my pupils. My research aimed to show how my pupils and I could together come to know and come to value what we know.

My ideas resonate with the work of Freire because an important element of his philosophy of *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994) was the idea of 'conscientization'. Taylor (1993) describes the term as:

> conscientization – developing consciousness, but a consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality.
>
> (Taylor 1993, p.52)

In summary I can say that my thesis does not aim to be a document about teaching children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to read or cope with the school curriculum. It is a thesis on equality, respect and the rights of individuals to come to know in their own way, following the traditions already pioneered by authors such as Fromm (1976) and Freire (1994), who speak, among other things, about having and being and personal forms of knowing. My research was about moving beyond teacher craft or the unconscious intuitive processes of the classroom. My thesis

contains explanations for my own processes of developing metacognitive reflection on my practice through enquiring into my practice.

2.4   Initial practical implications of my research for my pupils and me

My research is about theorising changes in my practice. In practical terms, I want my pupils to find their own ways of negotiating their difficulties with learning and particularly learning to spell, and I want to find the best ways to help them to do this. So far in this chapter I have described contexts and concepts that militate against this. These descriptions represent the second of the metaphorical waves that crashes against me and tugs at me as the pervasive contradictions of living every day in the society in which I live. As I noted earlier, Irish society, although founded on aspirations of democracy and freedom of the individual to achieve their potential, continues to reproduce forms of dominance and injustice that contribute to the marginalisation of people.

Key aims of my study were to

- Show how my pupils can come to value what they know and how they come to know it;

- Explore the nature of relationships between people which foster knowledge creation, and to develop the kinds of relationship that avoid oppression and domination;

- Become part of making a difference in the world for good through the demonstration of the exercise of my educative influence.

These aims became the living standards of judgement that I used to test my knowledge claims, as I explain throughout. In the remainder of this chapter I want to say how I am transforming my conceptual analysis of the reasons that prompted my research into an explanation for how I realised those conceptual analyses in the form of my real-life commitments. In doing so I am exploring how my commitments can be understood as grounded in my ontological values and how those ontological values can be seen also as the grounds for the articulations of my living standards of judgement for my research.

I intend to demonstrate that I am moving towards a methodology that respects the individual and the individual's ability to learn. I am also articulating my understandings of knowledge in which my research is based. I use the three values that I have named in the last section to frame this account. These values are:

- o Respect for the individual
- o Respect for the individual's ability to learn
- o Further issues of social justice

~Respect for the individual

My respect for the individual can be seen in the form of research question that I developed. Respect for both my pupils and myself as individuals was a reason for the personalised form of research question I developed – 'How do I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability who are within my care as a resource teacher in a primary school?' The question grew from reflection on how I had taught over the last nine years of working in various areas of special education. These reflections made me aware that I could not separate the person that I am from the work that I do. This understanding meant that I could not teach solely as a technician by finding the most appropriate teaching strategy or programme to deliver a specific set of facts. Because, as a resource teacher, I reflect my values and myself in my work, I searched for a methodology to accommodate my articulated values and I aimed to find methods that required 'less time ranking children and more time helping them to identify their natural competences and gifts, and cultivate those' (Goleman 1995, p.37). I did not approach my research with a prescriptive methodology. By constantly checking my data collection and research methods against the values that I have named, I developed a methodology that is eclectic and is responsive to the individual's attempts to develop new understandings. I will explain further in Part Three.

~Respect for the individual's ability to learn

Working from a belief in an individual's ability to learn included providing opportunities for children to learn in ways that are appropriate for them. This required taking note of how I, as a teacher, developed my learning and made

changes in my practice to achieve this. Integrating the role as a teacher and as a researcher in monitoring myself in action in the classroom was problematic. I needed data that recognised pedagogical expertise in terms other than scientific and technical. I came to realise that teacher practice was broader than the 'what' and 'how' of teaching or the technically accurate delivery of programmes, no matter how well suited they are to pupils' needs.

The educational theories that informed the various programmes, recommended in many psychological assessments for the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability, influenced how I taught those programmes. In examining the epistemological bases of these programmes my research took me beyond debates around behaviourist, constructivist or scaffolded methods of learning. Many of these programmes are grounded in what Olson and Bruner (1996) call 'folk psychology' and theoretically inspired behaviourism which, as Conway (2002) states, puts

> a premium on three basic pedagogical strategies; breaking down tasks into small and manageable pieces, teaching the basics first and incrementally reinforcing and rewarding observable progress.

> (Conway 2002, p.72)

Skinner's (1954) and Gagné's (1965) theories support the idea of the teacher not only instructing, as is the case in all these programmes, but also controlling the stimulus for learning to which pupils respond. Placing the teacher as the controller of learning removes much of the power to learn from the individual pupil. On the other hand, constructivist theories position the learner in a more active role. Vygotsky (1978 and 1986), in developing theories about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), speaks of the improvements a learner can make in terms of the distance between the actual level of development and the level of potential development under adult guidance or in collaboration with more able peers. Bruner (1985) uses the metaphor of scaffolding to explain the supporting of learning and ZPD. My research was raising questions such as, If I am to be the supporter of learning, how do I know that the form of my support is appropriate?

I am questioning how I, as a teacher, learned to value the expertise of my professional practice, my knowledge base of teacher craft, and how I have honed this craft over twenty years of general teaching. Similarly I need to find ways to help my pupils come to value what they know and how they come to know it. My methods needed to reflect an appreciation of personal knowledge, both my own and my pupils'. I provided opportunities for my pupils to become co-researchers in my research and we – both the pupils and I – investigated teaching methods and my pupils' learning methods. In this way I had come to see myself and my pupils as able learners and not learning disabled.

~Further issues of social justice

The idea of social justice in my research came to mean working to benefit individuals (children, other teachers) and myself who were suffering injustices, within our complex education system, because of issues around specific learning disabilities. A practical standard of judgement to assess the success of my work can be whether I have reconceptualised curriculum as a knowledge-generating exercise in which pupils can participate, as well as teachers. In this way I am asking if I have arranged the conditions of learning for my students in terms of offering them full participation in creating their own knowledge.

My research, while valuing action for improvement, needed to be underpinned by a firm philosophical and educational basis. To do this, I next speak about the idea of justice, which informs my research. As far back as Plato's 'Republic', the term 'justice' is depicted in ideas of the common good of all citizens. In my research I am aiming for improvement towards a good social order but this does not equate with Plato's description of distributive justice, which suggests that assets can be divided equally. Today justice debates in education often have a dual focus. First they explain distributive justice in terms of who gets what. Global examples of distributive justice are the promotion of universal elementary schooling and campaigns for universal literacy (Coolahan 1994). In the multimillion Euro industry that is our education service today, a variety of distributive justice exists that is about 'who gets how much of the education service or money' (Connell 1993, p.17). Despite the rhetoric of these stances, justice in educational terms cannot be achieved by distributing the same amount of a good standard of education to children of all

social classes and abilities because, in practical terms, the personal commitments and aptitudes of the learner must be taken into account. Therefore, when investigating the learning experience of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), I wanted to move away from a distributive model of justice and focus on contribution rather than distribution. By contributive justice I meant providing opportunities to contribute to a good social order through developing the capacity for self-development and self-determination (Young 2000). In my research context this meant that both the pupils and I had opportunities to contribute within our personal experiences of learning. This involved an acceptance of difference – different ways of being, different forms of knowledge and different ways of learning.

Griffiths (1998) provides three valuable perspectives on social justice, which form the basis of the working definition I used within my research. 'The first principle of social justice is that 'there is no one right answer' (Griffiths 1998, p.11). Hence my quest for social justice is more about engaging in processes than generating definite findings. This focus on process is also in line with an action research approach. Therefore, a relevant methodological approach for my research was to adopt McNiff's (1988) conceptualisation of spirals in action research. This model however represents the antithesis of traditional propositional forms of research, which search for the 'right answer' through linear methodologies. The second principle cited by Griffiths (1998) is that each individual is recognised and valuable, and that no one exists apart from her/his community. Positioning my pupils as co-participants in the research process rather than objects of enquiry seemed to give them both influence and importance. The third principle is that we create ourselves in and within relationship with community. As Griffiths (1998) states,

> we created ourselves in and against sections of that community as
> persons with gender, social class, race, sexuality and (dis)ability.

(Griffiths 1998, p.12)

This principle speaks to the idea of educational research as a form of understanding and explaining one's capacity for educative influence in the learning community. This concept of exercising one's influence in learning is a key feature of my research.

I now want to look at what led me towards my reconceptualisation of social justice. My revisioning of my practice began when I became aware of my own learned helplessness in dealing with the classroom difficulties of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in 1997, as I described them in the Foreword. My journey to address my learned helplessness started with courses of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland on specific learning disability. Many such courses, delivered in a didactic/transmission or 'lecturing-at' style, had a disempowering effect by giving a teacher new knowledge of the subject while ignoring the practical assistance necessary to implement changes in pedagogy and curriculum. Further reflection on my practice as a teacher occurred during a postgraduate programme of study, where I enjoyed a particular form of learning. This form of learning was informed by McNiff's (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.2) values and understanding of action research as a transformative, generative process. In my search to address the question of 'How do I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability who are within my care as a resource teacher in a primary school?' I sought a methodology that was transformative and generative. The value of respect for an individual's ability to learn, on which my research is grounded, encouraged me as a teacher, to 'be reflective of my own practice in order to enhance the quality of education for my pupils and myself' (McNiff 1988, p.1). This implied a research methodology that valued the idea of the person and their personal knowledge.

I needed to change my understanding in order to change my practice, as a teacher, so as to succeed in addressing my pupils' educational needs. To facilitate this personal transformation I chose a self-study methodology, which is in line with recommendations 7.2 to 7.7 of the Task Force on Dyslexia on both the pre- and in-service professional development of teachers (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b), which include:

> Intensive in-career development courses dealing with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, differentiated teaching, programme planning and implementation at the individual student level should be arranged for all class and subject teachers on an on-going basis.
>
> (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b, p113)

> the creation of a school environment which prevents or limits obstacles to learning which students may experience.

<div align="center">(Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b, p115)</div>

I chose a self-study action research approach, so that my research would be of immediate benefit to my pupils. I believe that this was a way of implementing personal and professional change through research, as can be seen in the many research theses on the websites jeanmcniff.com (2006) and actionresearch.net. (2006).

My thesis therefore is not a book or box full of propositional knowledge, nor is it just a document about teaching children how to read and spell. It is a living thesis on freedom, justice and the rights of individuals to come to know in their own way, following the traditions already pioneered by authors such as Freire (1994), Whitehead (actionresearch.net 2006) and McNiff (jeanmcniff.com 2006).

2.5   Summary

In this chapter I have explained how I have come to three major issues in my research and how I aim to address them.

1.   A clash of values exists between policy and the social practices concerning the education of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I aim to redress this by celebrating the humanity and potential of myself and my pupils I teach. This aim is grounded in my value of respect for the individual.

2.   In relation to my developing understanding of specific learning disability and the labelling of pupils with disability, I aim to enable both the pupils and myself to be seen by ourselves and others as valuable citizens. This aim is grounded in my belief in the capacity of the individual to learn.

3.   I consider why my current understandings of specific learning disability (dyslexia) are disturbing and this raises issues around social justice, which I aim to address through my research. The initial implication of this for me in relation to my pupils' learning is how to enable them to negotiate their difficulties with spellings, and how to find the best ways to help them.

The personal values as articulated in this chapter informed the purposes of my research and these values became the practical criteria by which my work can be judged, as follows.

In terms of learning and knowledge,

- Did I engage with issues of how I come to know and how my coming to know was informed by how I helped my children to come to know?

In terms of specific learning disability,

- Did I find ways to help children come to value what they know and how they know it?

In terms of social justice,

- Have I reconceptualised curriculum as a knowledge-generating exercise in which pupils participated, as well as teachers? In this way have I arranged the conditions of learning for my students, which offer them fuller participation in creating their own knowledge?

In this section I have described the practical concerns and epistemological background of my work. In doing so I have highlighted the two major influences on me as a researcher. These are my personal commitments to my work and my awareness of tensions between my values and my practice. Part Two of this thesis conceptualises these concerns in term of the core issues of my study and the further development of my conceptual frameworks.

PART TWO: CORE ISSUES OF MY RESEARCH

In this second Part, I want to review my practice prior to and in the early stages of my research. First I reconsider my actions following the receipt of a diagnosis of specific learning disability for a pupil. There are two key areas, from my description in Chapter Two, that I intend to examine in the next two chapters. The first is in relation to how I conceptualised specific learning difficulties. In Chapter Three I consider my values around learning and relate them to the focus on learning strengths that I expressed when I said,

> This discrepancy is very useful. It tells me that this pupil will learn better when new information is presented orally rather than in written form only. When I am explaining the report to the child's parents, I can emphasise the pupil has strengths above his average scores in verbal areas. I point out that this difference will be very helpful for him in career choices later in his life. His lower scores in performance IQ explain why he is having so many difficulties in school where most of the work is written.

Chapter Four centres on how I attempt to encourage this understanding of learning through my teaching. I relate my stance on learning to how I teach and evaluate the programmes recommended in the psychological report, given that I have said in the past,

> Good, it names strategies and commercial programmes. I will definitely teach these programmes.

I offer explanations for my practice, justifying how these accounts can be seen to constitute my own living educational theory as described by Whitehead (1989). I show how different conceptualisations of theory exist in the literature, and how I engage with the literature in order to justify my own theoretical stance. I explain why I challenge the view that theory is a discrete body of knowledge (see Popper, 1963 and 1972; Pring, 2000). I present my preferred stance of understanding practice as a living form of theory itself, that can be generated from studying one's own practice (Whitehead 1989; Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Accordingly, I am developing

ideas about the philosophical underpinnings of my research as my living theory of practice in the next two chapters.

Continuing my strategy of writing my thesis as a report of my action enquiry, I am also asking myself, 'Why am I concerned?' My answer includes explaining how my values informed the conceptual frameworks of my research. The labelling, the discourses, the dominant epistemological base from which specific learning disability (dyslexia) is understood, are all reasons for concern to me. My ontological and epistemological values are contrary to those that underpin the dominant form of knowledge in Irish education in that I believe that my pupils and I are valuable humans, and I am concerned that current systemic constraints can prevent the realisation of my potential and my pupils' potential. I believe in the worth of the individual and that people need to be free to develop themselves in terms of that worth (Sen 1999). My research focus is to understand and overcome those constraints in my context.

I am challenging dominant theories about specific learning disabilities (dyslexia) that adopt an objective or spectator view of knowledge (Hornsby 1995; Snowling 2000). The concept of spectator forms of knowledge is well established in the literature and communicates the idea that the researcher is a spectator and pupils (and others) are the objects of study. When this view enters a research field, the kind of theory developed is often of an abstract, reified form (Atkins and Tierney 2004; De Buitléir 2002; Herbert 2006). I chose not to adopt this stance for my research; instead I wished to investigate my research area from what has become known as an insider or internalist perspective (Chomsky 1986; McNiff 2002). This meant that I positioned myself as a researcher who was conducting her own self-study (Loughran *et al.* 2004) into how I could develop pedagogies that would enable me to enhance the quality of learning experience for pupils in my care who are labelled with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

I explain that the forms of theory and practice, which I outline in this section, inform my own practical, living theory of learning to teach for social justice. I explain and test my new understandings in later sections of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE: My Conception of the Nature of Learning for Pupils with Specific Learning Disability (Dyslexia)

3.1   Introduction

In this chapter I am describing the third wave of influence on my research, which, as I said in Chapter One, was the practical significance of traditional theories of learning for my teaching of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I have spoken in Chapter Two of how I excluded children in discussions about their own learning, and now I explain why I chose to reverse this situation by involving the children who participated in my research as agents in their own learning. In doing so I took action in accordance with my conviction that these children have significant intellectual capacity. In this chapter I show that my decisions have also been informed by my values base as a Christian and by the idea of the importance of embodied knowledge in human enquiry, as explained by Polanyi (1958) and Whitehead (1993).

I examine and analyse situations in my practice in order to come to an understanding of the nature of learning for the pupils I teach who are labelled as having specific learning disability (dyslexia). I show how different conceptualisations of learning exist in the discourses in my context and in the literature. I explain why I challenge the view that learning should be portrayed as training (Skinner 1957) or as being constructed for learners (Vygotsky 1978 and Bruner 1985). The understanding of learning that I arrive at, includes conserving some of the strengths of such existing theories of learning and building on them in ways that value the individual and his/her capacities for knowing and learning.

I have identified two key issues arising from my emergent understandings of normative theories of learning. The first of these issues was the exclusionary nature of learning where the learner's voice was often marginalised within the learning process. The second issue was the conflicting nature of the theoretical bases of learning, as it was constituted in my context. The Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland 1998, s.9, p13) requires educators to provide appropriate teaching for learning for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), and I do so by first

ensuring that my research offers a practical approach to addressing these theoretical and epistemological issues.

3.2   How learning is conceptualised in my practice: does it value the individual?

I begin this section with a description of how I taught at the beginning of my research process. I was teaching programmes that had been recommended in my pupils' psychological reports. More details about the programmes that I mention are in Appendix 4.1.

Pupil F sat across the table from me. His photocopy of P.A.T. Worksheet Ten from *Phonological Awareness Training* (P.A.T.) Level 1 (Wilson 1999) was in front of him. I had already tested Pupil F on the reading sheets provided in the beginning of the programme manual, which indicated that this was the appropriate sheet for him to work at. Worksheet ten looked something like this

a b c d e f g h l j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z			
gl bl pl st th			
-ank	-ide	-ock	-and
Blank			

I wrote the word 'blank' in the column under '-ank' and said, 'This is how we make blank.' As I wrote, I only said 'bl' and '–ank' with accentuation. I asked Pupil F to think of more words that sounded like 'blank'. I invited Pupil F to use the alphabet and consonants blends on the worksheet to find letters that could go with '-ank' to make real words. I knew that Pupil F had major problems in writing, so I gave him a plastic alphabet with red-coloured vowels and blue-coloured consonants. I demonstrated how I wanted Pupil F to place the letters of the rime 'ank' together in front of him and then to place each blend of consonants to the left of his rime and then to sound out the word it made aloud. Later in the day Pupils B and Pupil D did a similar exercise. Pupil D traced his words on a tray of sand because he enjoyed it and appeared to learn better when I gave him tactile activities. Pupil B used script writing to fill in her worksheet because linking the letters repeatedly helped her

memorise letter strings (Cripps 1988). After exactly five minutes I moved us onto the next task.

For the next ten minutes Pupil F read aloud from *Toe by Toe* (Cowling and Cowling.1993) starting at page 37 (there is a sample in Appendix 4.2). I gave him a tick for each set of sounds or words that he read correctly and a dot for those he could not read. We did this reading activity daily. When Pupil F read correctly on three separate occasions, he was deemed (according to the authors of *Toe by Toe)* to know those sound or words and so I omitted them from his reading and moved onto new word lists.

We read a story on page thirty from *Alpha to Omega Activity Pack Stage One* (Hornsby *et al.* 1999) together. I shadow read, supplying sounds or whole words when Pupil F was unsure of them. I asked Pupil F to guess a possible ending for the story and then he verbally answered the comprehension questions supplied in the book about the story. Finally he completed page 31 by writing in missing words in a cloze exercise containing thirteen sentences similar to the one below, all of which had words made up of consonant blends.

> **2. grab   grog   glum   grin**
> Do not be so _____

I finished the lesson by telling Pupil F that I would correct his written work later and asked him, 'What did you learn today?' and, 'What do you want to do tomorrow?' (see Appendix 5.2a).

These final questions were an indication of my values around my pupil's capacity to be aware of his learning and active in planning his own learning. The questions also indicated my understanding of learning as personal. I also used the term 'we' and worked together with Pupil F in the reading exercise, demonstrating that I was acting within an understanding of learning as, in part, a social process.

I want to explain how this lesson is an example of other values I held around learning. The lesson and the Individual Educational Plan (IEP see Table 3.1 below and full sample is in Appendix 6.1) that I had devised for Pupil F indicated that I was working within a propositional form of thinking at that time. Although Individual Educational Planning documents were a job requirement, the wording in them was mine and so I perceive them as an indicator of my thinking at that time.

Table 3.1: Extract from an Individual Learning Plan 2001 (Appendix 5.1)

PRIORITY LEARNING TARGETS:		
	Target Date	Date Achieved
1. Alpha to Omega activities pages 19-49 2. Complete level 1 PAT 3. Toe by Toe page 6 - 50 4. Wordshark short vowel activities 5. Read 20 words from Dolch common word list. 6. Pupil B will demonstrate that she knows letter sounds by indicating the letter when I say the sound on 10 occasions.		
Teaching Strategies Teacher modelling and practice		
Materials/Resources *Alpha to Omega Book 1*: *P.A.T 2:Toe By Toe:* Wordshark 2L and the Dolch common word list		
Home Follow class homework		

The learning targets indicate that I was using a form of propositional knowledge, because I was positioning knowledge as information and skills to be acquired by setting those specific targets for the attainment of learning. I was also engaging with causal logic in that I supposed that my modelling and pupil copying of practice would cause pupils to learn. I considered learning as a

> process, by which skills, attitudes, knowledge and concepts are acquired, understood, applied and extended.

> (Pollard 1997, p.134)

I had chosen materials and resources that were based on others' theories of learning. I, like other teachers, considered myself as attempting to apply others' learning

theories to my practice, rather than being a theorist of my practice. I did not perceive myself then as having knowledge-creating capacities. I am of the opinion that this was because I was working within a system which, as I have shown in Chapter One, holds fast to technical–rational forms of theory and logic. Consequently I was discouraged from thinking critically about how learning was happening. My situation is similar to Marcuse's (1964 and 2002) suggestion that technical-rational forms of theory and logic can close down debate and critique. Marcuse held that thinking and knowledge are often reified. He describes the consequences of this as a one-dimensional universe of thought and behaviour. In this way he suggests that critical thinking can be discouraged. I felt that I had been unconsciously subsumed into a one-dimensional world in terms of theorising forms of learning in my practice.

Although I was teaching programmes that were recommended in the psychologist's report about Pupil F, I was devaluing his ability to learn and think for himself in that I had chosen the skills that he should acquire and how he would acquire them. Yet I was also acting on a different understanding of learning that positioned learning as personal to the learner when I sought the pupils' areas of strength from the subdivision of IQ scores in the psychologists' reports. Similarly, I adjusted my teaching of the P.A.T. programme to permit Pupils F, D and B to work within their own personal strengths by allowing them to record the words they made using non-written, sensory and letter string approaches.

I was acting on a conceptualisation of learning as both personal and as an on-going process of skill acquisition. When I asked at the end of my lesson, 'What did you learn today?' and 'What do you want to do tomorrow?'(Appendix 5.2a), I was positioning learning as 'a process both of not knowing and of coming to know' (McNiff 2002, p.8) which means that the learning process is being explained from the personalised perspective of the learner as a transformational experience. I was also positioning learning, as Pollard (1997) explains it, as a linear process for change in that it includes understanding, application and extension. By reflecting on my own role as a resource teacher and on current policy conditions that recommend how learning should happen, it appears to me that these two different conceptions of learning struggle for dominance in my practical context.

~ How learning is conceptualised in the discourses around my practice

In order to engage critically with how learning was happening for the children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) that I teach, I reflected on my understanding of the discourses around their learning. The government has made two significant contributions to these discourses during the course of my research, in the report of the Task Force on Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b) and in *Understanding Dyslexia: Challenges and Opportunities* (Ireland, Department of Education and Science and Northern Ireland, Department of Education 2004), which was a joint initiative of the Departments of Education North and South in Ireland. Both Government documents have on the one hand provided political and practical contexts for my research that are grounded in objective, quantifiable knowledge, and they also adopt a medical model of disability, which I described in the previous chapter. On the other hand my understanding that the children who participated in my research can think for themselves and are capable of being agents in their own learning is also signalled in these documents in terms of valuing each individual student with dyslexia and in references to personal knowledge as well as the socially created nature of learning. My reflections below on these documents highlight the struggle between theory and practice in the contexts of my research.

The major recommendations of the Task Force on Dyslexia (Government of Ireland, 2002b), unlike my approach of valuing the individual as a person, objectify the individual, in that the Task Force recommendations cater for the needs of each student at varying levels of abstraction. This is demonstrated when the Task Force Report adopts a medical model of provision by recommending the diagnosis of needs followed by prescriptive suggestions at a remove from pupils such as

    (a) career-long professional development courses for teachers;

    (b) quantifying services provided by other agencies;

    (c) schools and teachers addressing the diagnosed needs by the provision of extra teaching hours and policies.

These recommendations are based on objective and quantifiable forms of knowledge. However the report articulates the centrality of the individual when it recommends,

> The adoption of a model of provision based on the needs of each student along the continuum of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

<div style="text-align:center">(Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b, p.xiv)</div>

Yet, the report recommends three practices that exclude the individual learner from active participation. These practices focus on accountability rather than how individual pupils learn in that,

(a) Teachers are to address the individuals' 'needs' by administration processes such as checklists to identify pupil difficulties;

(b) Parental involvement in decision-making about the continuation or discontinuation of support services;

(c) Programme planning and recording by teachers.

In the lesson described above, the shadow reading and my use of 'we' placed Pupil F and me within a creative relationship of learning. My commitment to the idea of knowledge generation as a creative process is also articulated when the Task Force Report calls for 'a whole-school, multidisciplinary approach to catering for all those with dyslexia across all levels' (Day 2003, p.76). The report, however, has no practical recommendations about how this process can happen. There is slippage between rhetoric and practice. In my research I offer not only an account of my practice as a dynamic, transformational form of theory but also as a demonstration of how the voice of the individual with dyslexia can be included, which may help to bridge this gap between rhetoric and practice.

The second, recent government publication *Understanding Dyslexia* (Department of Education and Science and Department of Education of Northern Ireland 2004) was distributed to every primary school in 2005 and positions the political and practical contexts of my work within a positivist and objectivist perspective. An example of this is a section dedicated to learning conditions and supporting learning. This section ignores the role of the learner or teacher and consists of suggesting

(i) Practical objects of support such as bookmarks, books on tape, ICT facilities such as PCs and Dictaphones (p.21);

<div style="text-align:center">53</div>

(ii)   Learning conditions such as practical modifications to the workplace of the pupils such as minimising noise and visual distractions, wall displays and colour-highlighted checklists (p.20).

The learning relationship between teacher and pupils that is a central theme in my research is omitted in *Understanding Dyslexia* (Ireland, Department of Education and Science and Northern Ireland, Department of Education 2004). *Understanding Dyslexia* articulates an understanding of learning as both personal and social. It cites examples of learning happening in pupil-to-pupil and adult-to-adult relationships in that it recommends both the grouping of pupils and 'working buddies' (p.20) to help with the support, direction and motivation of learners. Significantly, the teacher and pupil relationship is not named as part of the learning process. *Understanding Dyslexia* also makes a brief reference to awareness of personal knowledge, in that teachers are encouraged to 'ask parents how their children learn best' and to 'be prepared to learn from parents' (p.21). For me, the important learning relationships of pupils and teachers are again omitted from this document. Instead it positions the teacher as a facilitator and diagnostician supporting learning by using objects and strategies such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Both government documents cited adopt behaviouristic approaches to learning and to pupil motivation to learn, just as I had done by teaching the programmes recommended for Pupil F by an educational psychologist. This behaviourist approach to teaching and learning is evident in the language and discourses of the government documents I am discussing, as well as many of the programmes recommended for those with specific learning disability. *Understanding Dyslexia*, for example, suggests the following 115 programmes for assisting those with specific learning disability/dyslexia, most of which are based on behaviouristic approaches to learning: 24 phonological skills, 24 multisensory reading programmes, 19 handwriting, 26 spelling, 10 expressive writing, 7 mechanics of writing and 5 mindmaps.

Having taught most of these recommended programmes during the course of my career, I find that they have a dual focus. First there is an emphasis on a medical model of disability where control over the learning process is removed from the

learner to an 'other'. The 'other' I am referring to here is the programme facilitator, teacher or tutor. The learner is positioned as subservient to the learning strategies. This brings to mind Bourdieu's (1990) comment that in positivist logics, the model is superior to the practice it is supposed to represent. The second focus of these commercial programmes, in my view, is an emphasis on deconstructing or segmenting English reading and writing into components and skills through which the disabled learners' knowledge is expected to be reconstructed.

This deconstruction/construction approach positions learners as recipients of a body of knowledge and specific skills. My research challenges this stance, because this stance positions the learner in a passive role, ignoring his or her capabilities for thinking critically. In my research I tackled the passivity and invisibility of the learner, which often occurs in behaviourist approaches to learning, and which dominate my field, by encouraging the children in my research to voice their experiences of learning. In this way I addressed the polarised positioning of learning that occurs in my context by combining Pollard's (1997) and McNiff's (2002) explanations of learning so that learning for me and my pupils became an on-going personal process of not knowing and of coming to know.

~ Different conceptualisations of learning exist in the literature

The lesson that I described at the beginning of this chapter positioned Pupil F as the recipient of the skills that I chose to teach, yet despite this, the personalised adjustments that I made in teaching the recommended programmes, such as not expecting every pupil to write the list of words in P.A.T., showed that I valued each individual pupil. I now want to relate the actions I was taking to individually support my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to the literature in the field. Specifically I consider how the learner is positioned in the relationships between traditional theories of learning and discourses of disability. In this section I compare the three models of disability (medical, educational and psycho-social), which are present in my context, with three traditional theories of learning, in order to discover what understanding of learning emerges. In making these comparisons, I am flagging up issues around the epistemological base of intervention programmes and curriculum for the children I taught when I began my research.

Each of the three main models of disability – medical, educational and psycho-social – position the learner, who is labelled as disabled, as Other. The medical model treats the child as an object of study rather than as a unique individual because it works from a perspective of diagnosis, prescription and cure. Similarly, in behaviourist theories of learning (Skinner 1954 and Gagné 1965) I, as a teacher, am positioned as the controller of learning within cycles of behaviour management in learning using stimulus, response, and observation to regulate learning. These cycles adopt a medical model of diagnose, prescribe and cure to learning. In this way the learner appears as a passive recipient in the process of internalising a body of knowledge. An example of the combination of medical and behaviourist models of remediation in learning is the extensive research into phonological awareness and multisensory programmes to aid the learning of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Wise, Ring and Olson (1999), for example, in their large-scale study of various forms of remediation such as these programmes, find that the actual type of phonological awareness training is less important than the need to embed that training within a well-structured approach to reading. The scientific and structured process that Wise, Ring and Olson (1999) advocate therefore envisages learning as enabled through structured training, and diminishes the role of the learner in the process.

Within the second model of disability – an educational model – the child becomes potentially disabled by the interaction between itself and its environment; environment here includes the ways in which the child is expected to learn, similar to Bourdieu's (1977) idea of habitus. This model of disability places structures or curricula as frameworks of power over students. These conditions can negate the abilities of the individual child and have a disabling effect. Similarly, within a constructivist approach, learning can be managed by the teacher to the extent of providing tools for learning and staged developmental learning situations. Constructivist theories of learning also include structures, processes and programmes that often ignore the abilities of the individual child in areas not addressed by these programmes and can have a disabling effect on an individual child while in school. Using a construction metaphor to demonstrate the precedence of systems and designs over individuals, I, as the teacher, provide the building blocks, cement,

spades and trowels. The pupils use the tools provided to stick the blocks together into a pre-designed structure.

A psycho-social model of disability, the third model of disability, focuses on specific groups with disability and this grouping happens when experts take control of aspects of the disability. For example, psychologists, neurologists and educationalists all engage in research into dyslexia. In my research context, primary movement therapists, neuro-development therapists, those offering private tuition and special education provision by the Department of Education and Science, all offer support for dyslexia. Within the psycho-social model of disability, each of these specialists potentially becomes a form of social control, which can be maintained through and for their own interests. In practice this means that each group defines dyslexia within terms relevant to their own interests, therapy or programmes. Accordingly, the debate about how best to address dyslexia among commercial interests such as those of primary movement therapists, neuro-development therapists, and those offering private tuition is hotly contested. Yet in my personal experience the effects of these expert interventions are erratic in that there is no way of knowing which, if any, will benefit a specific pupil. Nugent (2006, p.107-111) also found, when she examined increases in reading, comprehension and spellings levels following primary movement therapy, neuro-development therapy and private tuition, that there are no statistically significant differences. Both my own personal experiences and the research above suggest that a psycho-social model of disability, which is present in my context, makes no contribution to pupils' learning.

In conclusion, having looked at how I taught at the beginning of my research and related it to discourses and literature around specific learning disability, I am concerned about understandings about the nature of the learning of my pupils on three counts. These issues are around

1) The capacity of my pupils to think and learn for themselves is ignored.
2) The conditions of learning, where pupils are withdrawn from their classes, for one-to-one resource teaching, exclude them from their peers.
3) There are no opportunities for my pupils to become aware of or value their own ways of learning.

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3.3 Is the worth of the individual evident in my research context?

I now offer two vignettes from my research that show the contrast between my later forms of practice and earlier forms, as described at the beginning of this chapter. These vignettes demonstrate my values around pupils and how I facilitated freedoms for pupils to express their views about their learning.

The first vignette tells how I offered my pupils opportunities for voice because I had been concerned that their capacities to think and learn for themselves were ignored in the ways in which I had been teaching. In year one of my research, I decided to enquire into the pupils' views on their difficulties, so, at the beginning of one particular lesson, I asked each of the eight pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), 'Why do you think that you come to classes with me?' Each pupil gave definite answers that varied from 'I have dyslexia' to 'I can't learn.' It dawned on me that I had heard the words 'I can't learn' frequently from children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I was concerned about the negativity of their answers. So I decided to investigate my pupils' views about how dyslexia affected them in school. With their permission, I made an audio tape recording of their answers (see Appendix 2.4c). At the beginning of every year during my research, I asked each new cohort of eight pupils the same question: 'How does dyslexia affect you in school?' Even in the final year of my data gathering, the pupils' answers on the tape recording made disappointing yet enlightening reading. They said,

- o I can't learn spellings
- o I can't learn tables
- o I can't learn Irish. It is hard to read and spell the words.
- o I can't read out loud
- o I can't make sense out of the words in books
- o I can't answer questions about stories
- o I can't do neat writing
- o I don't understand the words in maths
- o I can't do maths 'cause I mix up the signs
- o In history I can't remember what happens and some of the words are real hard to spell.
- o In geography some of the questions are hard to understand and it is hard to remember all the different countries.

(March 2003 Pupils' Reports, original in data archive, see Appendices 2.6b to 2.6.d)

Because those children experience failure to learn regularly in school they probably come to see this as a natural phenomenon. This concept can possibly be explained within Gramsci's (1971) ideas that people come to regard the ideological constructs of their social and political world as natural rather than their realisation of their own capacity. Both their peers and the educational system position these pupils as different from the mainstream and consequently as failures. When children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) are withdrawn from classes for additional tuition, their peers view those children as failures and different in that those children are not able to learn like their peers, as shown in the following example. A classmate of a pupil who was a participating in my research wrote to him:

> I thought that you couldn't learn. You were thick because you went to
> Mrs. McDonagh's.
>
> (20 May 2003, see Appendix 2.7)

Another possible reason for those with specific learning difficulty (dyslexia) to experience failure as natural is the emphasis that schools place on mathematical-linguistic abilities in the education system, as Gardner (1993) explains. This emphasis positions pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) at a disadvantage because their specific difficulties lie mainly within mathematical-linguistic ways of learning, which are viewed as the most valued ways of knowing in the contexts of normative curricula.

Barthes (1983) describes how this naturalisation process works in the political world in that dominant discourses powerfully reinforce social and cultural realities. He explains that populations are persuaded to acquiesce in their own oppression. I do not consider it a massive leap from this concept to the situation in my context where a population of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) are marginalised in such ways as to require them to remain oppressed although they have the innate ability (being of average intelligence) and capacity to change their situation. The pupils in my research have been persuaded by their experiences of the education system to acquiesce in a public perception of their own specific learning disabilities. They did not see their learning as 'a process both of not knowing and of coming to

know' (McNiff 2002, p.8) but rather as a process of not knowing and of being incapable of coming to know.

~ Developing an inclusive form of teaching and learning

To counter this situation, I looked for ways to address the issues of (1) giving opportunities for voice to the learner; (2) placing a value on the learning process rather than on quantifiable learning content; (3) withdrawal from mainstream classes. Prior to the research reported in this thesis, I experimented with applying a strategy to support learning in social settings. This strategy, which is called co-operative learning (Kirk 1997, 2003 and 2006), has proven useful to those with learning difficulties within mainstream classes, both in relation to my experiences and in the research of Kirk. This strategy was inclusive in that the learners were actively engaged in their learning process. In practice it involved me, as a teacher, mentoring pupils in the development of skills that contributed to active group-learning, such as taking responsibility for questioning, coming to and recording group decisions, ensuring that all in the group were motivated and took part at their own level of ability while continually building on known concepts. These skills were grounded in a constructivist approach to learning (Vygotsky 1978).

The strategy of co-operative learning is inclusive in that both the learning and its evaluation are achieved in co-operation with other learners. For example, the research conducted by Kirk (1997, 2003 and 2006) at primary school level in Ireland found that

> By experiencing effective heterogeneous co-operative groups, students learn to value and respect diversity and the intelligences, perspectives and strengths of others.
>
> (Kirk 2003, p.29)

Strategies for co-operative learning are cited in *Understanding Dyslexia* (Ireland, Department of Education and Science and Northern Ireland, Department of Education 2004).

Despite the beneficial aspects of such strategies, I find that there is epistemological incongruence in the research about it in the following way. In modifying Johnson and Johnson's (1994) model, Kirk (1997) introduces a reward structure based on Slavin's research (1991). Slavin (1991) rewards learning achievement observed by him, while Kirk (1997) rewards observed improvements in social skills. I perceive that there are conflicting perspectives on knowledge within the work of these researchers, in that Slavin and Kirk introduce observable measures of procedural knowledge in order to evaluate processes of learning which involve personal knowledge (rather than propositional knowledge) being socially created within co-operative pupil-learning groups. The groups are learning to value personal and dialogical forms of knowledge creation, while the researchers work within a propositional perspective of knowledge by establishing product/process tensions in their evaluation strategies.

Notwithstanding the epistemological questions that I raised about the epistemological bases of strategies to support co-operative learning, those strategies involve people talking together about learning. This concept of learning with others has relevance for my research. It also mirrors Freire's (1994) ideas on dialogue towards empowerment.

In practical terms I also intended, in my research, to explain why, although I taught pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) for 2.5 hours on an individual basis weekly, their learning of curricular subjects did not improve significantly. Given the advantages of co-operative learning, I queried if the isolation in which my pupils were expected to learn contributed to their difficulties. I reflected on my previous personal experiences of teaching those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and research in this field.

There is conflicting research evidence around the practice of withdrawal as follows. The education system is currently structured to provide support in special schools, special units within mainstream schools, resource classes (until September 2005) and learning support settings (following September 2005) in accordance with circular 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). My personal experience was that pupils preferred either withdrawal from mainstream classes or

access to special schools. Often pupils explained that their preference for withdrawal was because 'I get time out from our main classes' (Journal 2 November 2001; see Appendix 2.1e). Other pupils felt that in special schools they were amongst others with similar difficulties so they were valued as able to learn at their own personal levels (Journal 22 March 2003; see Appendix 2.1f). These seeming contradictions are borne out by research about the experiences of pupils. On the one hand those receiving special provision in collaborative settings are generally happy in school (Gerber and Popp 1999), and Demchuk (2000) finds that those receiving withdrawal services sometime felt stigmatised. On the other hand Humphreys and Mullins (2002) suggest that mainstream settings have a more negative impact on self-concept than provision in special units connected to mainstream schools. Research into pupils' perceptions of various learning support settings appears inconclusive. I sought however to understand how to create conditions that would support my pupils' learning.

~ How I encouraged learning through my teaching

The second research vignette is about how I encouraged learning through my teaching. During the first three months of my research I realised that pupils with dyslexia had much to offer each other in terms of how they experienced school. I timetabled a group session for each cohort on Fridays for one hour. During these sessions we developed our understandings about dyslexia together, as I now describe.

I wanted to move pupils away from the negative 'I can't do' feelings that they had expressed. I decided to focus on what worked for them. I looked for something that every member of the cohort was good at. After some reflection I realised that they could all draw well. So I decided to ask them to 'Draw a picture about what helped them with their dyslexia'. The picture below was drawn during an hour-long session where one cohort of pupils and I drew our feelings about specific learning disability using our personal choices of art media. In these art sessions I gave freedom to my pupils that enabled them to express themselves with ease in methods that disregarded their literacy difficulties. The pupils, having been given the opportunity to express their views, wanted to share their art-work and opinions. With their permission I

taped and transcribed their conversations and I have included a part of this transcript later in this thesis.

Picture 3.1 A pupil's explanation of going to Resource Class

The text in panel 1 reads: Pupil B says, 'Full stop. I ha to school I have to going to school.' An arrow with the word 'sky' points to a black sky. The text in panel 2 reads: Class Teacher says 'B. go to the resours [resource] teacher.' Pupil says, 'At least I will lern [learn] some thing.' The text in panel 3 reads: Pupil B says, 'Hi teacher.' Resource teacher says, 'Hi B.' The text in panel 4 reads: After School. Pupil B says, 'Hep [help] is good. It was not such a bad day.'

Following the pupils' artwork and discussion about what helped them cope with the difficulties that they were experiencing in school because of their dyslexia, I asked myself the following practical questions about the learning of the children:

> Do I discuss learning styles with my pupils? Do I suggest a choice of learning approaches to pupils? Do I allow my pupils to assess their own work? Do I give pupils opportunities to exhibit their understanding and to influence others?

> (14 March 2002, Journal in data archive, see Appendix 2.1b)

In answering these questions through my research, I am demonstrating that I am rooting my studies in a form of living theory of teaching for learning. My living theory is different from, though it incorporates, the propositional forms of teaching for learning that are the dominant ones in my context. I am engaging with knowledge as personal, and as being created and affirmed in my learning relationships with others. My questions show that I value individual learners' ways of learning by including them in the learning process.

I am also giving the children opportunities to work together and to begin to evaluate their learning. In taking action to address these issues my research offered an inclusive practice of learning where knowledge was socially created and affirmed. I was encouraged in this research aim by the writing of Fleischer (2001) when he concludes that students 'who have been disempowered through an institutional act of labelling can not only find a voice, but can also articulate resistance to labels' (Fleischer in Hudak and Kiln 2001, p.5). I was further encouraged by McNiff's and Whitehead's suggestion that humans and 'all organic systems have their own internal generative capacity to transform themselves into more developed versions of themselves through learning' (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.33).

~ Developing a living theory of learning to teach from within my practice

In the early stages of my research I had attempted to apply propositional theories of teaching to my practice unsuccessfully – as I described above in terms of strategies to support co-operative learning. I was unsuccessful. This represents the third wave of influence on my research, which was the practical relevance of propositional theories of teaching to combat specific learning disability.

My lack of success was commensurate with what I understand to be many other teachers' attempts to teach in accordance with propositional theories. An example of this phenomenon in the context of specific learning disability (dyslexia) is the difficulties teachers experience in trying to provide differentiated content, by which I mean content that was adapted for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), within a mainstream class setting. Research indicates that teachers find

differentiation very difficult to implement and sustain (Yuen, Westwood and Wong 2004, Fuchs and Fuchs 1999). Yuen, Westwood and Wong (2004) demonstrate the problematics of applying propositional theories to practice. Their results show that teachers make relatively few adaptations to meet the learning needs of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and rely instead on other pupils in the class to provide peer assistance (Yuen, Westwood and Wong 2004, p.67). In my research I am indicating the need to problematise processes and their underpinning conceptualisations when teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

A key to understanding why this is necessary lies in how the learner is positioned within propositional theories of teaching for learning. Theories of teaching can act as lenses through which the learning process is explained. This metaphor of a lens is significant because one can look through a lens from either side. Often the same learning incident can be viewed as an example of either behaviourism or constructivism or even personal knowledge creation, depending on the observer's perspective. For example I have described a constructivist theory of learning from an externalist perspective (Vygotsky 1978 and 1986). It can also be viewed from the learner's perspective. From the learner's perspective it can be explained as the individual constructing new knowledge by imposing mental frameworks on his/her own learning in order to make sense of the new learning by building it onto existing knowledge and mental schemas, as Bredo (1994) explains. In this case its internal focus is on constructing personal learning and knowledge.

3.4 Do people need to be free to develop themselves in accordance with their worth?

I have explained my values around learning and around the worth of my pupils, and I now want to discuss why I believe that it is important to value the individual. My belief that my pupils and I are valuable humans is informed by the spiritual beliefs that I hold as a Christian.

As a Roman Catholic I trace my values to Christianity. Some authors, such as Kohlberg (1984), would hold that being true to religious beliefs could be an immature response of obedience and fear of punishment. On the other hand my

persistence in religious beliefs, which are dictated from a centralised, supposedly infallible church (such as the Roman Catholic Church), could be presumed to demonstrate an orientation towards authority and the maintenance of a given social order for its own sake. However, neither obedience nor compliance influences the moral commitments, which I am calling my values. I believe that in making a clear effort to define my moral values and principles, I can show their validity and application beyond the authority of the church. Accordingly I am claiming that these values are the embodied values that inform my life and work and towards the realisation of which I constantly strive. Consequently they have informed my research topic and aims, and later I show how they inform my methodological choices and how they also become the living standards by which my research can be judged (Whitehead 2004a and b).

To begin my explanation of the sources of my values I am quoting the 'beatitudes'. The beatitudes are sayings attributed to Christ, after whom Christianity is named. The eight sayings of Christ represent his vision and are taken from the gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 5 Verses 3 –10 (Good News Bible 1976). Table 3.2 below takes each of the eight sayings of Christ and relates them to my values to show how my values inform the core issues and aims of my research. In later chapters I build on this model to show the relationships of my values to the methods and claims to new knowledge in my research. Reading across the columns I synthesise what I believe as a Christian and articulate and explain it as a value. The next columns correlate my values to the issues and contexts of my research, and to the aims or visions of my research. Therefore, I understand that Jesus did not give a blueprint for moral action in the eight 'beatitudes', but left us with his vision and spirit. Similarly in presenting my research as my living theory, I am not giving a blueprint for how resource teachers can improve the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Instead I am offering my claims in terms of descriptions and explanations for my practice in the hope that their vision and spirit will influence others.

Table 3.2: Showing the derivation of the values informing my research

Christ says,	I, as a Christian say,	My embodied values	Research issues	Vision – the aims of my research
'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.' Verse 3.	'Have a non-possessive attitude towards life and people and know my need of God.'	Freedom – a capacity for self determination in thought, speech and action for the good of oneself and others	Can both I as a teacher and the pupils in my research have freedom to voice our own ways of knowing within systems that value objective, outsider knowledge?	The ability to explain our capabilities, which in the case of the pupils are their abilities to learn and in my case (and perhaps also for my pupils) to develop living theory from practice.
'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.' Verse 4.	'Be touched by the pain of others.'	Compassion – a recognition of my needs in others and others' needs in me	Can I recognise the learned helplessness of my pupils and myself?	Awareness of how and why one learns as one does
'Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth.' Verse 5.	'Reflect that being sensitive is not a fault. Counter what is wrong by doing good.'	Justice – a sensitivity to injustice and a will to make changes towards a more just condition	Can I address marginalisation caused by existing provision and dominant propositional theory?	To have an educative influence that would encourage others to engage in more socially just learning experiences
'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.' Verse 6.	'Work towards fairness and justice.'	Equality – a capacity for justice and fairness in all human needs.	Questioning dominant pedagogies that generally promote behaviouristic teaching approaches for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia)	Explore the nature of relationships between people, which foster knowledge generation. I am developing the kinds of relationship that avoid oppression and domination.

Table 3.2: Continued

Christ says,	I, as a Christian say,	My embodied values	Research issues	Vision – the aims of my research
'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.' Verse 7.	'Make allowances because I don't know the whole story.'	Forgiveness – commitment to gaining fuller understandings.	Fluid reality No one right way of knowing.	To constantly question my understandings.
'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' Verse 8.	'Really care. Let people feel special.'	Human Dignity – a recognition of the capacity of others and a demonstration of care for each and every individual I encounter.	Pupils' capacities to learn were ignored.	A celebration of the learning capacities of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).
'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.' Verse 9.	'Build bridges. Be approachable to all.'	Wholeness – an acceptance and a commitment to the reconciliation of a plurality of approaches to life; mindful of the need to recognise mind, body and spirit.	Engage with issues of how I come to know and how my coming to know was informed by how I helped my children to come to know. Develop an epistemological stance commensurate with values.	The education of social formations.
'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of God.' Verse 10.	'Do what is right even it is not popular.'	Service – act according to my values and be an influence for the greater good regardless of the personal cost.	Do I live in the direction of my values?	Towards harmony between practice and values.

3.5 Summary

This chapter incorporates my analysis of learning contexts for pupils with specific learning (disability) and is supported by a Deweyan (1963) concept of knowledge as a process in which all parties grow rather than a process for the transmission of knowledge.

I have shown how I perceive the learner as a living human and explained learning as an on-going living dialogical and reflective process of not knowing and of coming to know (McNiff 2002 and Pollard 1997). So the form of theory that will best explain learning for my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) is a living form of theory (Whitehead 1989 and 1993). Whitehead explains how living theories involve researchers in studying their own educational development in the context of their own workplace as they respond 'to social pressures made explicit in their critical analysis' (Whitehead 1993, p.133).

I have explained how theories of learning need to be reconceptualised from the learner's perspective so that learning comes to be seen as a creative exercise in which the learner becomes an individual knower. In the next chapter I turn to how I taught pupils and its relevance to my question, 'How do I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability who are within my care as a resource teacher in a primary school?' I begin by considering pedagogical issues based on the teaching strategies and commercial programmes that I taught before and during the early part of my research.

CHAPTER FOUR: Pedagogical issues

4.1:   Introduction

In the last chapter I described how I taught a lesson to a pupil with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in the early days of my research. I now want to tell how I taught over the course of the first term of my research. I question what it was in my practice of teaching at that time, which prevented my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) from achieving their potential. This questioning incorporates the fourth wave of influence on my research. Within this wave, I address the successes and failures of my teaching as I help others to develop their capabilities. In doing so I explain how I have generated a living theory about learning to teach pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) as a form of practice-based theorising.

I present data from my work and my pupils' work as I explain how I have planned and worked towards fulfilling the recommendations on the pupils' psychological reports. I also explain how I began to question what was hindering my pupils' progress at a systemic level. Did the labelling of these pupils influence how I taught or how my pupils learned? How did I understand my role as a teacher?

In this chapter I outline some core issues, about pedagogy, knowledge and logic. By pedagogy I mean how I teach and why I teach as I do. This includes the influences on my teaching such as my job requirements and the craft knowledge that I have built up during a period of over twenty years as a teacher. This chapter therefore contains my explanation of how dominant theories of teaching in my field are largely defined in the propositional terms of didactic pedagogies for the transmission of knowledge. This chapter introduces how I shifted the focus of my pedagogy during the course of my research. While I was working my way through my questions of 'What is my concern?' and 'Why am I concerned?' I was encouraging my pupils to do the same. They too undertook action enquiries, and in this chapter I give a brief account of what they did.

4.2 How I taught pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) at the beginning of my research

The core issues of my research emerged during my reflections on how I taught. As I said in Chapter One I had been assigned eight pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) per year. I was confident, at that time, in what I intended to teach them. When I wrote my research proposal for the University of Limerick, who would accredit my studies, I felt delighted that I had already planned, researched and resourced a term (three months) of lessons. My plan was to teach all the programmes recommended for the eight pupils in their psychological reports and show how my teaching had influenced their learning. I intended to assess those pupils at the beginning and again at the end of the term. The form of assessment that I used was standardised tests that mainstream and learning support and resource teachers commonly used. They were the Schonell Spelling Test (Schonell 1955), the Neale Analysis of Reading (Neale 1988) for word recognition and the Drumcondra Profiles (Shiel and Murphy 2000) for writing.

Through the term, I taught the lesson, which I described in Chapter Three, except that I adjusted the content within the commercial programmes according to each pupil's individual abilities whenever they could be measured within the programme instructions. I repeated this way of teaching for thirty minutes, eight times a day, for each of my pupils. I have retained all written work connected with these programmes in my data archive – worksheets, copies, games and computer records (Appendix 2.6f).

I found this was a very boring way of teaching and, by the end of week one, I had added in the computer programme 'Wordshark' (Wordshark 1995, 1999, 2006) to the list of commercial programmes I was teaching. This programme was based directly on Alpha to Omega (Hornsby and Pool 1989), and I could match the games that each pupil played on the computer to the target content of his or her lesson. The change that I had just made was not intended to ease my boredom alone because I felt that my pupils were bored too. So I promised them five minutes of working on the computer at the end of each lesson as a bribe or, as I told them, 'as a reward for working hard'. By week three, I was so frustrated by the monotony of how I was

teaching that I decided to give us a 'day off' the commercial programmes on Fridays.

Despite my boredom and frustration the results achieved by my pupils at the end of the term were chastening. They showed a significant increase in spellings and word recognition but not in terms of writing (see the example from the first cohort of pupils below). These results were in keeping with both other cohorts who scored increases averaging between 133% and 666% in spellings and between 226% and 1466% in word recognition. Despite these increases, the children generally attained less than one more criterion in writing assessment (Shiel and Murphy 2000).

Table 4.1: Spellings Results

Pupil	Chronological age	Pre-Intervention reading age	Post-Intervention reading age	Improvement After 3 months
1	13 years 1 month	9 years 7 mths	10 years 5mths	10 months
2	12 years 7months	9 years 1 mths	9 years 10mths	9 months
3	12 years 8months	9 years 0 mths	10 years 8mths	1 years 8 mths.
4	10 years 8months	5 years 4 mths	6 years 9 mths	1 years 5 mths
5	11 years 4months	7 years 6 mths	8 years 3 mths	9 months
6	12 years 4months	8 years 3 mths	9 years 2 mths	11 months
7	9 years 7months	7 years 4 mths	7 years mths	4 months
8	11years11months	7 years 9 mths	9 years 0 mths	1 years 3 mths

Table 4.2: Word Recognition Results

Pupil	Chronological age	Pre-Intervention reading age	Post-Intervention reading age	Improvement After 3 mnths
1	13 years 1 month	9 years 7 mths	13 years 3 mths	3 years 8 mths
2	12 years 7 months	11years 2mths	13 years 0 mths	1 years 10 mths
3	12 years 8 months	9 years 4 mths	12 years 6 mths	3 years 2 mths
4	10 years 8 months	8 years 6 mths	9 years 2 mths	0 years 8 mths
5	11 years 4 months	9 years 4 mths	10 years 5 mths	1 year 1 mth
6	12 years 4 months	8 years 10mths	10 years 1 mths	1 years 3 mths
7	9 years 7 months	7 years 8 mths	9 years 6 mths	1 years 10 mths
8	11years11 months	9 years 3 mths	10 years 5 mths	1 years 2 mths

~ My reflections on my teaching at the beginning of my research

I did not continue to analyse the pupils' results statistically, because, as I reflected on why some of my pupils achieved higher rates of improvement than others, I realised that these successes and failures were not the core issue. I reflected on what I was doing and realised that I had ignored the children's capacity for originality and

creativity in this part of my research. I had positioned the children as 'malleable beings' into whom I was attempting to pour knowledge, as in Freire's banking model of education (Freire 1970). I can show evidence that I had not related my data to the values that informed my research in my correspondence with my supervisor below:

> I was wondering if, next year, I would find ways to show if any of my children had strengths – rather than weaknesses – within these areas. If so, I might be able to follow in Piaget's footsteps. His methodology of 'studying children's conversations' 'often showed children doing and saying unexpected things, results that other theorists found hard to assimilate into their models' (Bee: 2000 p.47). He tried to understand the child's thought rather than when they would come up with the right answer. His approach was at odds with others' methodologies much as my methodologies differ from many current action research practices. I want to find *valid ways* to study my thoughts as well as the children's. Although Piaget's methods were challenged his observations and insights were accurate (Bee, 2000 p.47).
>
> (14 April 2002 Correspondence with supervisor, see Appendix 2.3a)

Instead of acting in accordance with the values base of my research, my teaching, profiling and assessment process involved the normalising of underpinning values of power and control, which were at odds with my values of respect, equality and service. In terms of practice, the pupils' lack of transference of spelling skills to their general writing limited my children's written voice and in the future would leave them at a disadvantage in a world that places a high value on all forms of literacy.

I was disappointed that my teaching positioned me as one who facilitated information and skill transmission and my pupils as un-thinking, almost passive recipients. By basing the content of my teaching on the programmes I show that I was constraining both my potential and that of my pupils. The content of each of these commercial programmes presented a fragmented skills-based view of knowledge. For example PAT is based on a phonological approach where the blending of onset and rime together create isolated words that are then used for writing and reading and finally the transference of this skill is checked with dictation passages. Alpha to Omega contains a structured, developmental and multisensory format towards reading.

I realised that I was adopting a behaviourist teaching approach. By this I mean that I identified a learning need, measured a pupil's level of competence, applied a remedy using those intervention strategies above, measured the effectiveness of the strategy and rewarded progress (Conway 2002, p.72). This research method was at odds with the aims of my research, with the values base of my research and with the epistemological stance I espoused. The reason that I used this method was that it was the teaching strategy recommended by the manuals of the programmes I was teaching.

In addition, the processes of assessment that I had incorporated into the profiles above led me to realise that I was denying the capacities of my pupils as well as controlling my pupils' learning. This was a direct contradiction of what I had set out to do. I have said that I wanted to create opportunities for the children in my research to exercise their own capacity for choice. Instead I had tried to show accountability in my teaching in terms of pupils' achievements and in doing so had constructed a pedagogy that was grounded in power and subjectivity. This could be construed as reminiscent of Foucault's explanations of objectifying processes of 'control and dependence' that caused humans to become subjects (Foucault 1980, p.212, cited in Smart, 2002).

I was disturbed that I had become a living contradiction (Whitehead 1989) within my research. On one level, my research methodology, in the interests of accountability, meant that I had adopted an objective stance towards knowledge and learning. On the other hand, I had realised that the accountability of my self-study action research methodology required me constantly to reflect on and evaluate my actions in relation to the values that inform them. I was experiencing myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead 1989) because I had not achieved the values that I had set as standards of judgement for my work.

I further analysed what I had done in terms of the epistemological base of my research and current understandings of what counts as educational knowledge in the field. The propositional, objective and outsider form of educational knowledge that informed the testing, described in this section, established a culture of silence, as Devine (2003) described it, for the learner to dwell in. My children were being

placed within a structure of knowledge that made them 'beings for others'. To address this non-integration of participants into normative structures, Freire (1970) proposed the transformation of those structures so that they – children with specific learning disability in my case – can become 'beings for themselves'. This idea is in line with my values of respect and service.

~ My discovery about my assessment of my teaching and what I planned to do about it

I had found that the underpinning educational values I espoused were denied in the assessment processes I had devised. I therefore rejected standardised testing as a measure of my teaching because, in utilising a banking concept of education, the capabilities of the individual were ignored. I recognised that assessment featuring standardised testing can have a useful function in the financial administration and provision of education. However my emergent ideas sought to focus on capabilities already shown to be within my children and recognised in the primary schools' curriculum aims (Ireland Department of Education and Science 1999b). In doing so I have come to agree with Whitehead's (1993) understanding that,

> For educational theory to be directly related to educational practice it
> must have the power to explain an individual's development.
>
> (Whitehead 1993, p.54)

I came to the harrowing realisation that an authoritarian teacher/pupil relationship existed in the forms of teaching assessment I used, because it was grounded in a logic of domination (Marcuse 1964).

To counter this, I devised an approach for my Friday lessons, which aimed to move towards the realisation of my epistemological and ontological values. It also highlighted some of the systemic difficulties experienced by my pupils and myself.

4.3 Systemic constraints that prevent the realisation of my potential and my pupils' potential

Many of the programmes that I was using during the first four days of my week claimed a multisensory approach to teaching and learning. The Simultaneous Oral Spelling (SOS) method of learning spellings is recommended as a multisensory approach to teaching spellings. It is a practical method that is described differently by different authors. So on Fridays I decided that I would use this approach to teach spellings but I adapted it to ensure a pupil-centred way of learning that incorporated the senses of hearing, sight, touch and speech in their learning. This is how I taught.

My pupils' class teachers set spellings for them from class texts, or from errors that the pupils regularly made in their written work or from a list of the most commonly written words (Dolch List). I said the word, for example, 'atmosphere'. The pupil repeated it. I asked them to listen for the syllables. Six of my eight pupils could separate the word into syllables easily. Pupil C tapped her pencil on the table as she said the word until she matched what she said to three syllables. Pupil F could not hear syllables. So I gave him a small mirror. He watched the mirror as he said the word. I explained to him, over the course of a few weeks and with many examples and practice sessions, that each syllable contains a vowel and that when we speak a vowel the sound travels from our mouths unhindered by tongue, teeth or lips so that we open our mouths when we say a vowel. So when he looked in the mirror and said 'atmosphere' slowly and with accentuation, he could see his mouth opening slightly for each syllable. My visual approach to 'hearing' syllables was based on the Multisensory Teaching System of Reading (Johnson *et al.* 1999, see Appendix 4.1). So I taught spellings by asking pupils to count the syllables and then attempt to write what they heard on a white board. I wrote the correct version of the word under theirs and invited them to look at their attempt. I complimented them on the parts they had correct or approximately correct. They adjusted their spelling and then wrote the word correctly saying each letter sound orally simultaneously with the writing of it, as in the example below.

At	ms	fear
At	mos	phere
atmosphere		

They repeated this exercise at least five times using different coloured pencils for each syllable to help their visual memory and then in a sand tray to help their tactile memory. Finally they wrote the word correctly with their eyes closed. This unusual strategy demonstrates that a degree of motor memory and automaticity in spelling that word has been achieved.

Reflecting on my teaching of spellings, I was happy, at that time, that I was using an appropriate teaching strategy. Unfortunately the strategy, although suitable for a resource setting, did not easily transfer to a mainstream setting. By using this teaching strategy I was reinforcing the idea that pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) were deficient, in that more senses needed to be engaged for them to learn. The pupils whom I was teaching in this way were also constantly reinforced in the belief that there was something wrong with them in that they could not learn as other mainstream pupils did.

~ The influence of labelling pupils with a specific learning disability (dyslexia) on my teaching

The multisensory teaching strategy that I used confirmed publicly that the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) whom I taught, were different from what is regarded as the norm because they were being taught differently. This was one of three things that concerned me about my pedagogy. The second was that I was teaching all pupils with specific learning disability in the same way, thereby teaching them all to learn in the same way. This did not demonstrate the value that I have claimed in previous chapters of valuing the individual. My third concern about how I taught at that time was that I had chosen a multisensory teaching strategy simply because these pupils had the label of specific learning disability (dyslexia) and it was a strategy often recommended for pupils assigned resource teaching for that disability. My choice was dictated by the label rather than by the pupils' needs.

Because I was teaching my pupils as a homogeneous group, my model of teaching spellings was similar to the systemic model used to identify and categorise which pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) are to receive resource-teaching

allocation. That form of testing references pupils' abilities against norms achieved by similar-aged peers on specific standardised tests in word recognition, spelling, comprehension and mathematics. I was referencing my teaching of one pupil against a norm that I had established for all pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Yet the most developed abilities of these children may lie in other key areas, such as intra- and interpersonal skills, innovative problem solving, music and the visual arts. These other areas were being ignored.

Both my model and the systemic model could influence how pupils felt about their learning. Pupils can feel that they are good learners or not good learners depending on how often I make them repeat the writing of a word or how they score on standardised tests. These feelings can develop into a learning identity in which the pupil views him or herself as a capable learner or not. These different perceptions or identities can be influenced by norm-referenced testing because those who fall within the average norms on standardised testing are reinforced and confirmed as acceptable humans. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) speak of this idea where a social context reinforces a norm and becomes a construct of social reproduction. Sullivan (2005) describes how this happens in the education of traveller children in Ireland and describes their marginalisation within schools as social reproduction because schools,

> affirm[s] the identity of those belonging to the social group whose interests are best served by the school system

> (Sullivan 2005, p.1)

By falling outside the average norms on standardised testing, pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) are similarly 'not best served by the system.' I was exploring how the norms used to label children as having a specific learning difficulty can be seen as social constructs that are politically constituted in order to rank pupils for the purpose of allocating extra teaching provision. I intended to scrutinise and challenge the effects of these constructs in my research because, as I perceive it, the learning identities of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) – by which I mean their belief in their own capabilities to learn – are

confirmed and reinforced by their label of disability. This brings me to my third concern.

I have also observed that pupils who are labelled as learning disabled often adopt the characteristics of this label and perceive themselves as disabled in all areas of learning. There were two examples of this idea in the previous chapter when I noted how participating pupils commented that they 'can't learn' many subjects in school and when their peers viewed them as less able because they received resource teaching. As Apple says, 'labels [too] often function to confer a lesser status on those labelled' (Apple 2001, p. 261). In my experience pupils often generalise their label of learning disability to all areas of their learning because no one informs them that they are able to learn in areas not affected by their specific learning disability (dyslexia). This can cause a diminishing of pupils' self-esteem, as reported by Dillon (2001). In this way pupils can potentially become disabled by the interactions between themselves and their environment. I described this concept earlier as an educational model of disability (Ware 2003), where structures, curricula or institutions adopt a position of power over students that can have a disabling effect on the individuals. An educational model of disability can deny children the freedom to construct their own identities as capable learners because it contributes to the children's perception of themselves as learning disabled. This identity is further reinforced daily when the children are withdrawn from their classes for extra tuition from myself or other resource teachers. My concern is that when my pupils' learning identities are defined in such ways, there can be a denial of their personal rights as well as a denial of their own self-identification because, as Giroux (2000) states,

> Education is political in that identities are forged and rights are enacted.
>
> (Giroux 2000, p.25)

I am concerned that labelling can reproduce situations, leading pupils to remain learning disabled. I want to help them forge alternative identities. Like Giroux, I am convinced that the political power of education means that there is the possibility of changing the current situation.

I aimed to develop a form of teaching that enabled pupils to transform their learned perceptions of their learning identities. To achieve this aim I consulted the literature on the labelling of specific learning disability. According to international research, the labelling of pupils to access services has had a variety of results. In many countries pupils are ranked, and the provision of special services is dependent on a label, statement, certificate or admission procedure. Meijer, Pijl and Hegarty (1995) find that in most cases the result is that pupils are segregated in some way. This further confirms normative understandings that the pupils are deviant or 'special'. In Denmark however, the situation is more fluid,

> where special services are provided – and discontinued – relatively
> easily and so many students receive these services, that the label is of
> less significance.

> (Meijer, Pijl and Hegarty 1995, p. 122)

Accordingly, students in Denmark begin to fit into normative expectations. In my research I aimed to develop a situation where the label becomes less significant, thereby separating the person from the label.

~ The relevance of recent research into the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to my study

So far, I had based my understanding of my pupils' needs on psychologists' reports. I had taught them using behaviourist methods, and the content of my teaching had been commercially produced programmes or multisensory methods, which are recommended for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I had adopted a propositional stance to my children and my teaching in my research so far.

Before deciding how to address the issues that had arisen in how and what I teach, I considered other recent research into the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

Some researchers who have investigated specific learning disability (dyslexia) use propositional forms of research because these forms lend themselves to statistical analysis, which generally informs policy and provision. An example of this is the work of Atkins and Tierney (2004), which measured the relationship between visual

and auditory sequential memory skills and the reading and spelling of pupils with specific learning difficulties. They found that deficits in auditory memory skills are related to deficits in reading, and they therefore recommend programmes in this skill area for pupils at risk. The research is about measurements, deficits and prescription. However, in this form of research the voice of the learner – the person who should be at the heart of education – can be silenced. This form of research explains pedagogy in terms of the facilitation of knowledge transfer, where knowledge is understood as reifiable. This was the approach that I had adopted up until now. I had ignored the voices of my pupils about how they learned. My voice and the voices of my pupils were silenced.

Most of the forms of research into specific learning disability (dyslexia) adopt a propositional stance, which is usually presented in an abstract form of language. This is the case in the following research collections:

- o Snowling (2000) into cognitive psychology and a biological basis for dyslexia;
- o Thomson (2001) into neuropsychological aspects of dyslexia;
- o Reid (2003a) into assessment, programmes and resources.

By holding solely to propositional theory as an abstract and conceptual phenomenon the voices of the participants are silenced. The research can therefore become irrelevant to research participants and the live contexts in which the research took place. This form of theory focuses on analysis, explanation and prediction, rather than focusing on those being taught. Theory is communicated as

> a set of propositions that are stated with sufficient generality yet
> precision that they can explain the 'behaviour' of a range of
> phenomena and predict what would happen in the future.

(Pring 2000, pp.124 - 125)

Research on pedagogy often works within a causal or propositional form of logic and is framed in terms of the questions to which concrete and fixed answers are given. Examples of this can be seen in the writings of Mortimore (1999) who summarises current research about pedagogy at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, and in Wray (1994) who summarised research into

comprehension for those with learning difficulties. They, like many other researchers in the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia), use a logic of cause and effect to compare the relative effectiveness of different interventions for dyslexia that are similar in intensity and duration 'just as when trialing a drug it is important to test its effects in relation to a placebo treatment' (Snowling 2000, p.178).

My pupils' voices have often been absent in the teaching episodes I have described. I do not want to leave their voices out of my research because I perceive this to be unjust, in that it ignores the thinking capabilities and creativity of all involved in the research, except the researcher. The ideas of the research participants are generally written out of this form of theory. Some could argue that this form of theorising is relevant to the live contexts in which research takes place because it may influence policy making. I would, however, contend that this form of research is unjust on two counts. First, it prioritises phenomena over people and second, its focus on prediction can deny the freedom of choice of the participants to self-determination.

To address this dilemma I have sought a different form of theory. I have come to understand that there are two distinct perspectives on theory within the literature: first, a view of theory as a discrete body of knowledge that can be applied to practice (Popper 1963; Pring 2000); second, a view of practice as theory. This form of theory is generated from studying one's own practice (McNiff and Whitehead 2006) and is new in the field of learning disability (dyslexia).

In the remainder of this chapter I draw on episodes from my research to show how my pupils' voices and my voice became part of my teaching and research. I then reflect on how changes in my practice can relate to forms of theory.

In my research, I aimed to link my philosophy of valuing the individual and their capacity to learn to a form of pedagogy that could demonstrate the valuing of the individual and their capacities. To begin this process I tried to redress possible power issues in the relationships between my pupils and myself that, as I have said, were already present in how I taught and assessed my pupils. An example of this was my invitation (see below) to my pupils to participate in my research.

Hi K,

I am trying to be a better teacher and I hope you will learn what is the best way for you to learn.
Can I use your ideas to make our lessons better?
Can I tell other children and teachers about our work together?

Thank you
Mrs Mc Donagh

My wording 'I am trying to be a better teacher' and 'Can I use your ideas' surprised me, because it came from the heart, was sincere and was not couched in academic language. I was asking for my pupils' help. I was offering an opportunity to the pupils whom I taught that could free them to critique their situation and no longer remain as passive objects within a system that denies their capabilities. My ontological values of compassion, freedom, justice, equality and human dignity were present in those words and my wish to serve others informed my request to share with children and teachers.

Other examples of how wording can act as indicators of the core epistemological values on which I based changes in my teaching during my research, were the individual learning plans that I wrote for my pupils in the early (2001) and latter part of my research (2003). The full texts of both these examples are in Appendices 6.2 and 6.3. I have said in Chapter Two that in 2001 the teaching strategies I used were 'teacher modelling and practice'. I described what this looked like in the lesson in Chapter Three. In 2003 my individual learning plan read as follows:

Table 4.3: Extract from an individual learning plan 2003 (see Appendix 6.3)

Learning Target
Pupil, having identified his personal learning style for spellings, will read and spell 20 words from the common list
Teaching Strategies
Pupil composes higher and lower order questions on text. Discussion of learning strategies, metacognition
Materials/Resource
Class texts, common word list

Instead of taking learning targets directly from commercial programmes as I had in 2001, I now expected my pupil to identify his or her own personal learning style for spellings. My teaching strategies included discussing learning strategies and the pupil composing questions. I had written the pupil's voice into this document – voices that had been absent previously. I was also introducing a practice of metacognition. I will show later the specific meaning of metacognition in my teaching but basically it meant awareness of what and how one learned. I had changed the focus of the individual learning plans since 2001 and now, in my new approach, the focus was on the pupils' understanding of themselves as the person taking action.

This was a large leap. At times it took courage and an almost blind faith in the pupils I taught. To support my belief that it was possible, I drew on my Christian values and on the work of, for example, Arendt (1968, p.167), who speaks of the natality of the individual. This idea emphasises the concept that each person is precious by virtue of being born. Coulter and Wiens (2002, p.17) offers a further perspective that has relevance for my research in that they explain different research paradigms in terms of actors and spectators. I understand their explanation of spectators as interpretive researchers who observe, interpret and judge the actions of the actors being researched. Their work however supports opportunities to link the actor and spectator perspectives in research without privileging either within two activities. This involves participants and researcher acting and thinking together. It has direct links to my approach of placing pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) as co-researchers – a process which I began with the invitation (above) to my pupils to participate in my research. This invitation marked the beginning of this partnership, which I will describe in the next section.

In her work Arendt refuses to adopt the role of a judging actor and instead engages with her fellow citizens despite the opprobrium of friends (Bernstein 1996, p.158). She grounds her work in the idea of freedom as responsibility (Coulter and Weins 2002, p.17). My research is also values driven in that I have shown above that I want to move from a system that constrains my learning and my pupils' potential learning to a system that values each of us, as I have demonstrated in the permission letter above and in Table 3.2. I will show in Part Three of this thesis that these values can

be understood as transforming into my living standards of practice (Whitehead 2004a). But first I will consider issues arising from my teaching and move from the more general questions of knowledge and theory in existing research to analysing my own pedagogy and how I aimed to change it.

4.4 How I proposed to challenge the issues arising in my teaching

My research took an unexpected turn. This was partly due to my reflections on my teaching and on my pupils' learning, but also because unexpectedly some grateful and resourceful parents fundraised for the pupils with special needs in my school. The support teachers (including me), school management and parents therefore decided to install a kitchen in one of the resource classrooms. We hoped to develop our pupils' life skills and involve them in practical mathematics around money, shopping and ingredient measurement as well as practical English such as label and recipe reading. In order to facilitate this, a one and a half hour cookery lesson replaced individual lessons on Friday. As our school had more than one support teacher we took turns to take classes in the kitchen. I decided to take a group of eight pupils with specific learning disability for one and a half hours each Friday when we were not in the kitchen. The photographs below show the co-operative learning atmosphere in the cookery class, where reading, comprehension and some writing happen, with direct teaching by me.

Pictures 4.1 and 4.2: Cookery Class

Pupils enjoyed sharing what they knew and the different skills they had. Some could read better, some had better motor skills and could chop, stir and whip cream better

than others. In Picture 4.1 Pupil F has a hand written recipe. He and Pupil J are reading the recipe, unaided by me, and instructing Pupil B. As he works, Pupil B questions the others to check that his ingredient amounts and method are correct. In picture 4.2 Pupil B is now reading. Pupil K is whisking and checking that she understands the instructions with Pupil B. Pupil R is adding to the mix.

In a similar way, my group lesson also became a co-operative learning session in the followings ways. We all sat informally around the room in a circle, at times working in pairs and occasionally alone.

 This photo shows a pupil working at the teacher's desk while I, with my back to her and sitting in a pupil's chair, am chatting with another pupil. (See Appendix 2.4i)

Picture 4.3: Pupil working as teacher

One of the amazing events that happened during these hourly sessions was that my pupils began to conduct their own individual action research projects into how they learned spellings. I had failed to improve my pupils' levels of writing with correct spellings when I used commercial programmes or a multisensory approach. I told my pupils about my concerns and asked them to tell me how each of them learned spellings. I will describe how this happened in detail in chapter eight. But for now I will say that the important event was that the pupils themselves suggested trying each other's way of learning to see if they could improve their spellings scores. This developed into individual action research projects where, by involving others, each pupil aimed to improve his or her spellings. Their mainstream class teachers set spellings for them. They chose to learn those spellings by using three strategies for learning spellings that they had heard from their peers who had dyslexia in my Friday classes and that they had not used previously. They practised each strategy for one month and recorded any improved scores in spellings. They found that they could then select which strategy was the most effective for them in learning spellings

by comparing their scores over the three months. I give further information about my pupils' action enquiries in Part Four.

So what is the relationship between the new learning that was happening in my Friday morning classes and the types of Individual Educational Plans that I referred to above (see a fuller version of them in Appendices 6.2 and 6.3)? The changes that I adopted in my teaching approaches in the Individual Educational Plans from 2001 to 2003 were in part due to the pupils' action research projects about their spellings.

The Individual Educational Plans that I composed for each pupil whom I taught in 2001 were a practical example of the forms of knowledge that informed my teaching at the beginning of my research. Although these documents were a job requirement, the wording in them was mine and it indicated that I was working within a propositional form of thinking at that time. As a teacher/researcher, like other teachers engaged in special education, I am confined by Government recommendations and publications, which impact on how I teach my pupils. Circular 08/02 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002a) required me to set 'specific time-related targets for each child and agree these with the class teacher and principal' and engage in 'assessing and recording the child's needs and progress' (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002a). I was confined in a web of efficiency-focused, productivity raising techniques and documentation. The logic of cause and effect informs these processes of accountability in teaching. However, by spending so much time in documenting and accounting for my teaching there is little opportunity for critical engagement with the theories of teaching and learning themselves. Within the system of primary education in Ireland, the confining requirements that I described above increase in direct ratio to the severity of the difficulties experienced by pupils. Evidence of this can be seen in the differing job requirement of learning support teachers (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2000) and resource teachers (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002a). The distinction between learning support teachers who teach pupils falling below class levels in Maths and English and resource teachers who teach pupils with specified disabilities or syndromes, imply that resource teachers deal with a less able section of the school population.

I felt that these job requirements diminished my freedom in terms of innovation, spontaneity and immediate response to pupils' daily learning. The systems of accountability also establish the identity of the learner as subject to the system and to the teacher. For me, as a teacher, they establish my identity as an object in a reified system. In both instances the human is devalued while 'the system' is valued.

Political influences on my specific teaching context, during the past twelve years, are seen in documents such as the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (Ireland, Department of Education 1993); the Department of Education and Science Circulars such as 9/99 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999a), 08/02 (Ireland, Department of Education 2002a) and 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a); and the report of The Task Force on Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b) and Understanding Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science and Northern Ireland, Department of Education 2004). The final two documents in particular articulate a shift in emphasis from a technical rational approach towards ideals of valuing the individual and personal knowledge within a framework of inclusiveness and ongoing learning (Day 2003; Reid 2003b). Examples of these forms of knowing would be intuition, experiential knowledge and personal knowledge. Polanyi (1958) explains this idea of personal knowledge as the personal involvement of the knower in all acts of understanding. The intuitive and personal knowledge of pupils did not feature in my individual education plans for my pupils prior to 2001 nor in the lessons I taught.

In addition to a shift in forms of knowledge these documents refer to ideas of inclusion, which was an important ingredient of the Friday morning classes that I described at the beginning of this section. This was the inclusion of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and other learning difficulties in the mainstream classrooms. However it is assumed that participation in mainstream classrooms of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) happens by the assimilation of the pupil in terms of adapting current curricula, learning contexts or teaching methodologies. The overarching concept of all three aspects is a focus on making the pupil fit into the system through differentiation. Therefore the rhetoric of the inclusive aspirations of The Task Force Report on Dyslexia (Ireland, Department

of Education and Science 2002b) and *Understanding Dyslexia* (Ireland, Department of Education and Science and Northern Ireland, Department of Education 2004) does not yet live either at a systemic level or classroom practice level in schools generally, in terms of enabling pupils to take some control over their own learning processes.

I wanted the rhetoric of these documents to live in my classes and I questioned what appeared to me to be an acceptance of propositional forms of knowledge. I did so because the dominance of propositional knowledge prevented critical engagement with issues of pedagogy and on-going learning. I therefore encouraged critical engagement by my pupils with their own learning when I facilitated their action research projects about how they learned spellings. My critical engagement with pedagogy was reflected in the new approaches to teaching that I included in the sample Individual Educational Plans from 2003. The targets that I set embraced personal learning and personal awareness of how my pupils themselves learned. This is in contrast to the messages communicated by refereed publications within the field of special education and specific learning disability (dyslexia), which are generally confined to technical rational forms of knowledge, because that is what dominant voices in the contemporary culture value (Winter 2002). In discussing my research in later chapters I describe my pupils' action research projects about how they learned spellings – a personal perspective – which can enable others to make choices about their own lives, and make claims based on embodied values which can transform into living standards of practice and judgement (Whitehead 1989 and 2004a).

In preparation for this I now consider four pedagogical issues in my context that I have highlighted above and that I propose to address. These issues that inform my teaching are namely;

- o Different forms of knowledge in my pedagogical context support different forms of theory
- o The logic in which I base my research – issues of identity
- o My understanding of social justice in my context

o Propositional forms of theory do not encourage critical engagement with pedagogical issues in my context.

In the final part of this chapter I articulate the underpinning assumptions of the value base of my research.

~ Different forms of knowledge in my pedagogical context support different forms of theory

In my professional practice, as I have shown in the extracts from Individual Educational Plans above, I am required to set

> Specific, time-related targets for each child and agree these with the
> class teacher and principal

> (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002a, p.8)

The idea of target setting is grounded in theories from a business model of education, 'the predatory culture' and the 'logic of the market place', as McLaren (1995) called it, where the language of productivity, targets, goals, and outcome percentage improvements have become commonplace. Its values are product-based where children are perceived as consumers first and human beings second and I am positioned as a service provider.

Through engaging in this research, I am developing awareness of the power that the institution of the Department of Education and Science has on my views of knowledge and learning. The institutional epistemological stance has power over teachers in that it must be accepted as part of a teacher's employment contract. The power of traditional institutional epistemology can therefore deny the capacities of the teachers who are subject to it. Consequently, I began to perceive myself as one of those teachers referred to by Giroux:

> teachers become arid communities, shorn of capacities to use their own
> ideas, judgements and initiatives in matters of importance, and can't
> teach kids to do so.

> (Giroux 2000, p.91)

To address this position of impotence, I considered what my teaching was really about and the systemic constraints on it.

I see pedagogy as having two faces. These faces are similar to McNiff''s (2002) visions of the conflicting contemporary debates around knowledge in higher education that exist within 'discourses of competition and alienation' (McNiff 2002, p.2). The first face is that pedagogy is the management of the delivery of knowledge. The second face of pedagogy is the making explicit of the latent fund of personal knowledge in order to encourage on-going learning. 'Hidden processes transform into explicit ones in life-affirming ways and these emerge as the properties of living' (McNiff 2002, p.3).

Linguistic explanations of pedagogy, like those above, do not help me to understand or account for how I have changed my teaching during the course of my research. The personal and craft knowledge that I bring to my work from years of experience of teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) enables me to make split-second decisions without reference to a manual on teaching methodologies, subject content or theories of learning. For example, when my pupils themselves suggested trying each other's way of learning to see if they could improve their spellings scores, I immediately found ways to support their action research projects into how they learned spellings such as audio-taping and transcribing their individual learning strategies. Polanyi (1958) describes this form of practice as grounded in personal knowledge. He states how we know more than we can say because our vast amount of personal knowledge comes from small amounts of successful learning that we experience over a period of time, which he terms 'little victories' (Polanyi 1958, p.377). Because these 'little victories' are personal experiences they cannot easily be subjected to outsider measurement. Personal learning may be tacit or explicit. When I teach in ways that help to make a latent fund of personal knowledge explicit, as facilitating my pupils to make their personal strategies for learning spellings known to their peers, I am engaging with the second face of pedagogy. This second face of pedagogy also permeates the ways in which I developed my theory of justice in teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

This form of personal knowledge is contrary to the dominant procedural and propositional forms of knowledge required by specific time-related targets. In my context, when theory is taken to mean a body of knowledge that can be applied to practice, as happened when I used the commercial resources for dyslexia, the teacher is alienated and devalued because personal and craft knowledge are ignored. However where the researcher is studying and theorising her own practice, as I am, the opposite pertains. For me this is a more just form of theory because respect is afforded to the individual, as shown in the example in Picture 4.3 above, where a pupil is sitting and working at the desk and swivel chair assigned to her teacher (me). The focus of my research is to do with transforming an unsatisfactory situation – in which the capacities of the children in my research to think for themselves, and my own capacities, are denied – into a more satisfactory situation where their capacities are recognised and celebrated. One example of how I showed respect for my pupils' individual capacities to learn occurred when I facilitated their wish to investigate their personal ways of learning spellings.

To achieve these research goals I needed to engage with epistemological issues because, as a resource teacher, I have been required to subscribe to a form of theory that is grounded in the idea of a specific truth which, I contend, bears little resemblance to the realities of my experiences as a teacher of pupils with specific learning disabilities.

~The logic in which I base my research
In raising questions about 'How do I improve my teaching of my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)?' I am challenging traditional forms of theory by being open to creative and individual ways of thinking. Being open to impulse and imaginative, personal thinking is a challenge to the dominant propositional forms of logic that hold tight to one way of knowing and support the idea of pedagogy as a model for knowledge transmission. I am rejecting Aristotelian logic, which claims that things either are or are not, thus ignoring the problematic middle ground. I am no longer accepting dominant ideas that there is one correct way of thinking about teaching and learning for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) because this raises issues of power and control where I as a teacher am positioned as the only potential knower in the classroom. I agree with Foucault

(1979 and 1980; see Rabinow 1984 and McNay 1994) who states that knowledge is power.

The grounds for this ontological stance are that I see all humans as knowers. Some of the implications of my stance are that power can no longer be held solely by me as the supposed 'knower' in the classroom. An example of this change can be seen in the learning targets in the sample Individual Educational Plan for 2003 that I have given earlier in this chapter where the pupil identifies his or her personal learning style for spellings and discusses learning strategies. I must also facilitate all the people in my research – pupils, teachers and research colleagues – to exercise their power and creative imaginations. I have already given an example of this when, in Chapter Two, my pupils tested the new personal knowledge they had generated. Just as my pupils tested each other's learning strategies during their action research spelling projects, I too test my new understandings against the critique of the others in my research. I appreciate that my developing new knowledge cannot be imposed on others but instead I must find ways of invitationally influencing others, as I showed in the invitation to pupils to join my research.

I am constantly testing my own developing thinking. This self-questioning is obvious in the many questions I have raised throughout this thesis. In addressing these questions I am exercising my own voice in a similar way to that of my pupils when they suggested trying each other's strategies for learning spellings. I am creating an opportunity for my pupils and myself to exercise our questioning voices within our context. In doing so I will be drawing on the ideas of Winter (2002, p.147) who wrote about 'celebrating the ultimate reality of the individual's "possession" of their "own" voice' in research'. I am also engaging in a self-questioning of my pedagogy and practice, as occurs in self-study action research (see McGinley 2000; Marion Nugent 2000; Roche 2000). These teacher-researchers who engage in this form of research, make explicit the implicit ways in which teaching and learning happens as they engage with a transformative process of development (McNiff and Whitehead 2005). This openness to change embraces a philosophy that is generated from the contradictions within practice. I believe that research within this philosophical framework offers a more just approach for pupils because they are positioned as participants in the research process rather than as objects of research. I

am studying what I am concerned about in my practice and why I am concerned, and my pupils are concurrently conducting their own action research. They are, as it were, 'the play within the play' as Shakespeare said, in that they are researching within my research and I am researching alongside their research. Our separate and collective research projects are inextricably linked.

My reflections, in the form of questions, can be seen not only in the questions I am asking myself throughout this text but also in the extracts from my reflective journal and the thought bubbles in Part Three. This logic of constant questioning, reflection and re-questioning pertains in my study of my practice in order to generate theory from within it. Just as a logic of analysis or cause and effect can underpin a philosophy which positions theory as a body of knowledge to be applied to the practice; so I too am explaining the logic which underpins my work. I am attempting to present my new thinking and changes in my reality as a teacher within a form of logic that is believable. In my research I am also concerned with how my pupils expand their capabilities for critical thinking and learning and its resultant influence on their lives. The freedom for children with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) to forge their personal identities as learners is central to my research. The values of freedom and respect for the individual underpin the form of logic of my research and can contribute to a more just reality, as I have spoken about in the previous section.

~Issues of identity

Before I could help my pupils come to an understanding of their personal identities as learners, I needed to come to an understanding of how identities are formed – specifically how my identity as a teacher was formed. I began by examining what I meant by my identity as a teacher as a wrote in my diary,

> Did I make a distinction between the personal and professional me?
> No. When I teach, I am a mixture of both.

> (21 March 2002 Journal in data archive Appendix 2.1b)

The 'blurring of the boundaries between personal and professional lives' (Nias 1989, p.181) is part of what Nias describes as teacher identity. She talks about teachers being 'themselves in the classroom' (p.181). However her understanding of the

blurring of roles is limited to factual personal information about what teachers do outside school hours. For example, a teacher in Nias's study said that her students were aware of details of the teacher's personal life such as what she did the previous evening. I have a different understanding of this blurring of the boundaries. The blurring occurs for me because of the inseparability of me from my work. It is an integral part of who I am. In addition, the idea of totally separating personal beliefs and professional identity is not countenanced in my specific workplace. This is because my school is under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church and the beliefs of that church are expected to pervade the ethos of the school and all who work and learn in it.

To some, this situation may appear to be coercive or a denial of the freedom to construct one's own identity. My values, however, are the basis of my view of myself in the world, and related to my ontological position. They are part of my own theory of being.

By considering a little further the question of identity formation I want to question if my teaching can provide ways to reconceptualise my identity and challenge the systemic constraints on my potential. My identity as a teacher is not limited to my name, culture, situation, roles or gender. My past, present and future are contained within my identity. My identity includes my individual sense of being. Yet I cannot focus solely on myself in that I cannot be a teacher in isolation. As Derrida (1987) pointed out, identity involves a capacity to see oneself as not the centre. So I understand myself as 'Other to others', as Buber (1937) said, and other people perceive me from their perspectives. The freedom to construct one's identity can be denied when identity is forged by the external social constructs such as those in the education system which label pupils as learning disabled (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999a and 2002a). This freedom can also be denied in the dominant discourses within which I work when I focus on the four commercially produced programmes above.

To answer my question 'Who am I?' I revisit feelings and lived events in order to make my own meanings of them. For example in the picture on p.99 above (Picture 4.3), from a traditional perspective of teaching as imparting information and skills, it

could appear that I am ignoring the pupil at my table, that I am engrossed in my own world and not bothering to teach my pupils. Her experience of what was actually happening and reflection on what happened was quite different. My description of what was happening in that picture shows that the picture represents my values of equality, justice, human dignity and service in action. Through self-reflection I can develop a new understanding for and about myself. This concept has similarities with what Foucault (1979 and 1980; see Rabinow 1984 and McNay 1994) referred to as inner critical engagement. I check my reflections against my pupils' views. However, self–reflection is not sufficient. I must also check my understanding of myself against others. So, I engage first in a process that can be compared to looking at myself in the mirror in the company of others; then travelling into the mirror; and from the inside of the mirror questioning and checking with those others who remain outside the mirror. Foucault (1979 and 1980) writes that identity can include inner critical engagement and outer questioning of the condition of which the self is constituted. My analogy of the mirror works at two similar levels of questioning; first, the inner self-questioning and second, the questioning of one's understanding of oneself with and in relation with others. So I am suggesting that my pupils' perceived identity as learning disabled and my perceived identity as a voiceless facilitator can potentially be reconceptualised through inner self-questioning and through the questioning of our understandings of ourselves with and in relation with each other.

My understanding of identity and how I aimed to develop a form of teaching that would influence the pupils in my research to create positive learning identities is connected to values of freedom. I understand that ideas of freedom, identity and the recognition of the critical capacities of learning are interrelated. I ground my ideas in the work of Greene (1988) who speaks of freedom as a core condition for the development of critical capacity. In taking this course of action I located my research within an inclusive and relational form of logic (Whitehead 2004a). I demonstrated the spontaneity of my logic by acting on and including my pupils' ideas and suggestions about trying each other's ways of learning spellings. I also demonstrated a relational form of logic in acting to extend the relational, co-operative learning that I had observed in the pupils' cookery lessons to my Friday teaching that I had freed from teaching commercial programmes.

~My understanding of social justice in my teaching

I have explained that these programmes involve a model of teaching that treats the child as an object rather than as a unique individual. The child is positioned as a non-thinking someone to be trained in new skills. Both learner and teacher voice were diminished in the teaching of these four programmes in that I as the teacher became an unthinking facilitator of the programmes and the pupils became passive recipients of the programmes. Teaching these programmes appeared to me to be an unjust denial of both the pupils' capabilities and mine. I perceive two difficulties here. First, these accounts do not address the normalising processes when pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) acquiesce in normative perceptions that they are unable to learn. Second, this behaviouristic approach to learning positions the learner as passive within the learning process, and therefore self-motivation to learn is diminished.

For me, justice includes becoming aware of and testing my ways of teaching and learning, as I have described above. Getting an academic qualification for my studies is part of my process of legitimating my new thinking and actions. By getting a PhD for theorising my practice, I will be contributing to a knowledge base for our profession. For both my pupils and myself achieving justice will mean reversing our positions of marginalisation where our learning and knowledge appear to me to be devalued within the education system. The implications for my practice are that justice for the children will mean allowing them to become aware of and investigate their own learning successes and provide opportunities to transfer their new understandings to other situations. I believe that this form of justice in education is a live concept that can be understood in relation to people's practices. I have shown this idea in two ways during this chapter: in the pictures that I have included, and in my account of how I encourage my pupils to engage in action research into their own learning of spellings. These and the extracts from my Individual Educational Plans in 2001 and 2003, show changes in my practice in which a pupil could 'identify personal learning style for spellings' (Table 4.3), showing an awareness of his own learning. The pupil also investigated his own learning when we 'discussed learning strategies.' By composing 'higher and lower order questions on text' the pupil actively transferred some of the learning skills that he had acquired. In the

lived realty of my teaching, the pupil was actively taking control of his own learning as did all the pupils in this cohort in their action research projects.

Many theorists of justice, for example Rawls (1999), offer analyses of what justice is and involves. Rawls (1999) offers a propositional conceptualisation of justice. He regards 'justice' as an object of enquiry. However, instead of adopting a propositional approach to a study of justice, I am forming a living theory of justice that is informed by ideas to do with people's capacity to think for themselves and negotiate their own ways of learning, recognising that other people are also aiming to do the same for themselves.

The dominant form of justice in education focuses on issues of provision (Davies 1999) and issues of inclusion (Castles and Miller 1998). Accordingly, working from an externalist view of theory as a discrete body of knowledge that can be applied to practice, researchers such as Young (1990) and Griffiths (2003) write about action for social justice. Both Young (1990) and Griffiths (2003) discuss the complexities of established theories of social justice and suggest strategies and principles for action using practical examples from others' lives. They also are adopting a propositional stance in their studies in relation to the effectiveness of established theories of social justice in different research settings. I, however, am not placing my research within a propositional form of theory. I want to demonstrate the development of a living theory of learning how to teach for social justice from within my practice as I ask how I can develop changes in my practice to improve my pupils' learning experience.

I am engaging with ideas of social justice for emancipation in that I want to free the children from the label of disability and, for myself, I want the freedom to provide a more just form of pedagogy. In doing so I believe the children could engage in a more just way of being. I also seek the freedom to develop a form of theory of practice that can take into account the practical learning of both teacher and pupils. To achieve these emancipatory aims, I became involved in new ways of thinking and theorising that celebrated my own capacity for knowledge generation. The example of my facilitation of pupils conducting action enquiries into their individual ways of learning spelling, worked towards a form of social justice that liberated both the

children and myself. This form of justice recognised individual capacities to learn and speaks to my existing values around freedom and the capacity of all to think critically and to be knowledge creators. However none of these ideals could have been achieved within traditional forms of theory. A new form of theorising was required because of my focus on social justice and the individual. I needed to engage in a new form of dialogical research that allowed all participants to be valued and take a full part in the research process. In this way both the children and I had opportunities to create our own answers and thereby generate our own living theories of practice.

~ **Propositional forms of theory do not encourage critical engagement with pedagogical issues in my context**

My pupils called Fridays 'freedom Fridays'. The form of teaching and learning that I facilitated on Fridays was my attempt to understand and reconcile the relationship between the propositional stances to knowledge adopted by the institutions within which I work – both in my school and university – and the dialogical perspective of knowledge that I espouse. I have been helped by the work of Rawls. Rawls's (1955 and 1971) ideas resonate with the distinction I am making between institutional approaches to teaching pupils with specific learning difficulties and my practice as I work as an individual within those systems. His *Theory of Justice* (1971) states that each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. The idea of the precedence of the individual over society is discussed at length in Rawls (1955), where he examines differences between 'the justification of a practice by an institution and the justification of particular actions carried out by an individual and which falls under this institution' (Rawls 1955, p.1).

Rawls (1955) claims that the intent that inspires the institution and the individual defines their differing approaches. The intent that inspires a utilitarian, institutional approach, according to Rawls (1955), is that institutions claim to act in order to provide a system for the good of society, which they often ground historically. Similarly those who support the teaching of pupils with specific learning difficulties, both in academia and the Department of Education and Science, have the intent of

providing appropriate systems for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) within the historical necessity for literacy (Coolahan, 1994).

I was concerned about individual pupils with specific learning disability and sought to help each of them to be compensated for the difficulties they face daily within the dominant education system. My intent can be related to Noddings' (2002) theory of care. Her theory proposes ideas of learning and teaching concerning reciprocity and the necessity to confirm learners in their capabilities, which I agree with. I disagree with Noddings, however, when she speaks of how to put her ideas of care into practice. Her strategies centre on transforming curriculum and in doing so she slips into a propositional view of knowledge and adopts a utilitarian approach in her practice by seeking to put systems of best practice in place. She offers practical strategies for caring for others to adopt. I am arguing that the focus should be on a form of theory that allows the individual to transform themselves rather than a theorising of curriculum and skills. In contrast to the work of Noddings, Naidoo (2005), who also speaks about how to put ideas of care into practice, describes how her ontological commitment – a passion for compassion – and her engagement with the thinking of others has enabled her own practice to develop and from that to develop a living, inclusional and responsive theory of her practice. I too sought to develop a living, inclusional and responsive theory of practice to address the difficulties that my pupils and I were facing in our context, and I now explain how I proposed to do this.

In order to challenge a pedagogical context that is grounded in propositional knowledge, I believe that I must begin by articulating my values and show how I am prepared to live by my values in my practice. This is a problematic concept. In my research I articulated my values as the criteria by which my research and changes in my practice could be judged. Although I espouse a theory of justice that draws on Rawls's ideas around justice, and in particular justice as fairness, I build on his ideas towards a practical living theory of justice, where the values on which I base my understanding of justice would be shown to be lived in my practice. The validation of my theory of justice depends on my ability to show that these values are being lived out in my practice as both a teacher and researcher. In Part Three I discuss how I went about doing this.

~ The underpinning assumptions of the values base of my research

My research question, 'How do I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability who are within my care as a resource teacher in a primary school?' is grounded in values of justice, freedom, care, equality and respect for the capacity of the individual. I have shown, in my descriptions of my practice as well as in the pictures and my planning for teaching that I have included in this chapter, that I hold these values at a practical rather than abstract level in my research.

My practice and my thinking about these concepts are significantly coloured by my understandings around specific learning disability/dyslexia which have come from the stories and experiences of others; first, the book *The Scars of Dyslexia* (Eisenson 1994) in which adults with dyslexia described the horrors of their schooling and its effects on their later lives; second, the book *The Gift of Dyslexia* (Davis 1994) in which the author, as an adult with dyslexia, described talents through which he had achieved fame and fortune in later life. These key talents had been unobserved during his schooling because the school system valued logical mathematical intelligences rather than other forms of intelligence; and third, I was intrigued by my pupils' interest in famous people who are said to have specific learning disabilities (dyslexia) and also in my pupils' own stories. In committing myself to listening to and caring for my pupils, I am seeking new clarity and understandings around the nature of specific learning disability (dyslexia).

The changes I am making towards a more just, more free and more caring practice can be analysed from the perspective of the writings of Young and Noddings around social justice and care. Young (2000) suggests that social institutions, including schools, should provide

> conditions for all persons to learn and use satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognised settings and enable them to play and communicate with others or express their feelings and perspectives on social life in contexts where others can listen.
>
> (Young 2000, p.184)

Noddings (2002) provides a model of education from a care perspective, which could satisfy the needs of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to learn in ways described by Young above. Noddings's conceptualisation of care brought her to the understanding that

> how good I can be depends at least in part on how you treat me. My goodness is not entirely my property and the control I exercise, as a carer, is always a shared control.

<div align="right">(Noddings 2002, p.89)</div>

The idea of 'shared control', for me, implies openness not only to my pupils but also other pupils and teaching colleagues in my school as well as critical friends and researcher colleagues.

Difficulties remain for the approach I am proposing for my research. First, the maintenance of equilibrium of power between various people whom I am engaging in dialogue is problematic (Noddings 2002); second, the maintenance of open-endedness in the face of the dominance of propositional forms of theory in my context is also problematic. By adopting a self-development approach however, for both myself and my pupils in my research, I claim that I am moving towards a different form of theory of social justice, as I explain throughout this thesis.

4.5   Summary

I value all children, with or without dyslexia, and I seek ways of celebrating them and their ways of knowing, whatever these ways may be. So I have decided how to address the metaphorical fourth wave of the successes and failures of my teaching by asking in my research,

- o   How do I develop a theory of learning to teach that is inclusive of various ways of learning?
- o   How do I develop my own living theory of learning to teach for social justice in which my teaching can celebrate the potential of the children with specific learning disability (dyslexia)?

Coming to the point where I am able to ask these questions required a new epistemology and ways to address issues of power and validation, which I will describe in the next section on methodology.

For now, I want to reflect on why I was concerned about my teaching, given that my practice and my political context appear to work within different forms of knowledge. In this chapter I have reflected on core issues around the nature of educational knowledge that is valued in the literature of teaching in my field. Much of the reported research in the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia) is conducted within a scientific framework (Pumphrey and Reason 1991; Hulme and Snowling 1997; Snowling 2000), where the underlying philosophy seeks definitive answers that presuppose that there is one correct way of knowing. The Aristotelian idea that there is only way of knowing (text, 1253), proposes a philosophical approach that is at odds with research showing that those who have specific learning disability (dyslexia) are a heterogeneous group (Kerr 2001; Fisher 2002).

I examined the values and the logics that were implicit in the forms of theory within the literatures mentioned. The literatures were rooted in causal logic. These theories analyse the biology, cognition and teaching programmes that aim to remediate deficits in specific skills (Hulme and Snowling 1997) in terms of cause and effect, and assume that theory may be applied unproblematically to practice.

My research is founded on ideas of emancipation through the acquisition of knowledge (Freire 1994). I build on Rawls's (1971) ideas of justice as fairness and propose a practical theory of justice that has some similarities with Griffiths (2003) and Young (2000), where my practice will be shown to exhibit the values on which I base my understanding of justice. The issue of the disempowerment of the individual by dominant forms of propositional theory in my field has led me towards articulating my own living theory of justice for the teaching of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) where the latent capabilities of the learner can be made explicit and enhanced in the social development of schooling.

My thesis is about forms of theory, and how these forms and their underpinning logics and values and normative assumptions transform into social and educational

practices. My ontological perspectives, which are the grounds for my form of theorising, are about valuing life and people. Again I am working in a normative system that is driven by different ontological perspectives, that people are objects who can be controlled and manipulated. This raised issues of justice. Because of my ontological belief in the uniqueness of the individual, I engaged in forms of practice that moved in the direction of those ontological values. Treating people as valuable people is commensurate with how I understand justice, that is, as grounded in the relationships between people. The normative system in which my research is based denies individuals as valuable and closes down their life chances, so I perceive these normative systems as unjust. My own emergent ideas of justice helped me to understand what I am doing as I worked with young people who were also caught in conflicting systems of logic and values.

Within the practical context of my research there are hindrances to my pupils', and my, achieving our potential. I needed to find ways of challenging and overcoming those hindrances. In the next section I explain how I found a practical methodology that included a form of theory and logic that was commensurate with my values of respect for humans and their capabilities.

PART THREE: METHODOLOGY – HOW DO I SHOW THE SITUATION AS IT WAS AND AS IT DEVELOPED?

In the previous chapters I have spoken about the influences that led me to commence my research and the concerns that prompted me to take action to change my situation. Part of my aim was to find pedagogies that would enable children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to show what they could do. This choice involved decisions to change my practice, and also to change the form of theory by which my learning and the learning of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) could be explained. In Chapters Five and Six, I produce data to show how my pupils and I were systematically disadvantaged. I also produce data to show that I have taken action to overcome the disadvantage and transform the disadvantage into new forms of opportunity.

My journey towards a methodology in which I could develop educational and practical theory, from within the epistemological and ontological frameworks described in the previous sections, was difficult. It was difficult in that I needed to reflect, question and articulate personal reasons for my choice. This involved looking at myself in a metaphorical mirror. I reflected and questioned what I saw in the mirror. I came to understand why I chose not to accept what I saw there and undertake research in order to change things. My personal questioning was recorded in my reflective journals at the time of my research (Appendix 2.1a to 2.1g) and is shown in the thought bubbles throughout the next two chapters in order to demonstrate the epistemological and philosophical concerns I had developed along this journey. These questions were about

> 1. Who benefits from my research?
> 2. Have I found a form of research that I can live with in that it is commensurate with my values?
> 3. Have I acted ethically and have I morally taken the best steps to change the learning experiences for the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my research?
> 4. Have I scrutinised my ways of working to ensure that they are my best effort to address the concerns I have?
>
> (2 Feb 2003 Journal see Appendix 2.1d)

I utilise those four reflective questions to frame Chapters Five and Six. In those chapters I, in my dual role of teacher and researcher, consider what form of methodology can bring immediate change to the learning experiences of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) whom I teach, when I ask, 'Who benefits from my research?' In the first part of Chapter Five I explain why I chose a new methodology for studying the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia). In the second part of Chapter Five I address validity issues within this methodology and the standards by which my research can be judged. That part of Chapter Five is my response to questions two and three above, and is where I explain how I validate my claims to new knowledge in relation to the criteria that I have described as the standards by which I have created a living theory from within my practice. Chapter Six explains the data gathering and analysis processes of my research in response to the question, 'Have I scrutinised my ways of working to ensure that they are my best effort to address the concerns I have?' I examine if my research methods are commensurate not only with my stated research aims but also with the epistemological and ontological stance that I have adopted.

CHAPTER FIVE: My journey towards understanding using a self-study action research methodology

5.1   Introduction

My research set out to improve my teaching of the pupils in my care. I choose a self-study action research approach to study 'How I can improve my practice?' (Whitehead 1989). I choose this approach because it would enable me to address the core concerns that I have spoken of in previous chapters. First, I wanted to take action to change what I saw as failing situations in my teaching and in the learning of my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). An action research approach could facilitate this. Second I sought ways to resolve the pervasive contradictions between the rhetoric of propositional theory and the lived reality of my practice and my pupils' experiences of my practice. Third, I wanted to find ways to address the epistemological concerns I had about the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Fourth I wanted to act in ways that would address the clashes between the ontological and Christian values that I held, and what was happening in my practice. Again, a self-study action research methodology could facilitate this.

The key characteristics of a self-study action research approach are that it provides a methodology in which the researcher can address issues in their practice, by reflecting on that practice and taking actions, which are grounded in articulated values. Claims are evaluated against those same values, and theories generated. The significance of those claims for the wider community must also be articulated. My understandings of self-study action research are commensurable with, and draw on the views of McNiff and Whitehead (2006), as I will explain in this chapter.

5.2   The positioning of research participants within dominant research methodologies

I continue to tell the story of my research and how changes came about in my practice and thinking in order to address the concerns that I have expressed so far. Similar to my 'Freedom Fridays,' my research activities were given further impetus by a fortuitous yet unplanned event. This is what happened.

At the end of a Friday class, I sat down to make notes in my reflective journal. The pupils were tidying up their spelling record sheets. Pupil R edged towards me. As was usual for me by that time, I was sitting on a pupil's chair, so Pupil R was towering over me. She looked over my shoulder and asked, 'What is it? Why are you writing?' I explained that I was writing down what I was thinking. I was writing about all the good things that happened in our class today. I wanted to write them down so that I could remember (I had explained my research to her) that I was doing them and maybe use them in other classes. Pupil R said, 'You are writing down good things so that you can remember them. Can I do that too?' This was the story of how my pupils' learning journals started. I bought them a diary each. And every day they wrote down something new that they had learned. We discussed what they should write and we decided it could be *anything* we learned such as a new stroke at swimming or something in school. Their diaries were intended only for themselves to read, so spelling or handwriting did not matter. Later in my research some pupils gave me permission to retain their journals in my data archive and to quote from them in my research.

By sheer accident I had come upon a research method to enable my pupils and myself to celebrate our personal knowledge. This method was in sharp contrast to how my pupils and I are systematically disadvantaged by many contemporary methods for studying specific learning disability (dyslexia).

When I examined the methods and methodologies of current research in the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia), I realised that the positioning of research participants was significant, in that the pupils being researched rarely benefited from the research. This realisation occurred when I looked at my research question – 'How do I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability who are within my care as a resource teacher in a primary school?' – through various methodological lenses, as I now explain.

To begin my explanation, I want to return to the metaphor of the mirror that I mentioned in the introduction to this section. I positioned myself and the pupils in my care in front of the mirror as I considered the research methods that I described

in Chapter Four when I was investigating commercially produced programmes for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I tested the pupils, I taught the programmes and then I retested the pupils and evaluated the programmes. The reflections that I see are those of myself growing in stature while my pupils diminish in size until they almost vanish. This posed dilemmas for me as a teacher and researcher because the reflection in the mirror points to an imbalance. Our new positioning implies that I am in a position of power over the pupils, leading them to be less important and almost vanish from the creation of new knowledge within the research process. I recorded my concern about this imbalance in my reflective diary below. I was also concerned about staying outside the process of enquiry, when I asked:
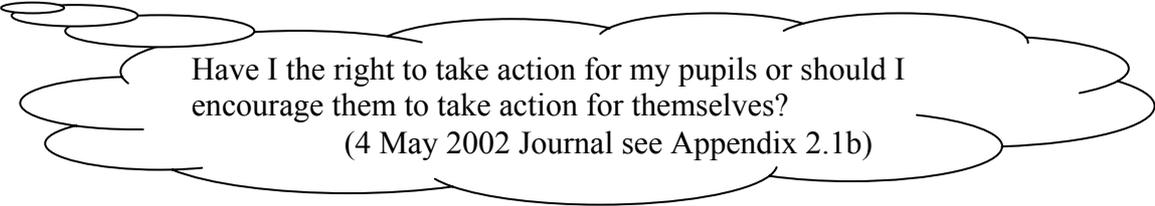
> Have I the right to take action for my pupils or should I encourage them to take action for themselves?
>
> (4 May 2002 Journal see Appendix 2.1b)

Eisenhart (2001) spoke of a similar dilemma when she wrote about making her decision between writing about the lives of others and taking action on their behalf. She states her research dilemma in these words:

> I have a responsibility as an anthropologist, a teacher and a person to speak and act sometimes on behalf of the girls who are participating in my research.
>
> (Eisenhart 2001, p.20)

In my research I did not want to act on behalf of my pupils. Informed by the values of justice, the right to create identity, and respect for the individual and their capacity to learn (as I discussed in Sections One and Two), I sought to influence pupils to take action for themselves. I saw a reality in my metaphorical mirror where intelligent pupils were excluded from creating their own knowledge although I was seeking an appropriate research methodology to change this situation towards a reality of empowerment. Their positioning had systematically disadvantaged my pupils as research participants within that research methodology

Next I examined the methodologies of current research in the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia) in relation to the positioning of research participants. I also considered whether empirical or interpretive research approaches, as described in Bassey (1990 and 1999) and Borg *et al.* (1993), could address the processes of learning, change and the value base that informed my research question. An empirical methodology for my research would focus mainly on the development of abstract theory whereas I sought to focus on the development of pupils' learning, and my understanding of learning is that it is a personal, on-going process of creating new knowledge. My research question is not suited to a positivist paradigm because I am seeking ways to enable my pupils and myself to celebrate our personal knowledge while incorporating our factual knowledge. I had found a suitable research method in the reflective journals of my pupils and myself. Now I needed a methodology that could incorporate this method and that was commensurate with its underpinning values.

In the light of the contexts and issues I described in the previous chapters, an interpretive, ethnographic or case study methodology would be equally unsuited to the aims of my research because these methodologies generally position the researcher outside the field of study. My research question, 'How do I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability who are within my care as a resource teacher in a primary school?' contains a dual focus on my pupils and myself, both of whose processes of learning must be accounted for through the form of research I chose. Although ethnographic research or an educational case study approach are commonly accepted forms of qualitative research in educational settings, they position the researcher as a spectator of the field of enquiry and would be at odds with my values around social justice, as I will now explain.

Spradley (1980, cited in Hitchcock and Hughes 1995 pp.17-19) uses the metaphor of petroleum engineers and explorers in search of oil to compare the thinking behind positive and interpretive paradigms. Both groups of people, he says, work in linear, sequential methods and have prior knowledge in terms of what they seek (research question), how to look for it (methodology) and what to expect (significance). However, differences between their approaches lie in their answers to the question 'What did you find?' The engineers would define their new knowledge as an object

(oil), whereas the explorers would have found a description – or new knowledge about something.

This explanation highlights, for me, the answer to a question that I wrote in my reflective journal early in the course of my research, which was:
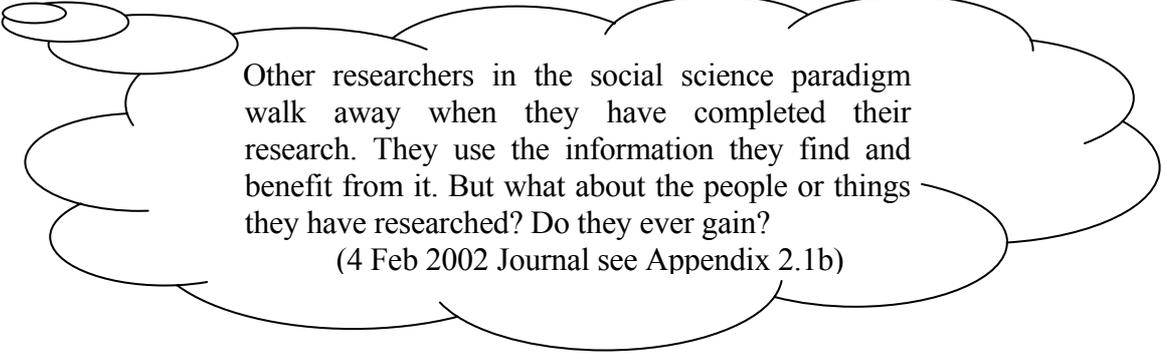
> Other researchers in the social science paradigm walk away when they have completed their research. They use the information they find and benefit from it. But what about the people or things they have researched? Do they ever gain?
> (4 Feb 2002 Journal see Appendix 2.1b)

In the case of both groups of oil researchers, I would not be perturbed that they should gain from their objective or descriptive new knowledge and the oil would remain impassive, impervious and untouched. In the case of educational research involving young pupils' time, energy and commitment to being researched, I do not accept that they can or should remain passive and unaffected. I was concerned that educational research – regardless of whether it was within an empirical, interpretive, social science or other paradigm – might not be educational in that it did not benefit the participants. This would, for me, be a denial of the living voices of those pupils and of respect for them as humans.

A denial of respect for pupils in propositional forms of research could be justified on the grounds that educational research may inform future policy and decisions about the type and amount of services that might be appropriate for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) as in the research of Morris (2001), Nugent (2006) and D.A. Walsh (2003) on provision for those with dyslexia in Ireland, and the research of De Buitléir (2002) on curriculum. Policy decisions are largely informed by abstract, conceptual theory such as the sources listed below. Bourke (1985) and Doyle (2003) employ traditional, scientific methodologies, and approach dyslexia from a psychological background. Doyle's work (2003), for example, is a large-scale, long-term study still in progress. Bourke (1985) addresses a very specific question that is relevant to practice – entitled 'A proposed automatic processing deficit dimension to dyslexia' – but his methodology focuses on justifying a specific practical approach rather than transforming current practice.

The dominance of methodologies that engage in abstract, conceptual theory has also permeated interpretive research methodologies in the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia). Chapple (1999), for example, enquired into 'Dyslexia: assessment, diagnosis and intervention: a case study of the effective intervention'. Her interpretive case study approach adopted a research stance that Eisenhart (2001) states has

> proliferated in recent years and come to dominate many areas of educational research.

(Eisenhart 2001, p.15)

This methodological approach positions pupils as inert objects, like the oil in Spradley's (1980) explanations above. So I contend that current forms of research on specific learning disability (dyslexia) are limited in that they offer little practical help to learners.

~ Implications of a dual focus of my research on my pupils and on myself within our contexts

Current forms of research on specific learning disability (dyslexia) are also of concern to me, as a researcher, because of the idea of the existence of a research reality external to me as a researcher. They concern me on the grounds that I understand the researcher inevitably to be part of the reality they are investigating. In chapters One to Four, I spoke about how I perceive myself (in the metaphor of the waves) as part of a complex and ever-changing reality which I cannot step outside of. The idea that reality cannot be held as external is supported in the works of Hocking, Haskell and Linds (2001) and Miller and Nakagawa (2002) who offer an alternative ontological positioning for the educational researcher. Hocking *et al.* (2001) write about unfolding the body-mind relationship in educational research. The work of Miller and Nakagawa (2002) introduces perspectives of spirituality in education by the addition of perspectives of soul or spirit to body-mind relationships. These researchers are theorising their realities and their realities include body-mind relationships.

I believe this has relevance for my research because in my situation, my research and theorising are located in the reality of my classes and the reality of the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Part of that reality is the changes in my thinking and that of my pupils as well as in our practices of teaching and learning, which occurred during the course of my research. Eisner (1988), in speaking about 'the primacy of experience and the politics of methodology' (Eisner 1988, p.15), uses the term 'methodological enfranchisement' to show the reality of research about a constantly changing reality. He advocates action research as a methodology to address living experiences in educational research. My living reality is in constant flux and can be understood as a process of development and change through experience. I relate my conceptualisation of reality to postmodernist conceptualisations where reality does not exist as a fixed entity. I locate my theory against other critical thinkers, such as Giroux and McLaren (1992). When outlining the then current situation in critical pedagogy, they discussed how language works to construct and mediate reality. This resembles my stance on the importance of the discourses that inform the teaching and learning of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my context, as I discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Active and appropriate learning for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) was one of the aims of my research. Giroux and McLaren (1992) present provisional elements of a critical pedagogy that has the potential to create active learners. As McLaren has pointed out, students react to information viscerally

> Knowledge is not something to be 'understood'; it is always felt and responded to somatically…that is, in its corporeal materiality. What matters is what is felt knowledge…knowledge as a 'lived engagement'.
>
> (Giroux and McLaren 1992, p.170)

I agree with Giroux and McLaren that both knowledge and reality involve lived engagement. Reality cannot be considered as 'out there' but is living and changing. We can mould reality in accordance with our needs, interests, prejudices, and cultural traditions (Beck 2004).

Since I conceptualise my reality in this fluid way, I am seeking a methodology that offers a degree of fluidity. In coming to my choice of methodology I had to ask,

'What is the significance of my shifting reality to the wider community?' and 'Why would others be interested in how I theorise it?' I wrote about these questions in my reflective journal as follows:
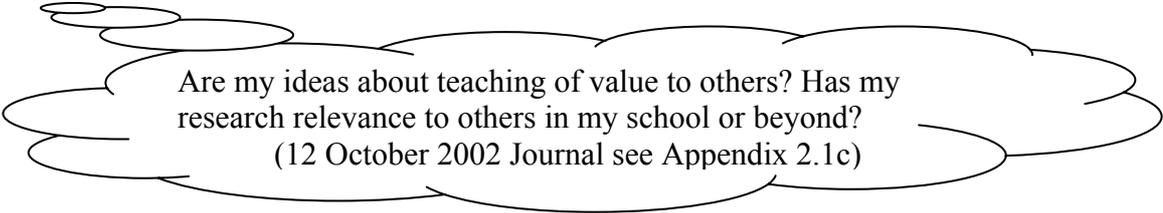
> Are my ideas about teaching of value to others? Has my research relevance to others in my school or beyond?
> (12 October 2002 Journal see Appendix 2.1c)

I am concerned that my research should have relevance for others because the metaphorical mirror cannot reflect myself or my pupils in isolation. We are placed against a background of my school, of teaching colleagues and pupils' peers. Neither my teaching colleagues nor the pupils' peers exist in isolation; they are in constant relationship with others. So I am choosing a research methodology that is not based in the kind of propositional theories that inform policy or provision but in the personal relationships within which new knowledge can be created in education.

~ Who benefits from my research?

In raising the question, 'Who benefits from my research? I have first considered the positioning of the researcher and the research participants in empirical and interpretative forms of research. These were the dominant paradigms in my field of specific learning disability (dyslexia), but they did not address the personal learning experiences of pupils or show ways to improve these experiences from the pupils' perspective. These methodologies work from an outsider focus, which is not commensurate with the personal focus of my research.

The aims of my research required that the pupils who participated in it must benefit in ways that change both their positioning and circumstances. To achieve this, my research methodology needed to facilitate:

- o   a personal focus;
- o   an equality of participation;
- o   a changing power dynamic in pupil / teacher relationships;
- o   a fluid conceptualisation of reality as not external to the researcher or the research participants;

o others and myself in taking action for ourselves to improve our circumstances;

o All of these concepts are grounded in values of equality, justice, freedom and respect for the individual and their capabilities.

The reflective journals that my pupils and I kept throughout my research provided a method that had a personal focus, an equality of participation and a changing power dynamic from the time prior to, and in the early part of, my research, when I alone marked my pupils' copies (See Chapter Three) and decided if learning had happened. In the second part of this chapter I move from a method to a methodology when I address the question, 'Have I found a research methodology that is commensurate with the values that underpin my research?'

5.3   How I am disadvantaged within research methodologies that do not link embodied values and epistemological values to research methods

I want to turn to a positive practical incident that occurred in my research before I interrogate the advantages and disadvantages of various methodological approaches in my specific context.

My pupils and I were filling in our journals at the end of class. Pupil M said, 'Teacher, I learned to do new steps at ballet yesterday. Do you want to know how I did it?' The other pupils heard her description of how Pupil M learned. One by one, over the next few weeks, they offered oral explanations of how they learned what they were writing about in their journals. Eventually, one Friday, when time was too short in class to hear everyone's descriptions of how they learned, we decided to write how we learned into our journals. When I gave my pupils new diaries in the next calendar year they titled them 'What I learned and how I learned it.'

Together we had devised a simple method to explain our learning. My pupils and I were reflecting on and studying our own practices. They were learning how to spell and I was learning how to teach them to learn how to spell. This is not a method that is found in any other research, that I am aware of, into how pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) learn. It was a part of our self-study methodology,

which again is not a methodology through which specific learning disability (dyslexia) is commonly studied.

The most common research paradigms in which specific learning disability (dyslexia) is investigated are empirical and interpretive. Neither of these methodologies is grounded in the epistemological or ontological commitments that have informed the aims and core issues of my research. I want to explain how I perceive this dominance of particular research methodologies as a disadvantage to me, as a teacher and a researcher, who wants to improve the learning experiences of my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and who also wants to improve my teaching.

There are four other main reasons why I felt that the empirical and interpretive methodologies usually used to study specific learning disability (dyslexia) would not be suitable approaches. In addition to a desire to enquire into my own teaching and my pupils' learning I wanted to find a methodology that was appropriate to:

- o The particular context of specific learning disability from my perspective and from my pupils' perspectives.
- o Developing a living theory that had current relevance to the pupils I was teaching
- o Bridging the theory-practice divide
- o My values commitments both ontological and epistemological

I now want to address in turn these reasons why I felt that my pupils and/or I would be disadvantaged if I chose the more usual approaches over a self-study action research methodology.

~ The particular context of specific learning disability (dyslexia) from my perspective and from my pupils' perspectives

My perspective was grounded in my Christian values (see Chapter Three). My pupils and I were already explaining some of our capabilities in our journals by showing an awareness of how we learned in a spirit of freedom and active compassion (see Appendices 2.1b to 2.1g; 2.6a to 2.6d and 6.3). In recognition of my belief in human dignity, I wanted to continue to celebrate the capacities of my pupils

with specific learning disability (dyslexia) within my chosen methodology. I wanted a methodology for my context that harmonised practice and values so that my research would be of service to my pupils and myself as their teacher. The form of journaling we now engaged in had grown through our influence on each other and from within an atmosphere of equality and justice. Our journals were not only about school learning. We were already addressing issues about the wholeness of the person.

The issue of injustice in my context was one of the two important issues that guided my search for an appropriate methodology. The second was my value commitments and these values, as I described in Chapter Three, included a belief in the individual's ability to learn and create new knowledge. McNiff (2002) talks about these ideas of individuals' knowledge creation and creative power. When explaining her preferences for self-study action research, she draws on the work of Chomsky (1986) and develops questions about the nature of knowledge of language, how knowledge of language is acquired, and how it is used. She asks,

> What do we know? How have I come to know it? How do I validate
> my knowledge? How do we share my knowledge? What do I use my
> knowledge for?

<div align="center">(McNiff 2002, p.1)</div>

The term 'knowing' as used by McNiff includes the idea of learning because in my view learning is part of a transformational process of coming to know (see Chapter Three).

~ Developing a living theory of practice that had current relevance to the pupils I was teaching

I am committed to the idea that theories of living practice can influence current policy and provision. This commitment is seen in my research journal question below,
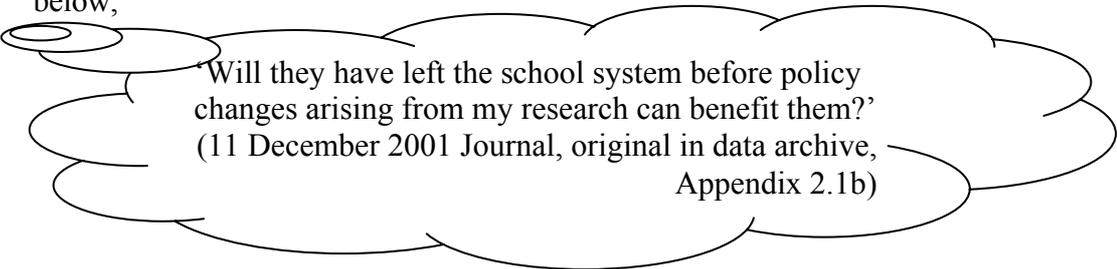
'Will they have left the school system before policy changes arising from my research can benefit them?' (11 December 2001 Journal, original in data archive, Appendix 2.1b)

I am positioning my students as active participants in my research because I want to make a difference to the contexts in which my pupils are disadvantaged and marginalised. I am not seeking to develop a grand theory of learning that will influence policy and practice for future generations of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Instead I am seeking to develop a living theory of practice that has relevance for myself and those with whom I work, and that can be made available for others to adopt and adapt as they wish.

~ Bridging the theory-practice divide

I developed an understanding of self-study action research during my studies for my masters degree, when I successfully theorised my ways of understanding my practice using a metaphor of six concentric circles (see Figure 5.1 below) of increasing size. Each circle totally embraced the previous one. The inner, smallest circle was a practical concern in my teaching, which initiated my research. The next four circles represented my developing theory, influences of school and the wider educational community, issues of ethics and methodological implications. Finally the largest outer circle represented my personal development and me. The key discovery for me was

> that the circles collapsed inwards. Vortex-like I became the centre of this changing visual representation. My search and development led to changes in methodology, changes in ethical stance around curriculum intervention, changes in the wider learning community, changes in teaching and finally to changes in the learning experiences for my pupils.

> (McDonagh 2000, p.76)
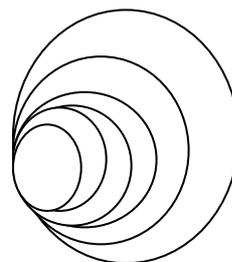
Figure 5.1: Research circles

The visual metaphor of concentric circles influencing each other that I developed to show the dialectical nature of my practice addressed a philosophical issue of how to effect change and address a practical teaching and learning dilemma. Reflecting now on my research methods, I believe that I had found a way to explain research that was not linear. My methods were also in keeping with my value of respecting the individual in two ways. First I had avoided the setting up of a control group, which I consider denies the participation of the control group or the main group; second my approach was in keeping with the epistemological stance I advocated in Chapter Four of this thesis. I had found, similar to Loughran *et al.* (2004), that the development of self-study action research can be attributed to a search for a research methodology to address the philosophical and practical questions of practitioners.

In my Masters studies and in this current research, I was conducting research in teaching rather than research on teaching. The shift towards research in teaching is a historical trend in self-study action research, according to Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998 cited in Whitehead 2000). I found that the key features of self-study action research are not located in methods and research tools but in its influence for living change. As I stated in my thesis,

> I believe the full significance of my research is not the published
> endpaper but the living interdependent growing initiatives it began in
> each of the circled areas.
>
> (McDonagh 2000, p.76)

~ My value commitments both ontological and epistemological

In this section I want to explain the relationship between my embodied values and the research methods that I chose. In Chapter Three I have explained that the spiritual beliefs that I hold as a Christian, informed my values and the concerns that led me to undertake this research. In particular I want to show, in this section, that by making links between personal values and methodology, I demonstrated how I found a form of research that I can live with, in that it is commensurate with my embodied values. By finding ways to study my own practice and generate theory as politicised practice (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, p.28-29), I show that these links exist at a practical as well as theoretical level.

I believe that I have taken the best steps both morally and ethically to improve the quality of learning experience for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my research because I can show how my values have become the standards by which I strive to live and to have my research judged. These values constitute and explain who I am and why I have chosen this form of research (Whitehead 2004a, p.1). Like Farren (2005), I sought a methodology to bring my embodied knowledge about teaching into the academy. I am placing my ontological perspective centrally within my methodology (Bullough and Pinnegar 2004, p.319). In doing so I aim to leave the world a better place than it was prior to my research (Naidoo 2005).

In order to show what this looked like in practice I return to two questions that I asked myself at the beginning of this chapter.

> Have I found a form of research that I can live with in that it is commensurate with my values?

> Have I morally and ethically taken the best steps to improve the quality of learning experience for the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my research?

I am asking questions about whether, from my morally committed stance, I could research in ways that did not immediately improve the marginalisation of my pupils. I wrote:
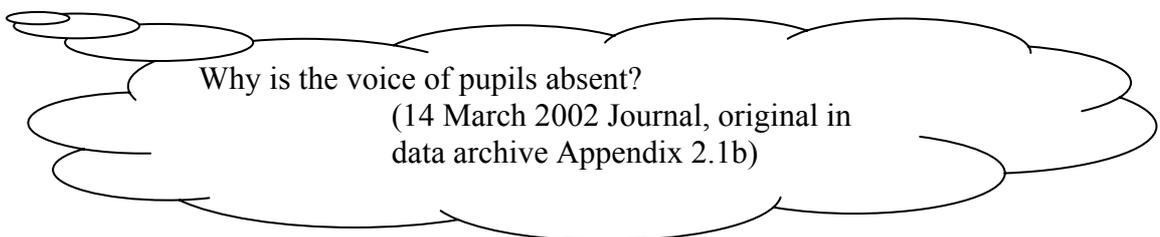
Why is the voice of pupils absent?
(14 March 2002 Journal, original in data archive Appendix 2.1b)

The significance of this question was that I was seeking a methodology that included actions for change and also included the views of the individuals being researched. A case study action research methodology, as Bassey (1999) explains it, offers an approach, which can include on emphasis on trying to make beneficial change in the workplace. This form of research addresses the dilemma of Eisenhart (2001) when she felt called to act on behalf of those pupils being researched. Cycles of descriptions of events, evaluation, the introduction of change and its evaluation,

form part of Eisenhart's methodology. These cycles are similar to my work as a resource teacher, where teaching involves critical cycles of reflection that can lead to best practice in teaching according to the Primary Curriculum (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999b). This systematic and critical enquiry could improve the practical situation for the pupils in my research with specific learning disability (dyslexia). These practical improvements could be generating a theory about practice but would not necessarily be generating theory from practice, as I now explain.

Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p.32) speak of theory generation as a form of politicised practice. This idea is built on McNiff and Whitehead's (2005) and Whitehead's (1989) explanations of generating theory by studying one's own practice. By 'my theory of practice' I mean that I am studying the changes in what I do and why I am making those changes. I am also documenting the influence of my changes in my pupils' work. My theory is a living theory grounded in embodied values. The values that informed my research are respect for the individual, including ideas around human dignity, equality and wholeness (Chapter Two); openness and fairness (Chapter Three); respect for the individual's ability to learn, including issues of equality, social justice, freedom, identity and care (Chapter Four). These values also become the standards by which my research can be judged. This brings me to my third diary question:

> 'Have I morally and ethically taken the best steps to improve the quality of learning experience for the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my research?'
>
> (24 March 2003 Journal, original in data archive Appendix 2.1c)
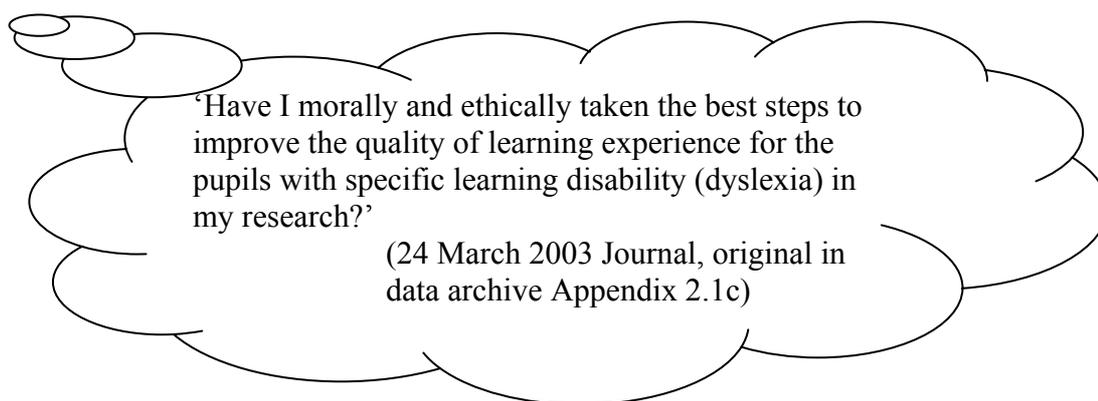
So now I explain the source of the values that I hold and then relate these values to the research methods that I chose. I check these choices against the reflections in the metaphorical mirror, showing how I test my claims to new knowledge and the validity of those claims.

5.4   Showing the realisation of my values as my research methods

In this section I discuss how I test my claims, taking into consideration ethical and methodological issues around my research, in particular the advantages and difficulties of positioning pupils as co-researchers. I begin with a practical description of how I developed a key learning.

When my pupils were conducting their action research projects into how they learned spellings, I audio-tape recorded each pupil individually, during their one-to-one classes, as they told about the strategy they used. There was soon a collection of tapes on my desk. One day, Pupil K asked what was on each tape. When she heard that seven other pupils had made a recording on the same topic as she had, she asked, 'Are they all the same?' This was a simple question with profound implications. Having listened as the pupils made their recordings it almost seemed like a silly question. But it was exactly the way many people view pupils with dyslexia, in that they presume that these pupils all have the same ways of learning. I asked if Pupil K would like to hear the other tape recordings. 'Yes. Of course.' How did she feel about others hearing her recording? 'No problem.' Over the course of the next week all eight pupils agreed to permit each other to listen to their recordings. Pupil K then asked, 'What did the others think?' This was a key question in my research approach. I could have answered her question but instead I said, 'We might discuss the recordings in our 'freedom Friday' classes.' Her enthusiastic reply marked a turning point in my research. It was the beginning of our reflective discussions. These discussions became a core part of my methodology.

What values did this research episode demonstrate? My pupils were playing an active part in the selection of my research methods, demonstrating a value of equality. I had given my pupils the opportunity to ask critical questions, so demonstrating a freedom that would not usually be present in my context. I showed respect for my pupils' human dignity in consulting them and asking their permission to share their tape-recordings with other pupils. My readiness to act on Pupil K's request is a demonstration of my compassion and service to others.

I now want to return to Table 3.2 in Chapter Three, to show how my values emerged and became central to other methodological decisions that I made. That table related how my Christian faith informed my values. I am now adding two further columns to that table (see Table 5.1 below) to depict how I transformed my values and aspirations into living standards by which I strive to live and research and wish to have my research judged. I discuss how the validity of my research claims can be tested against my values so that I can claim an ethical and legitimate form of establishing the validity of the living theories that I develop within my self-study action research methodology.

Working horizontally across the table below, I relate each beatitude, or reported saying of Christ, to my thinking as a Christian (in the second column). In the third column I name and give a short description of the eight values that underpinned my Christian commitments. In the fourth column I state each of these values as a standard by which my research can be judged. In the fifth column I form a question showing a relationship between the practical ontological and epistemological issues that my research addressed and the values and standards listed in previous columns. The penultimate column lists actions that I took in my research and some data gathering techniques that I developed, again relating them to the values base of my research and the standards by which it can be judged. The final column again makes links between my personal Christian beliefs and values, and the vision and aims of my research. I claim in Part Four to have achieved these aims and in the remainder of this section I discuss the methodology and methods that made these claims possible.

Table 5.1: Showing the derivation of the values informing my research in relation to my research methods and standards of judgement

Christ says,	I, as a Christian say,	My embodied values	Standards of judgement	Research issues	Action – data gathering techniques	Vision – the aims of my research
'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.'	'Have a non-possessive attitude towards life and people and know my need of God.'	Freedom – a capacity for self determination in thought, speech and action for the good of oneself and others	Do I act in ways that demonstrate freedom?	Can both I as a teacher and the pupils in my research have freedom to voice our own ways of knowing within systems that value objective, outsider knowledge?	Finding appropriate forms of voice such as painting, drawing, tape recordings, and oral presentations.	The ability to explain our capabilities, which in the case of the pupils are their abilities to learn and in my case to develop theory from practice.
'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comfort-ed.'	'Be touched by the pain of others.'	Compassion – a recognition of my needs in others and other's needs in me	Do I act in ways that demonstrate empathy?	Can I recognise the learned helplessness of my pupils and myself?	Learning from and with one another such as our journals of new individual learning.	Awareness of how and why one learns as one does
'Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth.'	'Reflect that being sensitive is not a fault. Counter what is wrong by doing good.'	Justice: a sensitivity to injustice and a will to make changes towards a more just condition	Do I act in ways that demonstrate justice?	Can I address marginalisation caused by existing provision and dominant propositional theory?	Inclusive ways of learning such as sharing learning strategies, developing a report of our shared understanding of dyslexia	To have an educative influence that would encourage others to engage in more socially just learning experiences
'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.'	'Work towards fairness and justice.'	Equality – a capacity for justice and fairness in all human needs.	Do I act in ways that demonstrate equality?	Questioning dominant pedagogies that generally promote behaviouristic teaching approaches for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia)	How do I change my practice to one of greater equality based on my new learning from my pupils' research and my research?	Explore the nature of relationships between people, which foster knowledge generation. I am developing the kinds of relationship that avoid oppression and domination.

Table 5.1 Continued

Christ says,	I, as a Christian say,	My embodied values	Standards of judgement	Research issues	Action – data gathering techniques	Vision – the aims of my research
'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.'	'Make allowances because I don't know the whole story.'	Forgiveness - a commitment to gaining fuller understandings	Do I act in ways that demonstrate forgiveness?	Fluid reality No one right way of knowing	Spirals of research actions, based on the new learning at each stage rather than a definite pre-arranged research structure	To constantly question my understandings
' Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.'	'Really care. Let people feel special.'	Human Dignity –a recognition of the capacity of others and a demonstration of care for each and every individual I encounter	Do I act in ways that demonstrate human dignity in an attitude of celebration and care?	Pupils' capacities to learn were ignored	Valuing of own learning by self and others. Both pupils and I present reports and papers on our new learning	A celebration of the learning capacities of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)
' Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.'	'Build bridges. Be approachable to all.'	Wholeness – an acceptance and a commitment to the reconciliation of a plurality of approaches to life; mindful of the need to recognise mind body and spirit	Do I act in ways that demonstrate wholeness?	Engage with issues of how I come to know and how my coming to know was informed by how I helped my children to come to know. Develop an epistemological stance commensurate with my values	New epistemology of practice. Knowledge transfer in oral, collaborative ways	The education of social formations
' Blesses are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of God.'	'Do what is right even it is not popular.'	Service – act according to my values and be an influence for the greater good regardless of the personal cost.	Do I act in ways that demonstrate a commitment to a good social order and the education of social formations?	Do I live in the direction of my values?	Values as standards by which data can become evidence in evaluating my research	Towards harmony between practice and values

The table above shows that the ideas in my research did not develop in a linear way and the linkages this table offers were not obvious until I came to writing up this thesis. They were however embodied in what I was doing. I had difficulty in articulating them in writing, as I wrote about in my journal.
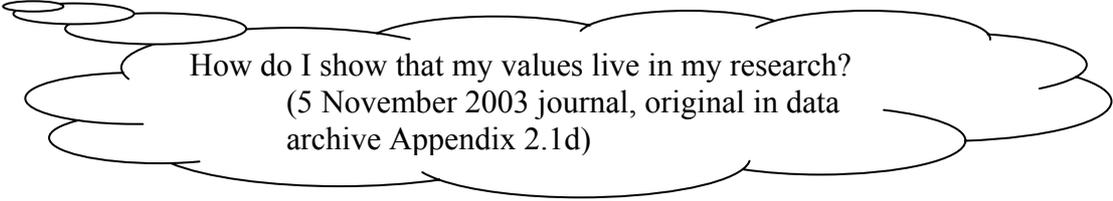
How do I show that my values live in my research?
(5 November 2003 journal, original in data archive Appendix 2.1d)

In earlier chapters of my writing, I have talked about myself and the children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) as products of the dominant education system and I developed the intention of improving our lot. This intention was informed by my value of justice and was informed by the vision that I held of the future – a future where the abilities of individuals with specific learning disability (dyslexia) would be acknowledged. Values can be understood as the major priorities that I choose to act on and that can creatively enhance life not only for me but also for those with whom I come in contact. Three key ideas within my understanding of values are personal choice, personal action and a personal vision of enhancement; for example my value of justice involved making choices to challenge the forms of theory and practice in my context and these choices form part of my research intentions; my value of justice also requires that I act in ways that demonstrate that value of justice, within my context, and my research methodology and methods form part of this action; my vision was a future where my chosen value of justice, in addition to the other values I hold are demonstrated to be realised in actions – mine and those of others – so that a more just situation would exist for those children with specific learning disability (dyslexia), for whom I was concerned.

I have chosen to study my practice and to take action to change it towards my vision of a situation where the abilities of individuals would be recognised rather than their disabilities. The writing of Whitehead (2004a) on living theory in self–study action research resonates with my ideas that articulating and explaining my values are an essential part of my methodology. Whitehead (2004a) chose his living experiences as a son, father, husband and scholar to communicate his ontological commitments or 'lived values', when he says,

> In my experience of human existence, every individual I meet is unique in the particular constellation of values that help to constitute and explain who they are and what they are doing. Within each individual I also see values of hope for the future of humanity and the potential to express values that do not carry this hope.
>
> (Whitehead 2004a, p.1)

Whitehead is also describing his values in terms of actions, vision and personal contexts. I have learned from Whitehead that values and lived experiences can be linked within a methodology of self-study action research. In the final part of the quotation above, I believe Whitehead (2004a) points to another significant issue, which I discovered during the course of my research, that self-study action research is not necessarily a celebratory narrative. I learned to question, Could I be wrong? I did so in order to justify the actions I was taking and to consider the possibility that my values may be misguided: an idea which Whitehead (2004a) suggests when he states that the individual has 'the potential to express values that do not carry [this] hope' for the future of humanity (Whitehead 2004a, p.1).

To explain the links between my research and my values, I adopted a two-part approach. First my research was based on practical principles about teaching and learning and second on my epistemological values. The practical principles were guided by my embodied values that informed the choices I made, the actions I took and my vision for the future. My epistemological values are the embodiment of my commitments to particular forms of knowledge. Farren (2005) claims, similarly, to have created a new epistemology of educational enquiry to bring the embodied knowledge of practitioners into the academy. She suggests a two-pronged approach to achieve this in which, first, practical principles, understood as embodied values, are used to explain learning and/or practice; second, epistemological values, understood as living standards of evaluation, are used as the epistemology for a new scholarship of educational enquiry. I am arguing that good quality educational research should follow the aims of moral education. In doing so the ontological positioning of educational research would be as Whitehead (2004a), following the ideas of Naidoo, states:

Enhancing the flow of love and respect for self and for others, in the education of ourselves and the social formations in which we work and live, would do much to ensure that we leave the world a better place than when we came into it.

(Whitehead 2004a, p.11)

My choice of methodology is a moral choice based on the values that I hold and that I have explained above as justice, freedom, compassion, equality, human dignity, wholeness and service. I have posed a practical research question that required a methodology to address both the actions needed and also the philosophical ideas that influenced the form of my research question. I have explained those philosophical ideas in terms of the values I hold in Chapters Three and Four. This idea of a research method to address the philosophical questions of practitioners is how Loughran *et al.* (2004) described the development of self-study action research. Self-study action research seemed to me to have a moral focus as its lineage. The works of Carr and Kemmis (1986), Elliott (1991), McNiff (2002), Whitehead (1993) and Zeichner (1999) all show how practitioners questioned the basis of their work. Carr and Kemmis (1986) also advocate a professionalism that resonates with human emancipation, according to Noffke (1997).

~ Testing my claims

I now want to discuss the links between my research methods and the core values that I have articulated in Tables 3.2 and 5.1. I show how this enables me to generate evidence from my data to test its validity in support of my claims to knowledge. I set this out in the following way

I state the values and standard of judgement

I provide an example of practice of the enactment of each value

I analyse the data excerpt in relation to my values and standard of judgement

I explain how I have used this data as evidence to establish the validity of my claim to knowledge

Here is an example of how I use this procedure. I take the value of freedom as an example.

Freedom as a value and standard of judgement

I am asking

> Do I act in ways that demonstrate freedom?
> (5 September 2003 journal, original in data
> archive, see Appendix 2.1d)
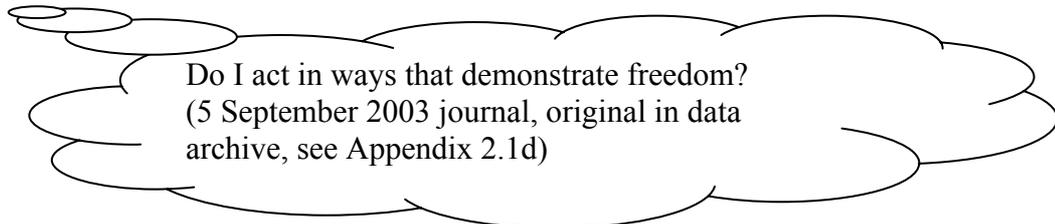
An example of the enactment of this value in my research was when I found appropriate forms of voice for my pupils so that they could become co-researchers and co-knowledge creators in my research. One example of taped and transcribed conversations between my pupils and class teachers, in Chapter Two, where they discuss the teacher's practice of questioning pupils, shows a freedom that was not available prior to my research. Artwork was another method I used to facilitate pupil voice, as in the example where a pupil drew his feelings about coming to my resource classes, which I have placed in Chapter Two. In his picture the pupil depicts how coming to resource class lightens up his day and rejoices that 'at least I will learn something there.'

I now want to explain the methodological process of moving from data, gathered in my classroom, to generating evidence to test the validity of my research claims. This process involves generating evidence to support my claims and then testing my claims and theories at various levels: (a) personal, (b) social and (c) institutional. Taking the example above, when I allowed pupils the freedom to depict their feelings about specific learning disability (dyslexia) through art, I describe and explain how I generated evidence from it. In a resource or support teaching setting, artwork is not part of the curriculum. I chose art first because I believe that many of the pupils in my research had a talent for art and second because they could possibly express themselves more easily in that medium than in writing. I saw art as a celebration of pupils' apparent talent. My choice was influenced by my value of respect for the whole person as well as an appreciation of the pupils' capabilities. In Section Four I demonstrate how the pupils' oral explanations of their artwork and their discussions about it generated new knowledge about how children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) have individual and significant understandings of that term. Freedom and respect were the values that influenced my actions and my selection of the pupils' artwork. I have chosen this specific data to justify and test

my provisional claim that I am realising values of freedom and respect for the individual in my practice. Freedom and respect are among the living standards by which I want to have my work judged. In judging my work I ask whether this data demonstrates freedom and respect for the individual in my practice. My actions support my claim that I respect pupils with specific learning difficulties and have given them freedom within my practice to express their own thinking.

Validation procedures

(a) Personal validation

I tested my claims first at a personal level in three ways:

o   I have argued my conviction about the importance of freedom and respect for the capabilities of the pupils who participated in my research throughout this thesis;

o   I have demonstrated in journal extracts how I have critically reflected on these commitments, examples of which exist in the self-questioning that I have already referred to in this thesis such as when I asked, 'Can I act for my pupils?'; 'Do I act in ways that demonstrate freedom?'; 'How do I show that my values live in my research?'; 'Have I morally and ethically taken the best steps to improve the quality of learning experience for the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my research?'

o   I have shown confidence in my values and convictions by acting upon them and by opening them to public critique as I show in the example below (Table 5.2).

Part of the practical process of validating my research was open-ended critique that began in the reflective discussion between the pupils who participated in my research and myself. During the course of my research this form of critique developed into discussions between pupils and pupils' peers and teaching staff; and between myself and teaching colleagues, resource teaching colleagues and colleagues at the university. I taped and transcribed many of these conversations and they are in my data archive and listed in Appendix 2. Table 5.2 below is an example of how I developed confidence in my values and convictions by acting upon them and asking others to critique what I had done. Rather than asking, 'Do you agree that these data are evidence of my values of respect and freedom in action?' I gave

another resource teacher, an art therapist and a counsellor the transcribed conversations and invited their written comments. In Table 5.2 we are discussing Picture 5.1 below in which Pupil B had drawn his feelings about his learning difficulties.

Picture 5.1: Pupil B's feelings about his learning difficulties

Table 5.2: Transcript of part of group discussion on artwork

Actual words used in discussion	My Comments	Triangulation comments – other professionals
Me: Would you like to share with us any ideas? **Pupil B**: I put a kind of border around it for the glitter. I done the outside and what I feel like in the inside. I'm having a party and there's the balloons and all that. And then there's the teacher on the outside. I put all red on the outside of the picture and all nice colours on the inside. **Me**: Is the Teacher in the red bit? **Pupil B**: Yea. **Me:** Why did you put him in there? **Pupil B:** Cause I don't like him. **Pupil K**: Just to keep the teacher out? **Pupil B**: Yea, just to keep everything bad away from me. **Me:** Is that teacher all teachers or just a particular one? **Pupil B:** Em, most of them.	*I used gestures.* *Error in verb.* *Good visual description.* *Colour matched feelings.* *Pupil B could say he felt like nice colours and represent teacher in dangerous red.* *Pupil K understood the meaning.*	Yours was an open question. Pupils had the freedom to answer in any way they liked The colours and shapes tell a lot. Joy, yellow. Red, fear. He is cocooned in the circle of light colours for safety. Worrying disclosure by this pupil. You would not be likely to hear them from him. It is great that he is free to talk them out with someone like you. School must be very hard for them. Could they try paint with no brushes for deeper feelings next time?

(b) Social Validation

This format above also provides a form of social validation; the second form of validation that I have established. Social validation in my research is about opening my research up to a wider group to critique. This group included two critical friends. We met at least monthly. They acted as both encouraging friends and as critics familiar with my research. Some of their comments are sprinkled throughout this thesis. A validation group of a minimum of five people from an educational background, and who had a good knowledge of self-study action research, listened to my work at various stages and commented on its merit and the acceptability of my claims. This group met five/six times yearly during the course of my research. Work colleagues also acted as critics and evaluators of my research. The final form of social validation that I have included in this thesis consists of comments from resource teachers who work in other schools.

I now want to give an example of social validation and legitimisation in relation to my claim, in Chapter Eight, to have developed a living theory of learning to teach for social justice, in relation to pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). As part of my validation process the questionnaire below was completed by seven resource teachers, directors and two programme co-ordinators of workshops, affiliated to the Dyslexia Association of Ireland, for pupils with dyslexia. These questionnaires (sample below) were completed following a presentation of my research evidence in support of my claim to have developed a new living theory of teaching for social justice for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), which I claim was a more socially just approach than what was currently available.

> Dear B,
>
> Thanks for the opportunity to speak about my work at the resource teachers' meeting in X on (date). I would be interested in your critical comments on the following in order to clarify whether my work is of value to others:
>
> Was anything in the content new to you?
>
> What did I omit that you think that I should have spoken about?
>
> What good practices, in similar lines, have you personally used?

Do you think that the approach that I used in my work is relevant for resource teachers, for learning support teachers or for class teachers and why?

Please feel free to write more comments than the space here permits. If you would prefer, just let's have a chat.

Thanks, Caitríona

(Complete sample in Appendix 7.3, originals in data archive Appendix 2.9)

The question 'Did you learn anything new?' was asking if the new knowledge I claimed was in fact new to those who are in the practical field of my research on a daily basis. All respondents answered yes, and went on to describe the new knowledge for them (See Appendix 2.9). In asking, 'Would you use any of my ideas that you heard today?' I received in writing confirmation from all respondents that what I was claiming should be believed and incorporated into public thinking (see Appendix 2.9).

(c) Institutional validation

Institutional validation took the form of presenting my research to university staff and students at both invited and public conferences (McDonagh 2003 and 2005). At these presentations, as I will describe in Chapter Nine, I sought the validation of my research from an educational research community. I received emails from some who attended the conferences, which stated that they recognised my embodied values within my research, similar to the example at (a) above. Samples of these emails are in Chapter Seven, Eight and Nine. By submitting this thesis I am seeking the legitimation of my research by the academy. The criteria by which it will be judged include both the criteria of the University of Limerick for a PhD and the criteria specific to my research in which I am claiming to have developed a living theory of practice.

The criteria of the University of Limerick for a PhD require an original claim to knowledge. In addition, I have outlined the criteria on which I base my claim to have developed a living theory of practice in practical terms in Section One and in terms of my ontological commitments and embodied values in this chapter. In the remaining sections of this thesis, I show that I have tested my data against these

values, which I identify as my living standards of judgement, in order to generate evidence to support and test my claim to knowledge.

~ My understanding of self-study action research

Returning to the metaphorical mirror in which I am framing my methodological choices, I am stating that my self-study action research is grounded in my articulated values. I am now asking, 'How can they been seen in the mirror?' First, the reason that I looked in the mirror in order to scrutinise that what was happening to both the pupils in my research and myself was a realisation of the eight values that I have identified above. These values included a wish for justice for those who were marginalised by the education system; a desire to care for them; a wish to serve them in order to change their situation; a respect for the capacities of each individuals; a need to afford others the freedom to develop their identities and capacities; and a desire for equality. My work and research were driven by those values. They were the living standards by which I was working and so they also became the living standards by which I judge the quality of my research.

Now, in the remainder of this thesis, I am asking the reader, if, in my research, I have demonstrated these values as I have engaged with issues of

- o learning and knowledge,
- o teaching and learning for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) who participated in my research and
- o social justice in my research .

Because my research focused on both the pupils whom I taught and on myself it was necessary to ensure that these values also permeated the ways in which I dealt with my pupils as co-researchers.

~ Ethical issues of engaging with young people as co-researchers

In this section I explain how I claim to have acted ethically. As part of my value of respect for the individual and my values of freedom, compassion, justice, equality and service, I demonstrate my awareness of the ethical issues of involving pupils between the ages of nine and twelve years as co-researchers. This requires an

understanding of the concepts, which inform university ethical committee guidelines (University of Limerick 2006) and developing these guidelines to include the methodology in which research was carried out 'with' rather than 'on' pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I am making claims that my research is based on my values and I am asking, as I did in my journal,

Have I acted ethically and have I morally taken the best steps to improve the quality of learning experience for the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my research?
(2 February 2003 Journal See Appendix 2.1d)
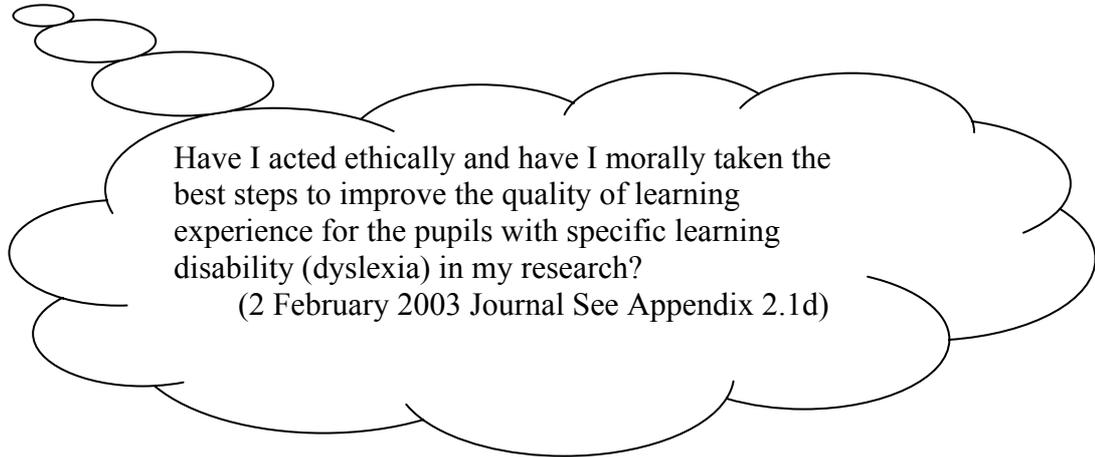
Because my research topic and methodology involved pupils aged nine to twelve years as research participants, important ethical issues arose about securing participants' informed consent and the protection of the identities of these research participants. Because of my belief in respect for the individual, I complied with what Bassey (1990) describes as a good research ethic when he said,

> The research ethic of respect for persons focuses on the value judgement that a researcher, in taking and using data from a person, should do so in a way which respects that person as a fellow human being who is entitled to dignity and privacy.
>
> (Bassey 1990, p.18)

In practical terms, I

o obtained permission for my research from all the participants as well as my school principal and school Board of Management. Samples of permission documentation are in Appendix 1.2 to 1.4

o negotiated access and found ways to keep all those involved informed about how the research was progressing through on-going conversations. These were noted in my journal entries (See Appendix 2.1a to 2.1.d)

o promised confidentiality and did not name my workplace as pupils or other individuals could be identified from it. This is included in the permission forms in Appendix 1

o ensured that all participants could withdraw at any time. There are samples of this in the permission forms in Appendix 1.3 to 1.4

o retained my right to report my findings in good faith.

These ethical conditions for my research are included in my ethical statement in Appendix 1.1. The programmes, tests and evidence of learning of the 24 pupils took place as part of their normal school work. I informed them that our discussions, tape-recordings and learning journals would help me with new ideas for classes. I gave information on my studies and research report to my Board of Management, Principal, colleagues, other professionals, and the pupils and their parents, first individually and orally and then followed by the ethical statement above. As a guarantee of confidentiality, the ethical statement signed by me gave them details of my work and I negotiated access with the firm understanding that nothing of a personal nature either about the children or colleagues would be made public (See sample in Appendix 1.1). The parents were asked to agree that their child's work could be used as part of my research. The procedures above demonstrated that all contributions were dealt with in 'dignity and privacy' (Bassey 1990)

Informed pupil consent became an issue for both the university ethical committee and for me. We differed on our understandings of informed consent in that the committee held that the parents' permission signed beneath by the pupils was required (see revised Consent form Appendix 1.3b). However, I held that the sample pupil consent form (see Appendix 1.3a) had appropriate language for them, as was the case for others from whom consent was sought. My consent forms were given to the pupils to take home to parents in whose presence the pupils signed them. The parents' ethical statement and consent form went home at the same time. I believe my approach was respectful and removed many power issues. First pupils might not have had the power to refuse consent if the forms were signed in school, as the research was to take place in class. I had negotiated with the school management that if a pupil did not want to be involved in my research another resource teacher would teach them. Thus there would be no detrimental effect to their education. Second the

University suggestion, where the language of the form was inappropriate to the pupils' age and reading levels, in my opinion left the possibility open that parents might give their permission for their child to take part without any explanation to the child of why they had given consent. The legal approach of the University withdrew from pupils their ability to give consent and required that my ethical statement and consent form be addressed to parents, signed by them and co-signed by pupils. I complied with this requirement but in addition I continued to get oral and written consent from my pupils (See Appendix 1.3b and 1.3c). All pupils invited to join my research accepted, as did their parents (Forms in data archive see Appendix 1).

I maintain that my values are at the core of my ethical stance and my methodology. The methodology that I have chosen holds the essence of what sustains me in my work as a resource teacher of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Recently the ethical requirements of the university have changed (University of Limerick 2006) and now include Child Protection Guidelines that are commensurate with the ethical stance that I adopted at the beginning of my research. These guidelines require that

> informed consent is obtained from the parents/guardians of children under 18 **and** from the children themselves. Children need to be informed in appropriate language so that they understand the research they are being asked to participate in.
>
> (University of Limerick 2006, 11.2)

5.5   Summary

To summarise this chapter, I set out to find ways to show how I could take actions to challenge the ways in which both my pupils and I had been systemically disadvantaged. I picture the understanding that I have come to of my self-study action research methodology as a light. When the light came on, I could move from my feelings of learned helplessness when teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). The light shone and enabled me to see the metaphorical mirror in which I watched my journey to choosing my research methods.

Initially I found research approaches that ignored the pupils in my research with only me as the researcher in focus. Having decided on a methodology that supported a dual focus on me and on the pupils in my research, I next saw my pupils and myself standing shoulder to shoulder in the mirror during my data collection processes. Others joined us at the mirror as the data was converted to evidence. Then crash. I went into and through the mirror. In this way I could check with those on the other side of the mirror that what I had seen was legitimate and valid.

The light that was self-study action research brought my pupils and me out of the darkness of our marginalisation within the education system. I describe in the next chapter how the light lit the way so that my pupils and I could share our new learning within its beams. It was also a light for sharing with the wider community as I show in the remainder of this thesis. In Chapter Six that follows I explain the practical methods that comprised my methodology as I took action to overcome the disadvantage experienced by my pupils and me and transform it into new forms of opportunity.

CHAPTER SIX: Explanations and justifications for my action research methodology

6.1   Introduction

I have described in Chapter Five my search for an appropriate research methodology. In this chapter I focus on offering explanations and justifications for my choice of methodology. I use the analogy of a mirror to explain the nature of my research process – a two-way mirror where I am simultaneously on both sides. From one side of the mirror I act and develop new understandings in relationship with my pupils. I cross to the other side of the two-way mirror and reflect on how I see myself as acting and developing new understandings in relationship with my pupils. Finally and more importantly I smash the mirror and move into an integrated reality by questioning and testing what I have seen and understood with those children who were participating in my research, with their peers and with my peers – teachers, resource teachers, psychologists who work in education, and researchers. The testing and questioning continues as I make my research public in academic presentations at conferences.

This chapter is in two sections. First I produce data to show that I have taken action to overcome the systemic disadvantage in which my pupils and I have been placed. Second I show how I transform that disadvantage into new forms of opportunity. I explain how I have selected data from the monitoring of the teaching and learning processes of my everyday work. My data gathering challenged the idea that data exists only in the form of definitive targets that were achieved or could be achieved in the future (Elliott 1991, p.51). Instead I show how I have gathered data from continuous questioning of my work and my pupils' work.

A linear research structure could not achieve this, so I describe how I searched for and found a methodology to depict my learning, my pupils' learning and our learning relationships. I examine how the five key data gathering processes that I engaged in supported the epistemological and ontological values-base of my research. I show how my triangulation processes (Bassey 1999, p.47) and validation processes demonstrated the relational nature of knowledge co-creation.

In practical terms I show how I took action to put strategies in place to help my pupils to come to their own understandings of how they learn. I encouraged them to undertake action enquiries into how they learn. We now formed a collective of researchers who were all researching our practice individually and collaboratively, as we learned from one another. My research became reciprocal, and my context became one of a community of research practice. I tested my methods against the aims of my research to ensure that, at each step of my research, I was addressing my concerns in a way that was commensurate with the values-base of my research.

I conclude that I have adopted a form of research that provided opportunities to challenge previous knowledge and learning and offered a new methodology for the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia). I have researched in ways that enabled pupils with specific learning disability to come to value their ways of learning; that provided methods for the creation of knowledge within teacher–pupil relationships; and that those ways demonstrate the existence of educative relationships. This is a methodology that permitted me to become part of contributing to a just system of teaching and learning for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

6.2   The structure and processes of my research: showing that I have taken action to overcome methodological difficulties

As is the nature of self–study action research, my research is ongoing even today. For the purpose of writing this thesis, however, I fixed a date, June 2005, after which I did not include any more data gathered from my classes. Up to that date, the new learning of both my pupils and myself forms the basis of my research claims. I now want to state how I selected certain pieces of data for inclusion in this thesis and how this data became evidence of my claims that were both practical and theoretical.

In the previous chapter I have explained my methodology as inclusive and participative, which has demonstrated my epistemological value of prioritising personal knowledge (Polanyi 1958). My methods have also demonstrated my willingness to have my provisional understanding critiqued at multiple levels by

pupils, peers and academics. In this way I continued to critique my methods and findings. I did not expect to produce definite solutions. I agree with Elliott that,

> When values define the ends of a practice, such ends should not be viewed as concrete objects or targets, which can be perfectly realised at some future point in time.

(Elliott 1991, p.51)

So the first part of this chapter is about overcoming the practical difficulties of gathering data in a living classroom situation in order to generate my living theory of practice. I begin this story by telling how I generated evidence from the raw data of my work in my classes.

~ How I gathered data and helped my pupils come to their own understandings of how they learn

I used many data gathering techniques in my research and my choice of methods grew in variety to facilitate the new knowledge I was generating. A variety of methods is not unusual in action research methodologies according to Stronach (2003), who suggests that there are as many forms of data gathering as there are researchers using action research methodologies. He speaks of a segmented-orange approach to data gathering, where the researcher divides research into segments or cycles and finds different yet appropriate approaches for each cycle. Another form of data gathering that he describes is an 'onion' approach where layers can be peeled away. In this approach the researcher begins with one approach and as each layer of action reveals further questions, further data gathering methods are added as required. I visualise my data gathering approach as a living and growing onion rather than as peeling an onion. I am using the metaphor of a growing onion to explain that my methods were not prearranged or confined to cycles; instead they were developmental and transformational in the following way.
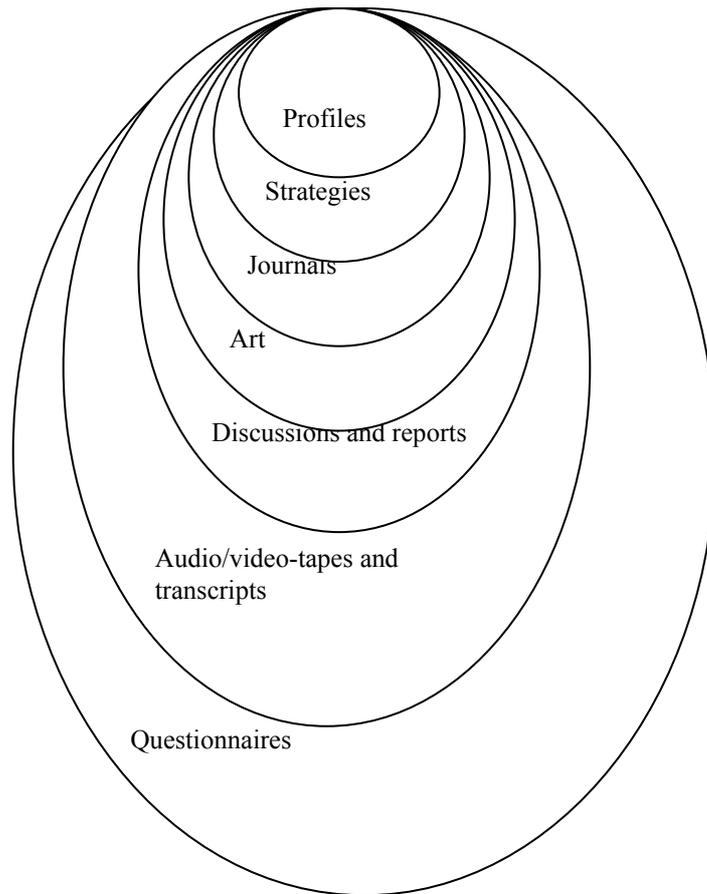
Figure 6.1: Layers of data gathering

Within my onion metaphor, at its tiny centre was the logging and investigation of currently available information on the pupils I taught. This took the form of pupil profiles, which I compiled at the beginning of the first year of my research for each pupil. These profiles were based on a format in the Learning Support Guidelines (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2000). The originals are in my data archive (see sample in Appendix 6.1). These profiles presented a picture of each pupil that was based first, on objective norm referenced tests; and second, on factual information about the pupil and his or her other learning attainments. Here is such a profile, as an example.

Table 6.1: Pupil profile

Name	M		
Date of Birth	18.08.90		
Sex	Male		
Class	6th		
Educational Assessment by psychologist	Test	Date	Results
	WISC	May 1997	Upper limit of the low average range. Non-verbal ahead of verbal.
	WORD	May 1997	Reading 6.0 years Spelling 6.6 years Comprehension 6.0 years
	WRAT	16.09.98	Word Recognition 10th percentile Spelling 7th percentile Arithmetic 16th percentile
Standardised tests administered and marked by class teachers	Test	Date	Results
	Drumcondra Primary Reading Test	19.12.01	Vocabulary 32nd percentile Comprehension 16th percentile Total Reading score 23rd percentile
	Drumcondra Primary Maths Test	23.05.02	Total score 19th percentile
	Drumcondra Primary Reading Test	15.12.02	Vocabulary 30th percentile Comprehension 37th percentile Total Reading score 35rd percentile
Family and educational history	M is from a family with a history of specific learning difficulties. He has not repeated any class. He received learning support in a group of 4 to 6 pupils for 2 hours and 30 minutes weekly from Sept 1996 to Sept 2000. In Spring 2001 he followed the Phonological Awareness Training Programme by J Wilson (details in proposal) for 20 weeks. I believe this intervention programme caused his improvements on the Drumcondra Reading Test. I can also evidence this with pre- and post-intervention testing on the Jackson Phonic Skills Tests. M attended speech therapy in 1998. I was his learning support teacher and became his Resource Teacher in September 2001. He has no known hearing or visual problems.		

The next layer of the onion represents data about the form of teaching he was receiving. I gathered information on six intervention strategies and alternative therapies that my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) were receiving at the beginning of my research. This included data from the programmes themselves and from our reflections on them. I have listed and described these strategies and therapies in Appendix 4.1. I examined these strategies from my perspective as well as from my pupils', and have already discussed my learning from these programmes in Chapter Four. The pupils' achievements were noted on individual pupil record sheets (samples in Appendix 4.2). In discussions the pupils expressed a preference

for the MTSR record sheets (Johnson *et al.* 1999) because they were allowed to comment on their own learning, as shown in the sample below.

Table 6.2: Pupil Record Sheet

MTSR (UK Edition) BOOK 1: Pupil Record Sheet						
Pupil Name:					**Date of birth:**	
Teaching point	Lesson No.	Introduced	Revised	Removed from regular review	Checked for mastery	Pupil comment
Symbols	1	Date	Date	Date	Date	Hard to remember but I got them all
Words	2	Date	Date	Date	Date	Easy
Sounds	3	Date	Date	Date	Date	Amasin but easy
Initial, middle, final	4	Date	Date	Date	Date	Good fun
i = (ĭ)	5	Date	Date	Date	Date	Hard to remember
t = (t)	6	Date	Date	Date	Date	Easy
Blending	7	Date	Date	Date	Date	Tough

Because the pupils seemed to enjoy reflecting on their learning attainments, I encouraged them to record other things that they learned and how they learned them in reflective journals. The following is a sample from one pupil's journal who wrote on Monday, April 2002, 'I can mack [make] a Piz[z]a. I watched my mam everytime she mak [makes] them. I say it in me hed [head]. When she let me do it I rmebr [remember] it all I bake it mesel [myself]. She wates [watches] but I do it mysef.[myself].' The pupils' journals and my own reflective journal formed the third layer of the onion. Building on the usefulness of our reflective journals, which both the pupils and I kept during each year of my study (see Appendices 2.1), I found more forms of data gathering to demonstrate my thinking and my pupils' thinking and the issues that had arisen from our reflective journaling, and these became layers four and five.

In layers four and five of the onion, I continued to make our individual thinking public. These data include pupils' drawings, paintings, reports, and taped and transcribed discussions with others in our school context. Examples of all these data appear throughout Parts Four and Five of this thesis. The examples below show how the drawings, paintings and group projects were reflections of the pupils' feelings and personal thinking about specific learning disability (dyslexia).
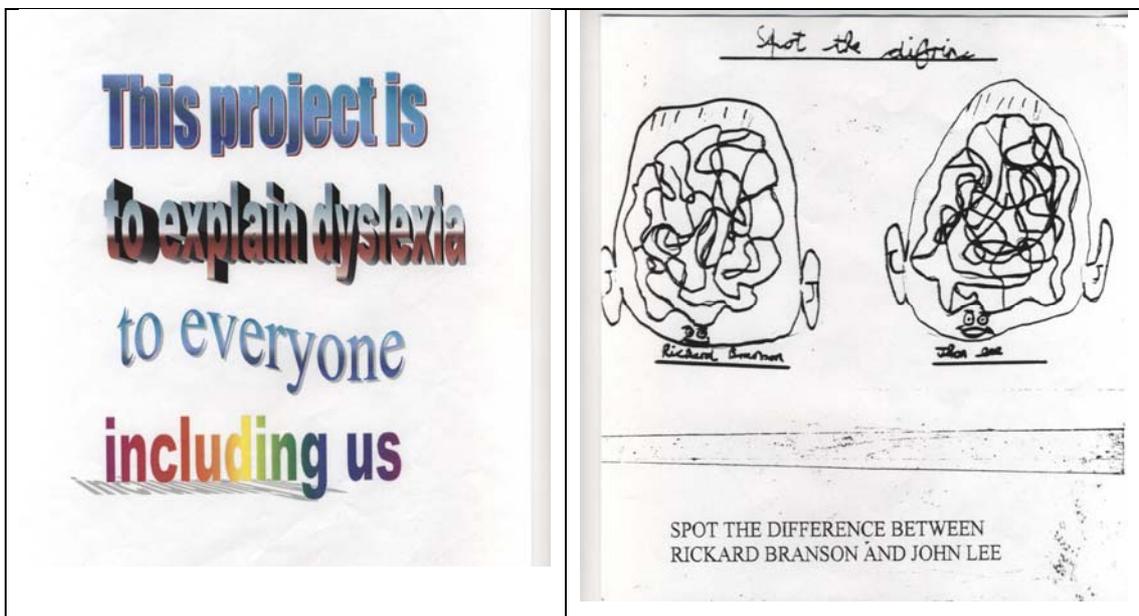
Pictures 6.1 and 6.2: Showing how pupils reflected on specific learning disability (dyslexia)

Their group projects and discussions were a further development on their reflections when they began to generate new ideas about dyslexia and their learning. The example below shows how I contributed to their discussions by transcribing them and annotating the transcripts on occasion to facilitate revisiting their reflections as often as they wished.

W said
I think it's easy to spell, if you go by the sounds of the words. **a, e, i, o, u** (Pupil W wrote vowels to indicate sounds of letters).
G said
 I learn a word by first try to count how many vowel sounds in it, how many bits. And then I start to try to learn to spell it. 123 1234 (Pupil G drew the numbers to indicate counting)

J said, I learned how to spell by rhyming the words. (rhymners)

C said, I learned the words by going one bit after another.

H, C and F said, I learned the words by learning them off by heart.

R said, I learned the big words by breaking them up into pieces.

L said. I learn the words by looking at it three times and saying it three times, then

writing it three times.

K said, It is hard to get spellings right

B said, We all have different ways of learning spellings

The next onion layer represents further data that I gathered in the form of photographs, audio and video-taping and transcripts, reflective group discussions with pupils, class teaching colleagues, resource teaching colleagues and learning colleagues at the University of Limerick. Samples of these data appear in later sections of this thesis.

Finally, I am at the outer layer of the onion. Pupils and teachers in my school who did not participate in my research completed questionnaires, examples of which are below, that provided evidence of changes in my teaching, in pupils' learning and in the attitudes of those others in our school context. Below I have placed a sample of Questionnaire One completed by mainstream classes about specific learning disability (dyslexia) and a sample Questionnaire Two completed by teachers and mainstream class peers. This followed the presentation by pupils who participated in my research, of their reports, explaining specific learning disability (dyslexia) to themselves and others.

Questionnaire One – (Original in Appendix 2.7 see also Appendix 7.1)

What does it mean to be intelligent?	Responses
Are students with learning difficulties dumb?	
Should boys and girls tell their friends about their learning difficulty?	
Can you tell if someone in your class is a lazy student and is struggling to learn?	
Whose responsibility is it to help a boy or girl who is having difficulty learning in school?	

Questionnaire Two – (Original in Appendix 2.8; see also Appendix 7.1)

What did you learn about dyslexia?	Responses
What other questions do you have?	

~ A methodology to depict my learning, pupils' learning and learning relationships

The research methods that I have outlined are linked at many levels. Initially I thought that the simplest way to portray this was in the form of a time-line. By showing when various layers of data gathering occurred, I thought that I could explain my research as three one-year cycles of research. I have placed one of these time line diagrams on the following page. This linear presentation of my research did not portray the multiple levels of linkages between my learning and my pupils' learning relationships.

Year One - the first cohort of eight pupils

Drew up pre-research profiles of pupils

Facilitated an action research project by pupils on 'how I learn spellings?'

Developed pupils' computer skills so that they could produce a project titled 'Explaining Dyslexia to Ourselves and Others' including their work to date

Taught and evaluated commercially-produced programmes for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)

Encouraged pupils' talents in art by expressing their understanding of dyslexia

Pupils were given opportunities to present their project orally to twenty teachers (whole school staff)

Taped pupils' dialogues (avoiding pupils' difficulties in reading and writing) on how dyslexia affects them and treatments they had received for dyslexia

Pupils kept personal journals naming things they had learned and how they learned them

To counter low self-esteem, pupils were encouraged to research famous people with learning difficulties

One teacher gave a pupil from his class, who was part of my research, the opportunity to present his project to his peers in his mainstream class

Questionnaires completed by 120 pupils in mainstream classes on their attitudes to learning disabilities

Figure 6.2: Year One research time-line

I believe that the visual representation below of my research communicates the richness and the interrelated nature of all the strands in my research project. Each yellow or orange section represents key research methods/actions. Personal knowledge and knowledge created in reflective dialogue and communicated in our journals, are at the heart of my non-linear methodology.
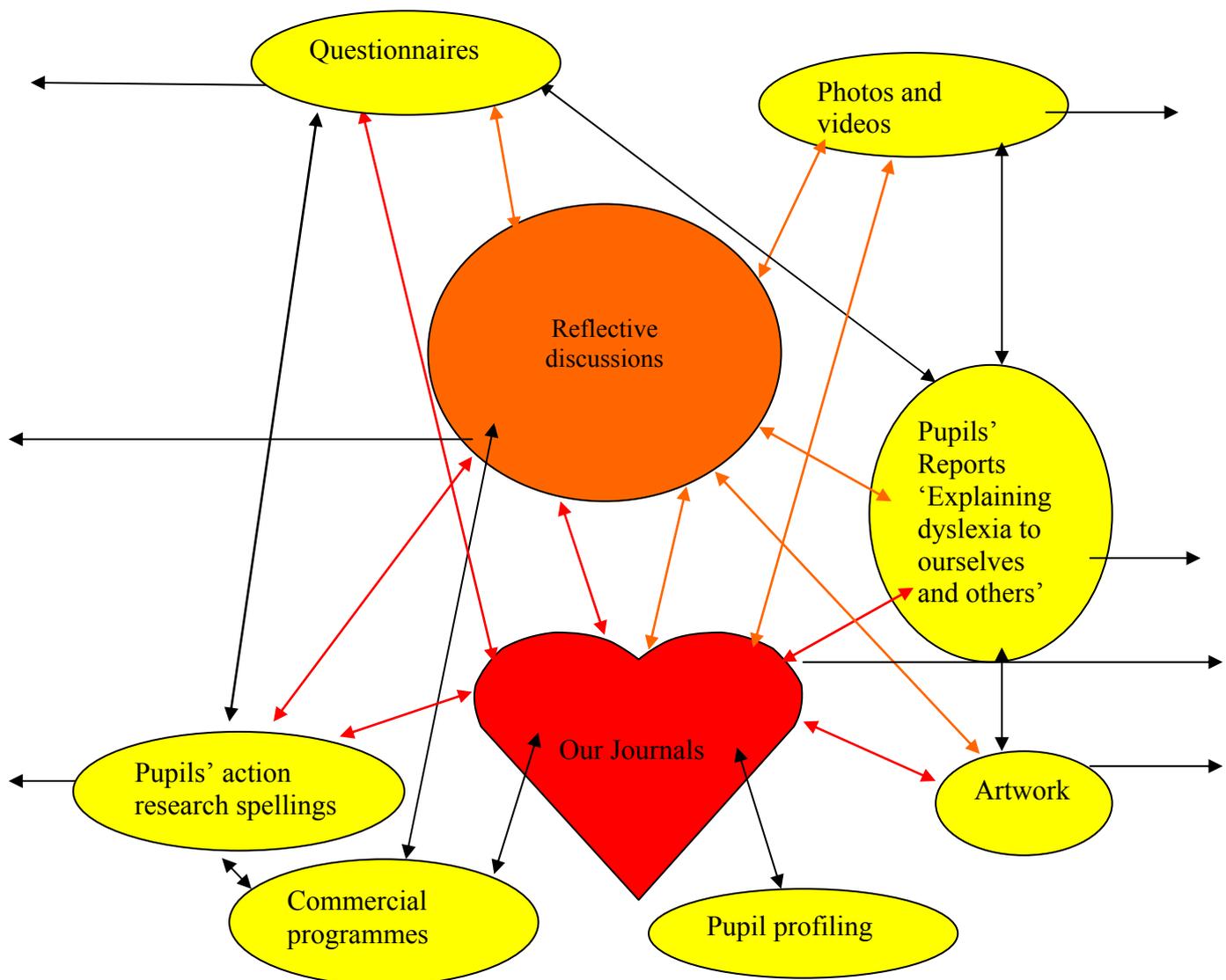
Figure 6.3: Links and interactions as the pupils and I learned together and as I tested my claims to new knowledge.

An explanation of Figure 6.3

The figure on the previous page is similar to the generative-action-reflection spiral that McNiff developed (McNiff 1988, 1993 and 2000). The visual metaphor she offers depicts the idea that action research is generative and transformational. This resonates with the previous part of this chapter where I explained the generative development of my layers of data gathering. McNiff's (1988) explanation of generative transformational action has relevance for my research methods because their main focus was on improving the quality of learning experience of the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) that I taught, yet my research has raised issues of epistemology, ontology, forms of theory and forms of research;

> Generative action research enables a teacher-researcher to address many different problems at one time without losing sight of the main issue

<div align="right">(McNiff 1988, p.45)</div>

6.3 How I plan to transform the systemic disadvantage of myself and my pupils into new forms of opportunity

The seven research methods that I have highlighted in the diagram above are linked at many levels. By finding a way to articulate these linkages I hope that I have countered the difficulties of the linear presentation of my enquiry as I had first conceptualised it. The interconnected, relational representation of my research demonstrated links and interactions as the pupils and I learned together. Pupil profiling and commercial programmes were part of a different epistemological perspective and made very few links with other areas in my research. As I have said before, they offered little to my practice. In my diagram there are on-going arrows, depicting opportunities for future learning, travelling out to the edge of the page.

In this section I look at the potential of each of these key research methods to aid the transformation of the failures in my context as I explained them in Sections One and Two. I then question if my methodological choice addresses the aims that I had chosen for my research which were

o   To show how my pupils can come to value what they know and how they
    come to know it;

o   To explore the nature of relationships between people which foster
    knowledge creation, and to develop the kinds of relationship that avoid
    oppression and domination;

o   To become part of contributing to social justice through my educative
    influence.

~ Five key methods

There were five key data gathering processes named in the diagram above and I now
want to explain them and the purpose of each method in my research methodology.

(1) Logging and investigating currently available information on the pupils in
    each cohort;

(2) Enabling pupils to become self-study action researchers

(3) Reflective group discussions between pupils, class teaching colleagues,
    resource teaching colleagues, research colleagues and a validation group at
    the University of Limerick;

(4) Photography, audio and video taping;

(5) Questionnaires to gather evidence of change.

*(1)   Logging and investigating currently available information on the pupils in
each cohort*

A sample of the pupil profiles that I developed appears earlier in this chapter. I had
planned to update each profile at the end of each research year or when new data
became available from any of the other sources. This expansion of pupil profiles did
not happen because I realised that this form of data was gathered via a scientific
methodology where an outsider shows change as objectively measurable. This
methodology positions the pupil as an object that can be measured, and ignores the
wholeness of the individual and their capabilities as thinkers in their own right. The
data I gathered on intervention strategies is another example of similar forms of
knowledge and again I did not repeat this part of my research with the second or
third cohorts of pupils because of clashes between the positivist forms of knowledge
in which they were grounded and the values base of my research.

(2)   Enabling pupils to become self-study action researchers

In contrast to the two methods that I described above, where knowledge was understood as reifiable, measurable and objective, I now want to explain a method that demonstrated knowledge as both personal and created in relationship with others. I had shared with the pupils who participated in my research my methods of journaling, reflection, discussion and triangulation and will now describe how this enabled them to become self-study action researchers. Their research is written into this thesis in the next section and they have given oral accounts of it to staff and to their class peers in my school. Their research question was, 'How do I learn spellings?' They recorded on audio-tape (see Appendix 2.4), under my supervision, their strategies for learning spellings individually. They listened to, reflected on, and added to their recordings. Following the agreement of all the pupils in each cohort these individual tape recordings were shared and listened to by all pupils in each cohort. They questioned without prompt from me, 'What do you think about how others learn spellings?' and 'Could you use any of their ideas?' The pupils gained an awareness of different learning styles and strategies. Pupils suggested researching, or as they called it 'trying out', each other's ways of learning and individually recorded the effectiveness of three different learning strategies. Their research opened further questions for my research, which I noted in my journal such as 'Can long term memory be improved?' (14 October 2001 journal, see Appendix 2.1b); 'Can metacognition aid the learning process?' (6 February 2002 journal, see Appendix 2.1b); 'In what ways can metacognition be developed?' (14 December 2003 journal, see Appendix 2.1d). Their research also posed questions about the methods I was using such as,
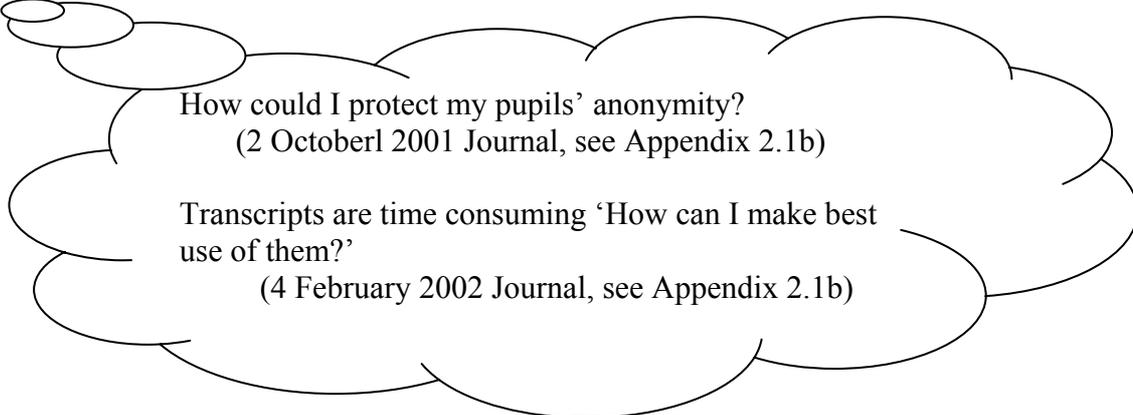
How could I protect my pupils' anonymity?
    (2 Octoberl 2001 Journal, see Appendix 2.1b)

Transcripts are time consuming 'How can I make best use of them?'
    (4 February 2002 Journal, see Appendix 2.1b)

These questions are indicative of how my research methods were developmental and rooted in the new knowledge that was being created in the relationships with pupils, teaching colleagues, University colleagues and critical friends.

(3)   Reflective group discussions between pupils, class teaching colleagues, resource teaching colleagues, research colleagues and a validation group at the University of Limerick

Reflective group discussions were used as a method to develop and test the new thinking of both myself and the pupils who participated in my research. Reflective group discussions took place with pupils, class teaching colleagues, resource teaching colleagues and research colleagues at the University of Limerick. These have been recorded in field notes, journal summaries, in correspondence and in taped transcripts (See Appendix 2).

These discussions also gave direction to the process of my research as in the following example of a discussion I had with the first cohort of pupils. In audio tape-recorded, preparatory discussions for their report on specific learning difficulties, the pupils asked, 'Could I show classmates what it was like to find it hard to read?' (see Appendix 2.4c). They devised the following in answer to their own question, which I have reproduced here from their reports 'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others'.
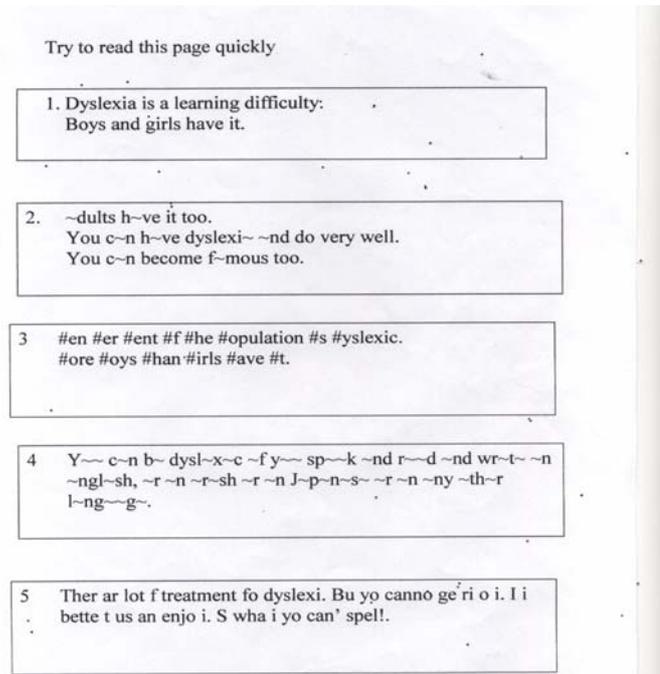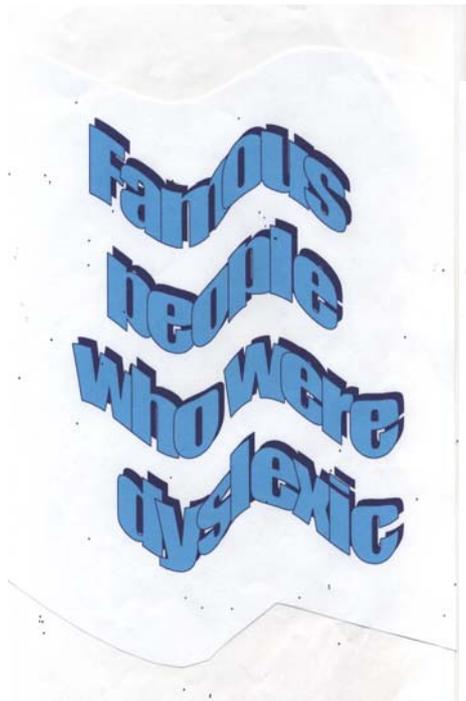
Pictures 6.3 and 6.4:

Pages from pupils' reports showing what it was like to find it hard to read

The portrayal of their ideas was based on a video (then available from the Dyslexia Association of Ireland) called 'How hard can it be?', which they had viewed. In that video, adults are shown how hard it can be to learn in a class situation when one is dyslexic. The pupils in my research devised their own strategies in the pages above to show others how hard it can be to read. Another example of the interrelatedness of my research methods was when I noted, in my journal, the avoidance strategies, which my pupils said they used in class to avoid having their difficulties made public. I provided an opportunity for pupils to inform their class teachers of this during the question and answer session that followed the presentation of their reports to their class teachers.

Cohorts of pupils had discussions with five class teachers at a time and together we theorised the nervous, attention-seeking and avoidance behaviours that the pupils in my research displayed in their mainstream classes. These discussions were noted in my journals. Bassey (1999, p.47) advises triangulation of teacher interviews about the pupils' behaviours and researcher observations in case study research. In my self-study approach we were engaging in living triangulation. Rather than teacher-to-teacher interview and researcher observations, I was observing, learning and

checking my theorising against feedback from both the class teachers and pupils present at these reflective and triangulation discussions. The teachers were learning from the pupils by checking their practice against pupils' experiences of it and I was checking my practice against my new understanding of dialogical methods of knowledge creation. Pupils were developing their understanding of the disability with which they had been labelled.

My own developing understandings were noted in my journals such as notes from discussions with resource teacher colleagues on the appropriateness of intervention strategies for pupils. During the course of my research I presented my findings to them and received written responses. A resource teacher in my school and another resource teacher in my locality commented in writing on all transcripts of taped conversations between pupils, and between the pupils and myself. From time to time I have also received written comments on these transcripts from other professionals such as an art therapist and a counsellor. Details of these are included in my data archive (see Appendix 2).

I met with colleagues from the university bi-monthly to discuss our learning. Issues of knowledge, data gathering methods, methodology, culture, journalling, educational theories, and developing learning through relationships were discussed. These colleagues included both PhD candidates and college lecturers. Our discussion and critique continued in writing and on web form as described in Glenn (2004). When I provided evidence from my research, these colleagues' correspondence provided written validation of my claims. I maintained contact with two critical friends throughout the course of my research. As well as offering their critique they provided validation in the same way as colleagues from the university.

(4)   Photography, audio and video taping
Throughout my research I used photography but videotaping was limited to three occasions because I had not access to a video recorder in school. I used these forms of data gathering and evidence generation because they can capture descriptions – such as movement, facial expression, verbal intonation – as well as certain skills. An example of these skills in my class situation was the composing, on the spur of the moment, of appropriate forms of questions for each individual pupil, while

monitoring pupils' levels of interest using eye-contact, and mentally re-planning the next phase of the lesson based on pupils' responses. An audience member captured evidence of my embodied values on video as I presented a paper on my research at an educational conference. The video and his correspondence stating that he had observed my embodied values are in my data archive (see Appendix 2.4f), to which my response was,

> As a teacher I find it much easier for me to present data around my students than about my own thinking, learning and practice. Your video will be vital for this purpose.

(12th June 2003, original in data archive see appendix 2.5e)

Self-study action research offers a methodology to explore change and, among other things, it is about making explicit what is implicit in one's practice through a living logic or, as Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p.8) call them, logics of imagination. A second video (see Appendix 2.4g and some stills from it are in Chapter Seven) was of my pupils presenting their reports, which explained their understanding of their learning difficulties to peers in their class in the presence of the school principal, deputy principal, a trainee teacher, a class teacher and two resource teachers. They provided evidence of a change in my context. One element of this change was that pupils were teaching teachers and school managers about specific learning disability (dyslexia). This form of change could be described in words but the living evidence on the videotape was richer and led me to regret that I had not made greater use of this form of technology. I was convinced of the richness of this method of gathering evidence of living change and the generation of living theory when I presented that video (with appropriate permissions, which I will explain in the next chapter) at an academic conference (McDonagh 2003). The audience articulated their agreement with my findings and identified other new areas of learning (see Appendix 2.4e). The development of new knowledge in relationship with others was evident in the correspondence from audience members following the conference.

I also photographed my pupils at work and they have photographed me, as in the examples in Pictures 4.3 and 7.6. This reciprocal photographing shows the equality in our relationship. Another example is in Chapter Seven where on a series of

occasions I photographed pupils writing, looking for data to support my journal reflections about how pupils used unusual sitting positions, pencil holds and paper positioning. These photographs are part of my evidence base for my developing theories about the three-dimensional nature of thinking of those with specific learning difficulties.

(5)   Questionnaires to gather evidence of change

I sought qualitative evidence of changes in my work place. In the first year of my research I administered a questionnaire to investigate attitudes of the general body of pupils, excluding those pupils who were part of my research, to specific learning difficulties. At the end of the second year, after 16 pupils who were involved in my research had presented their reports titled 'Explaining Dyslexia to Ourselves and Others', the questionnaire was re-administered to detect any changes in attitude. The questions asked were based on an American programme 'Other Kinds of Mind' (All Kinds of Mind 2005) and were:

- o   What do you mean by being intelligent?
- o   Are people with learning difficulties dumb?
- o   If you had a learning difficulty would you tell a friend?
- o   Can you tell if someone is lazy or if they are struggling?
- o   If you have a learning difficulty, who is responsible for helping you?

The language of these questions may not seem academic, for example 'intelligent' is not an antonym for 'dumb'. However, the questions are written in words that are commonly used by the pupils in my context. Question three is asking about attitudes to specific learning disability (dyslexia) although the pupils who participated in my research used the term 'learning difficulties'. The question is asking if specific learning disability (dyslexia) is something to be ashamed of. Class teachers gave permission and time for me to explain and administer this questionnaire. Full classes (thirty plus pupils) at sixth, fifth, fourth and second level (aged approximately twelve, eleven, ten and eight years) answered the questions. The replies were tape-recorded and tabulated but not statistically analysed. They demonstrated a change in the attitudes of mainstream class pupils, as I discuss in Part Four. Their opinions indicated the development of personal knowledge and provided evidence of educational influence – mine and that of the pupils who participated in my research.

Each cohort of pupils tested the new knowledge they created about their understanding of specific learning disability (dyslexia) against what others had learned from their reports in short questionnaires, which they composed. One example, given earlier in Section Three, was that class teachers and the pupils' peers in their mainstream classes answered the following two questions, 'What did you learn about dyslexia?' and 'What further questions do you have about dyslexia?' (see Appendices 2.7; 2.8 and Appendices 7.1 and 7.2). A second example, also given earlier in Section Three, was my questionnaire to test my new learning against the feedback of twenty-four resource teachers (see Appendix 2.9 and Appendix 7.3). The final question that I asked –

> Do you think that the approach that I used in my work is relevant for resource teachers, for learning support teachers or for class teachers and why?
>
> (Appendix 7.3)

– demonstrated my openness to critique.

~ The transformative potential of my methodological choice

Having described my research methods, I intend to show in this section how they helped in the transformation of the situation at the beginning of my research. I will show that I have scrutinised these methods by engaging in constant self-questioning and by testing my methods against the aims of my research. I then explain how the large amount of data that was generated by the changes in my practice was selected and converted into research evidence. Part of this process was the constant checking of my choice of self-study action research in the metaphorical mirror. I am questioning the moral basis of my research. Others involved in action research and self-study action research, have also considered the moral basis of their work. For example, for Stenhouse (1975) action research involved recapturing the moral basis of teaching, while, according to Noffke (1997), Carr and Kemmis (1986) advocate a professionalism that resonates with human emancipation.

The self–study action research methodology I have chosen requires both action and self-study. I am not only describing the actions that took place in the course of my

research but I am also studying why those actions occurred. My thesis includes both description and explanation. This involves not only asking why things are so but also asking for what purpose they exist. So my research involves constant self-questioning. I have asked questions about my practice such as

How do I teach now?
Why do I teach in this way?
What is important to me that influences how I teach?
Are my ideas about teaching valued by others?
(May 2001 journal in Appendix 2.1b)
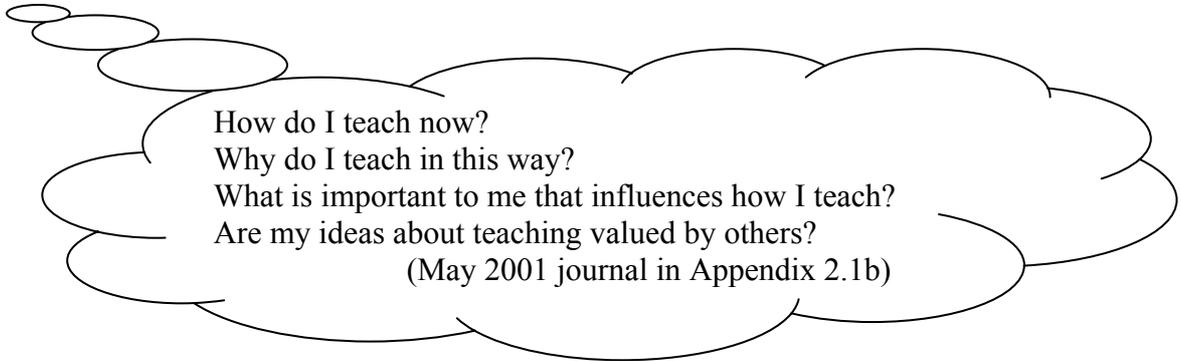
In practical terms I was problematising taken-for-granted assumptions about my practice and checking and testing my claims and theories with pupils, with class teacher colleagues, with resource teacher colleagues and with learning colleagues from my university. This at times was disturbing in that I had expectations of what might be the next step in my research, and then an insight from one of the groups above might change the course of my research. An example of this was when a teacher colleague pointed out that although the pupils participating in my research and I had identified areas of difficulty for them in school, we had not listed areas that the pupils were good at. The teacher's comments changed the thinking behind my data collection methods and placed a practical focus on achievements. This disturbance is part of the essence of self-study action research, which I see as similar to Donmoyer's (1993, p.7 cited in Donmoyer 1996, p.20) encouragement to researchers when he said,

Put your ready-made, comfortable assumptions of knowledge and learning on hold… to think anew about the art and science of educational research and practice.

(Dunmoyer 1996, p.20)

I am positioning my ontological perspective centrally in the research process as Bullough and Pinnegar (2004) suggest, and am enquiring, 'Have my research methods addressed the aims of my research?'

Testing my methods against the aims of my research

In this section I am asking, 'Are the methods that I have chosen in keeping with each of my chosen research aims, which were informed by my ontological perspective and embodied values?' I have named three major aims for my research and I will deal with each one in turn:

1. To show how my pupils can come to value what they know and how they come to know it;

2. To explore the nature of relationships between people which foster knowledge creation, and to develop the kinds of relationship that avoid oppression and domination;

3. To become part of making a difference for good through my educative influence.

1.   To show how my pupils can come to value what they know and how they come to know it

When I enabled each cohort of pupils to conduct a self study action research enquiry into how each individually learned spellings, pupils came to value that they could learn and control their own learning (see Appendix 2.1e and 2.4a). As described above, the pupils tested their own findings about learning strategies by measuring themselves against themselves as they learned spellings using a range of strategies identified by their peers. Pupils were creating new knowledge individually when they named their personal ways of learning spellings and they were also creating new knowledge together in their group discussions about different ways of learning. The audiotape recordings of their discussions demonstrated reciprocity in knowledge creation (see Appendix 2.4b).

By facilitating this form of pupil research, I have shown that my methods of research have changed my practice. The control of learning that dominated my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), as I described it in earlier chapters, was gone. The research methods I have chosen have empowered pupils to value what they know and how they come to know it. The pupils' research was living and

on-going in that, even when the period of my research ended, they had the capability to continue investigating their personal learning.

I chose pupil journaling (see Appendix 2.1e to 2.1g) to help them develop an awareness of what they knew by making entries beginning first with the words 'I learned' and naming the new learning; and later with the words 'I learned (named learning)' and 'I learned it by (naming the method)'. During their group discussions each cohort realised that each individual pupil had personal ways of learning and this did not only apply to spellings. The significance of this new knowledge for pupils was that they became aware of what they knew and changed their ways of thinking in light of their evaluation. The pupils' research reports (see Appendix 2.6a) also demonstrated that in action research conclusions are tentative. The pupils' wording of their report title shows that they too were generating their personal theories of learning when they called it 'Learning spellings: the best way for me' (see Appendix 2.6a)

The equality of our relationships that was inherent in my research methods was shown when I painted my feelings about dyslexia along with my pupils (see Appendix 2.6e) and joined their artwork discussions (see above). Pupils photographed me as I painted and worked with them just as I did with them (see Appendix 2.4h and 2.4i). The methods I used to carry out the first aim of my research gave opportunities for changes in practice and thinking. These changes occurred not only in my case but also in my pupils' learning practice and in their thinking about their positioning within school.

2.   *To explore the nature of relationships between people which foster knowledge creation, and to develop the kinds of relationship that avoid oppression and domination*
The methods I used allowed both the pupils and me to explore the nature of relationships between people, which can foster knowledge creation. They gave rise to changes in my epistemological and ontological perspectives. For example my reflections in my journal gave me self-awareness (see Appendix 2.1b to 2.1d). I used journaling as a research method for my pupils (see Appendix 2.1e to 2.1g) and in so doing the pupils were provided with an opportunity to develop self-awareness of

what and how they learned. The form of question in the questionnaires (Appendix 2.7 and 2.9) composed by me and by the pupils demonstrate that we are valuing personal knowledge and that we are always open to critique. The value of equality and respect shone through all reflective discussions. An example of this respect was the personal written invitation from pupils to class teachers to hear their oral presentation of their reports on explaining our learning difficulties (samples in Appendices 2.6b to 2.6d). Learning support staff was the first group. These teachers were so impressed by the pupils' work that they offered to supervise mainstream classes so that the teachers of those classes could attend the presentations. The entire school staff attended. The form of the reflective discussions was not merely for triangulation of evidence. They were occasions when knowledge creation was fostered in an atmosphere of trust, sharing, equality, service and respect.

My research methods also permitted the development of the kinds of relationship that avoid oppression and domination between myself and my pupils and all who had any part in my research. Pupils took control of their own learning and of the research process. For example, on an occasion when I had to leave one cohort during a discussion, the tape recorder was left on and pupils continued their discussion with the same intensity as if I had been in the room. This is significant because one would expect such young pupils to wait for adult guidance. This episode, I believe, demonstrates that control and domination of pupils by teacher was not a feature of my methodology.

There is further evidence of a change in the teacher-pupil power relationship in the form of questions they put to teachers in the questionnaire following their reports in which they explained their learning difficulties. They asked teachers, 'Have you any other questions?' showing a confidence and competence that there had been no opportunity for them to demonstrate without my facilitative research methods.

3.   *To become part of making a difference for good through my educative influence*

Journaling was one of my transformative methods because within the pupils' journals was evidence that changed my understanding of specific learning disability (dyslexia). My thinking was changed when I saw in their journals the evidence that

they had multiple individual task specific ways of learning (see Chapter Eight), and this concept was at odds with the perception of these pupils as learning disabled. As well as being a vehicle for new knowledge that made a difference to my world in terms of my expectations of pupils labelled with a specific learning disability, journaling provided a vehicle for the development of metacognition. Metagognition in the case of my pupils and me meant awareness of what we knew and how we came to know. It was a method for developing new personal knowledge.

Audio-taping, artwork and reflective discussion were all methods that did not prioritise the pupils' areas of difficulty in school, which were mainly reading and writing. The methods I chose suited the pupils' abilities. In Chapter Nine I produce evidence that the ways in which pupils spoke to teachers, school management and peers about their learning difficulties were recommended by the school principal as a method for all in the school to learn to deal with difficulties (See Appendix 2.4g).

The research methods I used allowed the pupils and me to break norms; norms where pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) were positioned as non-knowers because they had difficulties learning; norms where I was positioned as a non-theorist who acted according to others' theories of learning and teaching. My methods empowered us to break the rules because of their focus on ability rather than disability. I can show (in Chapter Eight) that my research methods have changed my context because I have changed my practice. I have changed from a practice that was a denial of my values, and which I did not believe that I had the power to change. My research methods have allowed me to feel sufficiently empowered to open my work and that of my pupils to the critique of others. Reflective discussions and other methods that depended on my strengths in interpersonal communication and my pupils' oral strengths contributed to these changes.

The idea of educative influence is central to my research methods. My choice of methods meant that I was an agent for others as well as myself. But I was not acting alone. I was finding ways for others to think and learn for themselves by providing research methods to help others to understand how they can work together so that they can improve their own contexts. Whitehead (2004b) terms this process

'contributing to the education of social formations.' A key feature of this process is that it respects each individual and 'their capacity to influence their own learning and the learning of others' (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.44). In order to achieve this, my research methods of journaling, audio and video taping, questionnaires, and interpretive discussion were on-going over a three year period.

6.4   Summary

In this section I have explained how I travelled from traditional methodologies in the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia) to a methodology that recognises the dual focus of my research on both my pupils and on myself. This dual focus has been influenced by my embodied values. These values have not only influenced my choice of research methodology but they also were shown to inform my selection of data, the generation of evidence from that data as well as being the criteria by which I judge the new learning that I describe in the Part Four. My journey towards a methodology for my research has had four core themes. First, I have found ways to show that the children and I could co-create knowledge. I have used methods that demonstrated how I understood myself as in relation with them, and they with me. The reflective dialogues that I have included in my methods involved a dialogue of equals and spoke to values of justice, respect for the wholeness of each person and human equality. Second, by offering the children opportunities to become self-study action researchers in their own right, I have found a method that has linked the value of the person with the idea that people/children must be free to realise and exercise their value. This research approach was grounded in my ontological and Christian values. Third, I have developed methods that permitted critique of my own stance in relation to my pedagogies, as well as in relation with dominant practices of teaching children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Finally, I have used research methods such as reflective journaling and processes of validating my research that contributed to my understanding that personal and social practices are informed and underpinned by specific ontological and epistemological values. My ways of analysing pupil profiling and commercial programmes for specific learning disability (dyslexia) allowed me to critique dominant forms of theory and learning on the grounds that they can lead to further marginalisation and domination of those who

are already oppressed. My methods also highlight critical issues around self-monitoring, self-esteem, and epistemological and personal values.

I address these issues in the next section when I ask myself how my new learning led to the development of my practical living theory of learning to teach for social justice, through teaching my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

PART FOUR: NEW LEARNING

In this section, I make a claim to knowledge in relation to what I have learned about the teaching and learning of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). In the previous section I set out a methodology that my pupils and I used collaboratively. This methodology is shown to be emancipatory in this section in that we learned how to become free by developing our capacity for self-critique through action research. I encouraged my pupils to do their action research, at the same time as I was doing my own action research. I now I describe how I have arrived at the point where I have enabled myself and my pupils to exercise our voices.

In Chapter Seven I explain my own living theory of practice as learning to teach for social justice, as I demonstrate my attempts to alleviate my experience of learned helplessness as a teacher of pupils with specific learning disabilities (dyslexia). I draw on the work of Kerr (2001) to show that my experience of learned helplessness is not unique, yet my approach to it contributed to the development of my living theory of practice. The nature of both a theory of practice and a theory of justice are handled in traditional literatures as subjects to be studied; for example Rawls (1971 and 1999) and Griffiths (2003) regard justice as an object of enquiry to be discussed in an abstract propositional way. Contrary to this perspective, I show that practice and justice are embodied in the lived experiences of people as I develop a new living form of theory to explain how I alleviated my learned helplessness and attempted to influence the learning of the children involved in my research through my own life affirming practices.

In Chapter Eight I explain how I have generated a living theory of learning to teach for social justice in relation to children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I produce evidence to support my claim that the children's awareness of how they learn can enhance their learning. I explain and analyse how, by providing opportunities for the children in my research to have a voice in their own learning, I can help them to see themselves not as consumers or objects within the school system but rather as confident and capable learners.

I have come to realise that by adopting an inner locus of control, both my pupils and I have formed a metaphorical fifth transformative wave of influence. This is where all becomes dynamic. The first four waves described in earlier chapters have generated sufficient momentum to form a tidal wave. This metaphorical tidal wave has welled up from the shifting of the two major epistemological earth plates – the traditional view of knowledge in my field and the stance that I have adopted.

The wave has rolled on. All who have been involved in my research have been stunned into acute personal awareness and action. Everyone who was in the path of the wave has been drawn into participative action – no one is left on the margins. The wave transforms all within its living flood. My practical research processes contribute to this transformation.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Towards my living theory of learning to teach for social justice through teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)

7.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I am asking, 'What did I do to address my own and my pupils' learned helplessness?' I found an answer by theorising the actions I took to address my experiences of learned helplessness as a teacher of pupils with specific learning disabilities/dyslexia. My initial theorising took the form of analysing my actions against current theories in the literatures. I examined my thinking about my ways of working with the children who participated in my research against the insights of Kerr (2001) who found that teachers who taught those with dyslexia experience learned helplessness themselves in their teaching and thinking. During my research I learned to change my practice and engaged in a form of practice that was reminiscent of the attributive theories of Graham (1991) and Weiner (1994 and 2000). These researchers explain how the ways in which we conceptualise our success and failure in learning can determine how we learn or do not learn as individuals. I combated my learned helplessness by moving towards a practice-based form of theorising.

Within this practice-based form of theorising, I held myself accountable for my work, within a self-study action research methodology, as explained by McNiff (1993), McNiff *et al.* (2003) and McNiff and Whitehead (2005). I show evidence of my practical pedagogical changes, and changes in the learning experiences of the children who participated in my research. My accounts of these experiences are tested at several levels – in the classroom, in conference presentations and research seminars – against the values that I named on Table 5.1 of freedom, compassion, justice, equality, forgiveness, human dignity, wholeness and service. These values have become the living standards by which my claims can be judged (Whitehead 1993).

So in this chapter I am speaking about what I can do about my concerns as I outlined them in Chapters One to Four. I have found strategies to enable pupils to learn

effectively. I did this by developing a form of practice that addressed the learned helplessness of pupils. The changes I made in my practice were based on my personal experience of learned helplessness. I show how pupils can become aware of what they are doing as they learn through reflection and positive self-talk. I claim that I have moved towards a living theory of learning to teach for social justice. I claim that mine is a living theory of contributive social justice.

7.2   Developing strategies to enable pupils to learn effectively by theorising the transformation of my personal experience of learned helplessness

I want to tell how I developed ways in which pupils could address their learned helplessness. To do so I must start at the beginning, with my own experiences of transforming my own learned helplessness.

This first chapter about my new learning deals with how my research addressed the dichotomy between my values of justice and what was happening in my practice. I begin with a description and explanation of my own experiences of injustice, which led to my learned helplessness as a teacher of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I agree with Slavin that,

> Learned helplessness is the expectation, based on experience, that
> one's actions will ultimately lead to failure.

(Slavin 2003, p.343)

I have described my learned helplessness in the excerpt below from a transcript of a group discussion with peer doctoral students. I then compare my description to the thinking of Kerr (2001), when he produced qualitative and quantitative evidence of the learned helplessness of teachers of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Kerr also investigated how teachers were personally affected when faced with students who had been diagnosed with specific learning disabilities (dyslexia). During the meeting I said,

I was a teacher who was quite frustrated with what was happening in my classroom. I felt I wasn't meeting the needs of the children. I didn't have any way of rectifying this position. Various courses weren't of any use. The institutional aids that were there, weren't helping me.

(12 February 2003 Taped conversation and transcript, original in data archive Appendix 2.5g)

Kerr (2001) similarly found that his respondents, all of whom taught pupils with specific learning difficulties/dyslexia,

Revealed almost universal, and very considerable confusion and uncertainty as to what dyslexia might be.

(Kerr 2001, p.82)

Even more significantly, 66% of teacher respondents

Showed considerable disempowerment or learned helplessness when faced with a student with dyslexia.

(Kerr 2001, p.80)

Kerr's respondents and I dealt with our learned helplessness in different ways, and this divergence is central to my claim to have developed a living theory of learning to teach for social justice. I dealt with my learned helplessness by undertaking self-study action research. I held myself accountable, within this methodology, for my work, and I experienced a major shift in my thinking. The following quotations are examples of how others confirm that I demonstrated changes in thinking in the ways I worked. The quotations are taken from a validation meeting with research peers where I presented my data and evidence that I had generated in my research by assessing my data against the values I stated were my standards of judgement. Those in the group assessed my evidence and claim as well as the clarity and acceptability of my standards of judgement. At the meeting, I said that,

I had always thought that the powers-that-be had all the wisdom, and that the practitioners had not.

(12 February 2003 Taped conversation and transcript, original in data archive Appendix 2.5g)

A research peer said,

> You have come, through studying in this method [self-study action research], to understand that there are other ways of knowing and the value of individual personal knowledge.
>
> (12 February 2003 Taped conversation and transcript, original in data archive Appendix 2.5g)

Kerr (2001) in contrast found that the teachers he researched responded differently, when he stated that,

> The language used by two thirds of the respondents grew grey and pessimistic, expectations fell precipitatively and tuition became abruptly behaviourist, skill and drill-based and sometimes scheme-driven (Hornsby and Shear 1990).
>
> (Kerr 2001, p.81)

A distinguishing feature of my approach was that I decided to adopt an internal locus of control in tackling my learning helplessness. This required addressing problematic questions, such as the nature of learning, knowledge and who are knowledge creators. It is against these questions (as I have discussed in Chapters One to Four) that I place my claim to have transformed my experiences of learned helplessness towards a more just conception of learning. By questioning my pedagogy, I demonstrated a metacognitive awareness of the need for openness to change. When I adopted an internal locus of control I demonstrated a belief in my own capacity to think and change my situation. My commitment to a self-questioning methodology about my practice and thinking is grounded in the values of respect for the uniqueness of the individual and their capabilities to think, learn and change. By doing my research I claim that I am demonstrating a more just approach to knowledge creation and theorising in that I am creating opportunities for the voice and thinking of the teacher and her students to be heard within a context that largely values objective and quantitative studies of pedagogical processes.

The divergence between what seemed to be occurring in the teaching of Kerr's respondents and in my own practice can be analysed within the framework of attribution theory (Graham, 1991; Weiner 1994 and 2000), which addresses the

demotivation attached to learned helplessness. Although these authors' research was not specific to teachers, it enables me to explain the differing perspectives and actions of Kerr's respondents and my research. The theory of attribution explains that when learning is attributed to one's own ability, and when one is convinced that there is stability, about how one's efforts to learn are valued, and when one is in control of the process, then learning is successful. On the other hand if one is unsure of one's ability to learn, as is the case in learned helplessness, and if the assessment of one's learning is dependent on subjective assessment by an outsider to the learning process whose view cannot be controlled by the learner regardless of how much effort he or she puts into the learning process, then learning is not successful. Graham (1991) and Weiner (1994 and 2000) attribute the degree of success or failure to the balance between these three attributes of ability, stability/instability and control of learning by the learner. The learned helplessness that both Kerr's respondents and I felt as teachers could seem to stem from a feeling that nothing we personally did mattered. Attributing the cause of failure to ourselves, as teachers, thus denying our abilities, is the first of the three features, which, Weiner (1994) claims, determine personal success and failure in learning settings. Kerr's respondents and I differed on our approach to the second and third attributes of learning and this is demonstrated in the pedagogical changes we made.

The key indicators of success and failure within the framework of attribution theory are ability, effort, task difficulty and luck (Slavin 2003, p.334). Kerr's respondents and I demonstrated similarities in our attitudes to ability and effort but differed in the other aspects. Kerr's respondents and I all doubted our personal ability to help pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) by engaging in the 'grey and pessimistic' (p.80) language of Kerr's respondents and my belief that 'the powers-that-be had all the wisdom, and that the practitioners had not'. Both Kerr's teachers and I demonstrated our efforts to address our learned helplessness by introducing 'drill-based programmes' (Kerr 2001, p.81; McDonagh 2002, p.3) and attending 'courses' (McDonagh 2000, p.14). However, in terms of task difficulty and the element of luck we adopted different stances. As Kerr put it, his respondents 'blamed the victim' (p.81) and the victims that he was referring to were pupils with dyslexia. In doing so his respondents coped with their learned helplessness by shifting the locus of control from themselves to the pupils. Their

'abruptly behaviourist, skill and drill-based and sometimes scheme-driven' (Kerr 2001, p.81) practice positioned Kerr's respondents as technicians who perceived pupils' learning as responses to such schemes and drills. In shifting the locus of control Kerr's respondents maintained their self-esteem but their pupils were placed at a disadvantage, according to Kerr (2001). A practical example of this shift in focus was,

> Whenever tuition was altered this was invariably a 'dumbing down'. Flair and methodological freedom frequently vanished. What respondents appeared to offer 'dyslexics' was fragmented and deliberately repetitive, highly structured and controlled, depersonalised and focussed on the subskills of literacy.
>
> (Kerr 2001, p.81)

By contrast, I adopted an internal locus of control through the process of engaging in self-study action research:

> I learned to be responsible for what was happening in my work.
>
> (30 February 2003 Letter to supervisor, original in data archive Appendix 2.3a)

By adopting an internal locus of control in learning I have not only engaged with a process to address success and failure in learning and the injustice of the learned helplessness I had experienced but I have also reconstituted my identity as a teacher in that I have begun to theorise my practice (Clandinin and Connelly 1995). The epistemological stance I have taken in doing so is what McNiff (2002) refers to as an internalist rather than an externalist approach to knowledge and theorising. I have prioritised personal knowledge (Polanyi 1958) and broken with the hegemonising power of outsider theory over my practice by taking action to control my learned helplessness. My new understanding of my identity as one who can theorise my practice of teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) is linked to my understandings of knowledge. My new understanding of identity as inner critical engagement in part supports Foucault's (1979 and 1980) ideas that identity comprises inner critical engagement and outer questioning of the condition of which the self is constituted. Many of Foucault's ideas around how the self is constituted

deal with issues of subjection and the nature of power relationships. In my research I have engaged with a power struggle between myself and theories in the literature; yet I have sought to avoid power struggles between myself and those whom I teach and with whom I am researching.

These seeming contradictions are also informed by my respect for the individual and their unique capabilities to think, learn and change. The epistemological stance that I have adopted in my research informed my differing approaches to theoretical, ontological and epistemological power struggles. I am not theorising identity, power or justice as things at an abstract level. I am presenting my understanding of them as aspects of the practices of real people. I want to show how my practice-based living theory of learning to teach for social justice can transform negative situations into life-affirming ones or, as McNiff and Whitehead (2006) write, that each person,

> [h]as the power of influence. Each has the capacity to influence their own learning and the learning of others. Each has to learn to exercise their influence in such a way that the Other will also learn to exercise their power for influence for educational sustainability.

> (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.238)

My living theory of learning to teach for social justice has at its core those ideas of my capacity and that of the pupils in my research to influence our own learning and the learning of others. Based on these ideas, I am describing my living theory as a contributive theory of justice in which those experiencing injustice are enabled to contribute to establishing justice. My reflective awareness and metacognitive approach to my ways of working and influencing the learning of others has contributed to the development of my living theory of practice. I am claiming that the actions I took to address the unjust situation of learned helplessness, as I experienced it, were based in personal awareness, and my personal awareness contributed to personal actions that influenced change in myself and in others. The remainder of this chapter provides the evidence from changes in my children's learning to validate my claim to have transformed my experiences of learned helplessness towards a more just conception of learning. Producing such evidence involves articulating my standards of judgement by which I assess the quality of my

evidence. I do this below. I will show how I provided opportunities for the pupils in my research to develop an internal locus of control in their own learning and also how I provided opportunities for them to develop their personal forms of voice. In doing so I demonstrated in practice that I value the individual learner by developing a more just form of practice and less power-constituted relationships between pupils and teachers and between epistemologies in teaching and learning.

7.3   Developing a more just practice to address the learned helplessness of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)

In this section I explain how my awareness of adopting an internal locus of control led to innovative changes in my practice and provided a more just approach to learning, knowledge and knowledge creation. I claim this because these changes provided a framework to address issues of marginalisation; issues about freedom for learners to voice their preferred ways of learning; and issues of power relationships in teaching and learning.

The first four chapters of this thesis include instances of how organisational issues such as labelling denied pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) the possibility of maintaining a positive self-image in the face of their learned helplessness. Prior to my research many pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in my school context experienced a lack of belief in their own capabilities, which in turn led to a lack of effort to learn, and cycles of learning avoidance. The Individual Educational Plan in Appendix 6.2 gives an example of how this can appear in school documentation, when teachers write that a pupil 'doesn't try hard enough' or that the pupil 'is capable of better results'. Thompson, Davidson and Barber (1995) suggest that people attempt to maintain a positive self-image even in the face of such helplessness. It was my experience that pupils set up avoidance strategies to help maintain a positive self-image. I gathered evidence of the avoidance strategies that the children in my research used in dealing with their experiences of learned helplessness, as in the following example.

Yearly cohorts of participating pupils produced a written group project (see data archive) to explain their learning difficulties. In this project the pupils listed nine

curricular areas out of a possible eleven in which they experienced difficulties. In making this list, each child, without any prompting from me, used the words, 'I can't do…' (other references to this are in appendix 2.6b). These words can be perceived as a demonstration of an avoidance strategy based on the pupils' experience of failure. This expectation of failure based on experiences of failure resonates with the learned helplessness that I had felt as their teacher. I questioned if what was happening for the pupils could be explained in terms of the four key indicators of success or failure in learning within the attribution theory discussed above. I noted my questioning in my journal when I asked,

> Could they be aware of why they say they can't learn?
> Do they understand but can't articulate learned helplessness?
> If they became aware could they change the situation?
> (12 January 2002 Journal, original in Appendix 2.1b)

Attribution theory (Graham, 1991; Weiner 1994 and 2000) positions ability, effort, task difficulty and luck as key indicators of success and failure in learning. In the previous paragraph I have shown how pupils in my research believed that they do not have the ability to learn. Pupils ceased attempting tasks that they decided were too difficult, in order to maintain the idea that they could do well if they really wanted. The idea that pupils could do well if they really wanted to is a concept described by Jagacinski and Nichols (1990), which refers to a strategy that students employ in order to keep their self-esteem in failing situations. Similar to Kerr's respondents and me, the pupils are attributing the cause of their failure personally. We are all attributing our learned helplessness to ourselves, which is the first of three features, which, Weiner (1994) claims, determines personal success and failure in learning settings. The second characteristic is whether failure or success is perceived as stable or unstable, which means that the pupils believe that the situation cannot be changed. Weiner (1994) states that the third characteristic is whether the cause is controllable or not. Here the pupils had already demonstrated some control over their learning situations by devising avoidance strategies. This, to me, indicated a positive response to my third journal question above – if they became aware could they change the situation? Therefore the difference between my reactions to learned helplessness and that of my pupils lay in the second characteristic that involves the articulating that we could change things, as I now explain.

By writing about my practice in my research, I found a way to voice and theorise how I changed my experiences of learned helplessness. The idea of voice has significance for the development of my living theory of learning to teach for social justice because through gaining our voices the pupils and I could address the initial concerns in my enquiry, in that my pupils needed ways to establish their own learning voice within their processes of learning and I needed to establish my theorising voice. My self-study action research process contributed to a more just situation for me because the process provided ways in which I could become aware and reflect on how best to transform my learned helplessness. In the research episodes below I will show how I provided opportunities for the pupils in my research to gain a voice with the purpose of making the situation more just for them.

Each cohort of pupils was first given an opportunity to show their awareness of their feelings about the disability with which they were labelled. They then demonstrated this awareness in conversations with peers and myself. I found that the pupils could learn to reflect on their learning disability and their diminished self-esteem. An example of this was in artwork in which each pupil depicted their feelings about their specific learning disability, as in Pictures 3.1 and 5.1 above. In discussing their artwork, the voices of each cohort of pupils were heard – voices which were usually silent about their difficulties within the education system – as when Pupil B spoke of how he perceived most teachers as bad and that he wanted to keep away from them. When Pupil K asked if the drawing represented ways 'just to keep the teacher out' Pupil B responded, 'Yeah, just to keep everything bad away from me' (19 February 2002 Taped conversation and transcript, original in Appendix 2.6e).

My explanation of the pupil's picture and reflective conversation was that I had created an opportunity for pupils to present their voice in a visual form that ignored their written disabilities. In this process pupils articulated how they understood the learning disability with which they were labelled. Myself, another resource teacher and an art therapist reflected on the transcripts of the pupils' conversations in writing (originals in Appendix 2.6e). One of these critical friends confirmed that both in my practice and in my claims I had respected the capabilities of the pupils in my

research. She also stated that I provided them with a more just learning setting when she wrote,

> You stood aside and gave them [my children/researchers] a voice. Art made it safer for them. It was a filter that allowed them to have a voice. Art created an atmosphere where they were prepared to tell what they thought.
>
> (28 Feb 2002 Correspondence from Critical Friend A, Appendix 2.5h)

The art work of my pupils, in which I offered them opportunities for free expression using any art medium of their choice, was reminiscent of 'outsider art' (Kinley 2003) or 'Art Brut' (Azzola 2005). Both of these art forms have come to be celebrated worldwide. They feature varied works created from both usual and unusual materials that were dear to the artists – from fabrics to paperclips and felt-tip pen drawings. Apart from a freedom from artistic conventions, Kinley claims that their works exhibit visual connections and impulses, which add to their uniqueness (Kinley 2003, p.47). The artists themselves give the title to the genre in that they dwell on the margins of society for reasons as varied as learning disabilities, mental and physical disabilities, unemployment and homelessness. What emerged from my children's art was surprising to both the pupils and to me. In looking at their work the visual connections, the visual impulses and freedom from artistic convention can be seen in many of the pictures included in this thesis. This artwork permitted pupils to communicate ideas and emotions associated with their personal experiences; to rediscover their own identities and diversity. Outsider art, because its artists come from the margins, is generally presented without explanation. However my pupils developed new meanings about their work during taped peer conversations about their pictures, which appeared to alleviate their learned helplessness as in the following two transcript extracts,

> Pupil J said. 'I drew a brain or somethin' like a brain. A dyslexic brain. And then a big brain. Like the normal brain. To see can anyone spot the difference. They won't. There'll be none 'cause I drew two brains just the same. Cause no one's able to say to a kid like you're dyslexic. It's like catching them out. It's just provin' to people there's nothing wrong with the brain. It's just how you think about things.
>
> (4 March 2002 Pupil discussions, Appendix 2.4c)

This is the picture that accompanied the discussion above. Pupil J had come to the same conclusion as Davis (1994), that dyslexia for him was about how one thinks.
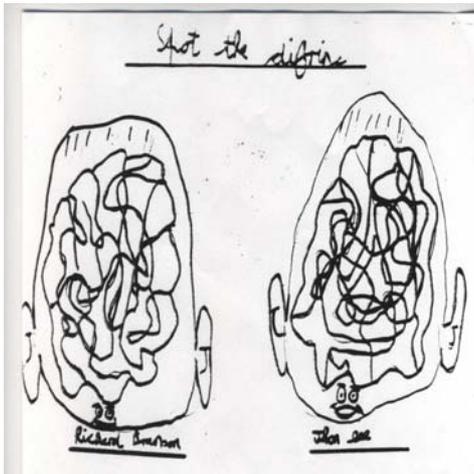
The pupils quoted in the next transcript extract build on Pupil B's understanding of dyslexia by identifying the factors that contribute to their disablement as school, pedagogy and comprehension. The pupils relate their difficulties in comprehension to slowness in decoding words. This statement is factually accurate because their comprehension difficulties are not due to lack of intellectual capacity because, unlike many other pupils receiving learning support, these pupils are of average intelligence or above, as demonstrated on their scores achieved by psychometric testing (see Chapter One and in their pupil profiles see Appendix 6.1).

This picture, painted by Pupil R, and the discussion beneath it shows how Pupil R understood that school was more inhibiting for him than dyslexia itself. His understandings seem to fit within the educational model of disability that I explained earlier.

He said, 'I thought I would draw something cause Easter is coming up and Easter is one of my favourite times. So I drew an Easter Egg and somebody in the corner. That's me. And then I just wrote Easter beside it. Dyslexia means nothing to me. There are other more important things.

Pupil R said, 'My picture is my Easter at home in my house. I thought I would draw something 'cause Easter is coming up and Easter is one of my favourite times. So I drawed an Easter Egg and somebody in the corner. That's me. And then ... just... writ Easter beside it. Well…it [dyslexia] doesn't exactly affect you at home, cause you're not doing any work like ... It's just at school. That's where you see…that's where you see that you have that specific learning difficulty. 'Cause when you're outside playing sport or something. No, it's not there. But when you're doing maths or spellings, that's when you find that specific learning difficulty a problem. You…'

Pupil J interjected, 'Sometimes I always have to ask someone to spell the big words.'

Pupil M added, 'In school it affects you because teacher is always going too fast. And you can't understand the reading. You'd just read a page and you can't understand it.'

(19 March 2003 Transcript, see Appendix 2.6e)

An awareness and inner questioning of the disability with which they had been labelled occurred during the process of making the artwork. There is evidence of the pupils' reflections and outer questioning (Foucault 1980) during their conversations about their artwork. Foucault (1979 and 1980) tells how identity is formed through processes of inner reflection and outer questioning. In the conversation transcript below an entire cohort of pupils talk with Pupil T about his picture depicting his understanding of dyslexia.

Pupil J said: I think it's like a monster. With the eyes and the big nose. It has one massive eye and one little eye. And it has a kind of key rings. It has something beside the eyes…….

Pupil B said: I think it's like all the teachers, looking and saying and talking to you like and saying you're not good and all that.

Pupil T said: I'll tell you what I drew. 'Cause yea I tried to draw. Eyes. Mouth. I tried to draw ears. Nobody recognised my ears.

Pupil J said: I thought they were key rings……

Pupil T said: What I see is dyslexia affects eyes, ears and talking. That's why I drew three things. And it jumbles them all up all over the place, looking like a monster – J was right. So sometimes eyes are getting messages. Sometimes ears are getting messages. Sometimes your eyes are seeing things that you hear differently. Sometimes ears are hearing things different from how your eyes see them. That's my bad drawing of an ear. That's an ear in there. I wasn't very good at ears. And anybody who has all this jumble of all this – like with dyslexia – eyes and ears and lips…. can still know things crystal clear.

Pupil N said: You can explain stuff by just scribbles and all that. Just what you feel. I done it.

(14 March 2003 Discussion transcript, original in Appendix 3.2a)

The full transcript of this discussion about Pupil T's drawing of his feelings about dyslexia is in Appendix 3.2a. Pupil T described dyslexia as processing difficulties in the areas of hearing, listening, speaking and seeing, yet he claims that these organisational distortions give him clarity of thought and communication. I maintain that his descriptions and explanations could contribute to many of the current research debates about dyslexia from medical, educational and psychological fields.

The understanding of dyslexia that the pupils gained through discussing their artwork was reminiscent of my shift towards an inner locus of control in learning. I had provided them with opportunities to use a form of voice in which they too could personally take control of their understandings of their disability. This inner locus of control was the power base on which we could build our abilities to transform the learned helplessness that we had previously experienced. Through artwork and discussion I am claiming that the pupils in my research have been provided with opportunities for developing personal awareness and a contributive form of social justice, where pupils are confirming each other's abilities to make explicit their personal tacit understandings of the disability with which they had been labelled.

I want to clarify two issues here: first, did pupils understand dyslexia as a disability, and second, did they appreciate that they have been labelled? In answering the first question, I maintain the pupils understood dyslexia as a disability prior to taking part in my research. However, their understanding changed during the course of my research. For example, Pupil T whom I quote in Appendix 3.2a stated that dyslexia provided him with clarity of thought and communication, suggesting he understood dyslexia as contributing to his ability rather than as a disability. Yet in an earlier journal entry, he wrote,

I have the same disease as my Mammy
(Appendix 2.1e)

The examples that I have given above indicate the level of self-awareness that the pupils who participated in my research had reached. The research methods that I used to achieve this level of self-awareness included reflective discussions, which together with their artwork, provided opportunities for the pupils to exercise their individual voice particularly in relation to their learning. There were two other key features of my research at that time. These were reflection and positive self-talk. I will explain these over the next few pages, but for now I want to state my claim that I have provided evidence of a more just practice in that I am living to my values. In developing self-awareness about specific learning disability (dyslexia) in relation to others with the same learning disability, I have shown empathy by allowing the participating pupils opportunities to adopt the same approach to learned helplessness as I had. I had also allowed them the freedom to explore their identities as learners in their artwork. Both of these indicate my commitment to service and my belief in the capacities of these young individuals. In my relationship with my pupils I demonstrate that I treat my pupils as myself and so I show my values of respect for the individual, freedom and service which support my understanding that learned helplessness can be addressed by valuing the learner and more specifically by the learner valuing him/her self.

~ Pupils become aware of what they are doing as they learn through positive self-talk and reflection

In practical terms there was the enactment of two transformative concepts that alleviated my learned helplessness and that of the pupils in my research by helping us to become aware of what and how we learn. These were (a) positive self-talk and (b) reflection. These processes also helped us to construct new transformative meanings. In the research episode below I claim that, by facilitating positive self-talk, I can show its implications for self-esteem. Following from this I give examples of forms of reflection for both myself and my pupils. In demonstrating our awareness of what and how we learned, I feel justified in claiming that this metacognitive approach alleviates learned helplessness or, in the images of the wave metaphor, shocks all whom it touches into acute personal awareness and action against the injustices we have experienced.

In the following episode from my research I claim that issues of low self-esteem and poor self-perception, as shown in B's picture (Picture 5.1 above) and which were also obvious in many of my children's pictures, were reversed. As part of a group project explaining specific learning disability under the title 'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others' (Appendices 2.4g and 2.6b), my pupils accessed Internet information on famous and successful people who are reported to have or have had specific learning difficulties. Using clip art and word art pupils presented their findings in this project. Their project title initiated a metacognitive, positive internalising process. Each cohort of eight pupils produced projects. The contents of these projects are below and these projects are in my data archive (see Appendix 2.6b to 2.6d).

Table 7.1: Contents of pupils' reports explaining their learning difficulties

Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Famous people who have specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)	Famous people who have specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)	Famous people who have specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)
Things I have difficulty with at school	Things I have difficulty with at school	Things I have difficulty with at school
How I learn spellings	How I learn spellings	How I learn spellings
Treatments for specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)	Writing about what I've learned	Writing about what I've learned
You too can feel dyslexic - activities	Do I learn things that I am good at in the same ways	Do I learn things that I am good at in the same ways
How dyslexia helps me		
How I feel about specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)	How I feel about specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)	How I feel about specific learning disabilities (dyslexia)

As can be seen from these tables of contents, the pupils' projects grew from the negotiation of understandings of specific learning disabilities (dyslexia) by my pupils and myself. In their projects my pupils show and explain how they had internalised new ideas around specific learning disabilities (dyslexia). As a result, I as their teacher became a negotiator and facilitator of knowledge acquisition rather than a controller of pupils' knowledge and knowledge acquisition. My approach challenges an empirical and pragmatic approach such as Dweck (1986), who argues that focusing on learning goals that are easy to achieve for the pupils can reduce helplessness. It also challenges a staged approach such as that of Alterman and

Pitrich (1994), who advise that teachers prevent or alleviate learned helplessness by structured processes giving pupils (1) opportunities for success in small steps; (2) immediate feedback; (3) consistent expectations and follow through (Alterman and Pitrich 1994). However my ideas about celebrating positive and negotiated understandings contained other elements of successful learning as described by Slavin (2003), which he states involves 'eliminating the negative and moving from familiar to new, using advance organisers or guided discovery' (Slavin 2003, p.v). In devising group projects on specific learning disability (dyslexia), I claim that my pupils were 'guided to change their attribution style to become persistent and independent learners' (Lerner 2000, p.245). I facilitated further enhancement of pupils' self-esteem in the example of positive self-talk that follows.

(a) Positive self-talk

The concept of positive self-talk features in many commercial programmes for dyslexia – such as Phonological Awareness Training (Wilson 1996), Multisensory Teaching System of Reading (Johnson *et al.* 1999) and Toe by Toe (Cowling and Cowling 1993) – in the form of pupils monitoring of their personal progress. Although positive self-talk is not a stated feature of these programmes, I became aware of it in the following way. In an initial phase of my research I used commercial interventions for dyslexia (see Appendix 4.1) with a cohort of pupils over a three-month period. Quantitative comparisons (see Chapter Nine) showed that the most effective programmes in achieving their stated aims contained personal, self-scoring sheets of daily attainments, a sample of which are in Appendix 4.2. These sheets could be said to be more than record keeping data because the children perceived them as a form of positive motivation. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of pupils' recorded achievements on the programmes and their responses to the question 'Which sheet works best for you?' provided evidence of pupils' preferences for those sheets with congratulatory formats or space for personal comments.

Positive self-talk was a feature of the personal learning experiments my pupils engaged in during my research. Here positive self-talk means a personal form of

motivation in which pupils were encouraged to self-affirm themselves on attainments with oral statements. An example of it would be:

> Pupil L said, 'I felt happy when I drew all my ideas. I can't say them but the colour helped me show them. Now I can tell you about them. I am good at drawing. It helps me think.'

> Pupils S said, 'When I read over all the things in my diary – the things I learned this week I didn't believe that I had learned so much. Wow!'

> (February 3004 Taped conversation and transcript, Appendix 2.6e)

By contrasting pupils' attitudes prior to and during my research, the power of positive self-talk, as a form of motivation to continue learning, became obvious. In the following two pictures and commentaries (Pictures 7.1 and 7.2) the pupils provided data of how they found that, by exercising their voice in their artwork, they could reverse the poor self-perception (McCormack, 2002) which had arisen from discrepancy between their achievement level and their potential of which they had been aware prior to my research.

Pupil L said, It means just how I am. The two Rainbows mean that me feelings

backfire. So sometime I am happy and then I can be sad straight again. It is just expressing my feelings.

Pupil C asked, Why are you in the middle of your picture?

Pupil L said, It was just an expression of how I felt. I thought that drawing a picture of me helped me realise how I feel.

Picture 7.1 and discussion of 'Mood Swings' by Pupil L (9 years)
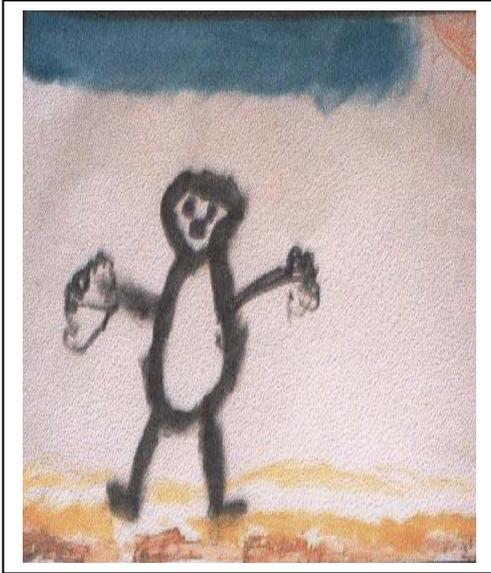
Pupil S said, This is me on the beach.

Pupil G asked, Why are you only black?

Pupil S, Just.

Pupil G asked, Why are you in your own?

Pupil S, I always am.

Pupil L asked, Who helped you with your homework? [seeking to identify a time when he might not be alone]

Pupil S, I try and solve it. I only ask my mam or brother if I am really, really stuck.

Picture 7.2 and discussion of 'Aloneness' by Pupil S (9 years)

The importance of art as a window into pupils' developing thinking will be discussed later in this chapter, but for now I want to question as I did in my journal at that time,

> Can positive self-talk be included in a pedagogical approach for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)?
>
> What are pupils' perceptions of positive self-talk?
>
> Can this be gleaned in an open-ended evaluation approach commensurate with my values and philosophy?
>
> Can positive self-talk contribute to the learning of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)?
>
> Can positive self-talk address low self-esteem in pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)?
>
> (17 September 2003 Journal, Appendix 2.1c)

I am claiming that I gained new knowledge from episodes such as those recounted above in that I now understand the power of self-talk as a motivator to learn for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Based on this new knowledge, I introduced changes in my teaching in order to influence the learning of my pupils. Building on the idea of positive personal reinforcement, I invited them to keep personal diaries in which they wrote or drew pictures about 'Things I can do and how I learned them' (Appendix 2.1f). These diaries, as in the example below,

became a daily form of positive self-talk in that the children recorded a range of achievements and learning strategies. Their achievements were amazing to me as well as to themselves as evidenced in the following extract from my own journal and an audio-taped recording of a pupil's comments on his diary.

Table 7.2: Pupil P's learning journal 7th January 2002 – 18th January 2002

Monday	I can spell ¼ of all reading words
Tuesday	I know how to do desumuls*
Wednesday	I know my scout prayer
Thursday	I know my way round around the pervinls**
Friday	I know safety in the home
Monday	I know how to puck a sliter***
Tuesday	I know how to make noodles
Wednesday	I know half of my 7 times tables
Thursday	I know how to do a solo
Friday	I know how to tipe**** on the PC. I did not know I knew so much

*Notes: * Decimals; ** indecipherable; *** sliotar - a ball used in playing hurling: **** type.*

The concept of positive self-talk in learning can not only act as a form of motivation but also as a booster of self-esteem. As Slavin (2003) suggests, this form of positive reinforcement is an antidote to learned helplessness. The process in which pupils' self-esteem was shown to have improved during my research occurred as follows. Prior to and following my research each pupil completed a commercial self-esteem or self-perception checklist (Coopersmith 1967 and Barker-Lunn 1970), and one composed by a teacher colleague and me (see below). These revealed significant improvements in awareness. Pupils perceived themselves differently and also realised how their peers viewed them. An example of this is in Table 7.3 below where I compare the percentage scores of the 2nd cohort of pupils prior to my research with their percentage scores post research on our teacher-composed checklist of self-awareness in learning. I am presenting these scores as indicators of the pupils' changes in thinking about themselves. The instructions to pupils for completing the checklist were, 'Please tick once on each line'.

Table 7.3: Teacher composed self-esteem and self-perception checklist

LIKE ME			NOT LIKE ME	
Prior	Post		Prior	Post
87 ½	0	I am no good at anything	12 ½	100
0	100	I am good at learning things	100	0

87 ½	50	It is hard for me to do things in front of my class	12 ½	50
62 ½	25	I do not like reading	32 ½	75
25	100	I am good at doing things	75	0
75	50	I like writing	75	50
87 ½	0	School upsets me	12 ½	100
0	87 ½	I tell my friends when things are hard	100	12 ½
32 ½	100	I have lots of friends	62 ½	0
12 ½	50	My friends think I am good at things in school	87 ½	50
12 ½	100	My friends think that I am good at things outside school	87 ½	0
87 ½	25	It takes me longer than my friends to get (understand) new things	12 ½	75

In this process pupils were engaging in self-study action research methods similar to mine. The evaluation of changes in my practice and in theirs continued in the form of short conversations between myself and the pupils that were taped and transcribed in which pupils answered, 'Do you feel you are good at spellings? What else are you good at?' I have evidence of the power of positive self-talk from pupils, class teachers and parents below. This evidence is in written, oral and visual forms (Appendix 2). In the following example a 12-year-old pupil wrote about his improvements as follows:

> Since then I feel more confident. I feel I have improved in English reading. I learn my spellings much quicker with less hassle and I know them forever. I know I have improved in reading, spellings, comprehension, mathematical sentences, tables and learning Irish spellings. I did my entrance exam to secondary school on 9th March. I think I did very well. Here are two spellings tests – note the date – and a project.
>
> (20 March 2002 Pupil correspondence, Appendix 2.2b)

In addition I recorded anecdotal evidence from pupils' class teachers and parents in my reflective journal.

> Class teacher E said, I watched J grow in stature before my very eyes as he spoke to his peers about how he learned.
>
> (05 April 2003 Journal, Appendix 2.1d)

> J's mum says, He's never been so happy. He does his homework by himself. I feel redundant.
>
> (07 June 2003 Journal, Appendix 2.1d)

Further confirmation of increases in self-perception can be seen in the contrast between pupils' artwork at the beginning of my research (see Picture 5.1 above) and their pictures at the end of my research (Pictures 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 below) where they relate new positive feelings, for them, towards their learning.

Pupil C said, I think L likes being in the park.
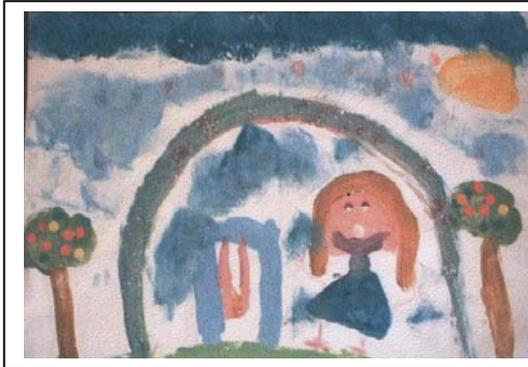
Pupil G asked, Are there apples on the tree?

Pupil N answered, Yes. There are apples on my tree in the garden. I was happy and I liked them. The rainbow is saying that I am happy. School is easier and I'm happy now

Picture 7.3 and discussion of 'School is easier' by Pupil N (aged 9 years)

Pupil S said, There is a blue sky. I am playing hurling.

Pupil H asked, What kind of mood are you in?

Pupil S answered, Happy. There are nets. I find difficulties in English spellings so that's why I want to learn sport

Picture 7.4 and discussion of 'I am happy' by Pupil S

Picture 7.5 'Before and After' by Pupil M (aged 12 years)

The contrasts in the picture above, between Pupil M's cry for help as he shelters from an electric thunder storm and his joyful arm-waving when he stands on top of the world, are visual representations of dramatic changes in Pupil M before and after my research.

Introducing a form of voice that was appropriate for my pupils highlighted two significant issues around identity, both for the children participating in my research and myself. Pupils, rather than being disabled by the learning environment in which they were placed, were in fact enabled by it. The changes I made in my practice provided an educational model of ability rather than an educational model of disability as described by Ware (2003). Rather than being learning disabled by the education system the pupils in my research had been given opportunities, through various forms of voice in art and dialogue, to construct their own identities as able learners. In this way 'the label [of learning disability (dyslexia)] was no longer conflated with the labeled' (Hudak and Kiln 2001, p.6). I claim that the changes in my pedagogy had achieved in practice, within a framework of social justice and care, what Young advocated at an abstract level, which was,

> conditions for all persons to learn and use satisfying and expansive
> skills in socially recognised settings and enable then to play and
> communicate with others or express their feelings and perspectives on
> social life in contexts where others can listen.'
>
> (Young 2000, p.184)

Significantly, I had come to a new understanding that my identity does not only centre on me. Instead I have come to the view that identity is, as Derrida (1988) proposes, about personal engagement with the social formations of the culture and contexts in which I live. I have changed my practice especially in my relationships with my pupils within the culture and contexts of my work in a way that is in keeping with the epistemological stance that I have explained in this thesis, where I position knowledge as personal yet created in relationship with others. I have changed my practice according to new insights from the children participating in my research. I have therefore demonstrated that my pedagogy is not about the management of knowledge transfer but I have travelled through the mirror, which I referred to in Chapter Five, questioning and checking my new understandings

against the pupils who remain outside the mirror, thus coming to an understanding of myself and my thinking with and in relation with my pupils. I have realised that my identity as a teacher, my individual sense of being (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.225), is influenced by my pupils.

(b) Reflection

The pupils and I together are the fifth transformational tidal wave of influence in my research. Together we have contributed to our understandings about what dyslexia means to those who have it. We have also contributed to a process to enhance pupils' self-perception. Our contributions can be seen as countering the injustices that we experienced prior to my research. Our contributions are a practical form of justice. Reflection was a major part of the process that has brought us to this contributive form of social justice.

I now explain how journaling provided opportunities in my research for reflection and metacognition, for both my pupils and myself

~Journaling as a process of learning for the pupils in this research
Through journaling, as I described in Part Three, I claim that I personally came to appreciate the value of asking how others with specific learning disability (dyslexia) learn. I encouraged my pupils to engage in a similar form of journaling to mine. The content and implications of my pupils' individual journals demonstrated the range of their own new learning, as in the two examples that follow:

> I called my last diary 'Things I Can Do'. This year I'm calling it
> 'Things I Can Do and How I Learned Them'.
>
> (15 January 2004 Pupil journal, Appendix 2.1g)

Pupils' journal writing provided a form of positive self-talk as well as a record of learning over a sustained period. As well as forming data for my research these journals became personal records of what my pupils themselves value as their learning for the year. Their journals also listed personal task-specific learning strategies as in the following example:

> I learned my ballet steps by sitting and watching for a long time. The others do it but I just watch. Then at the end I just stand up and I can do it. But if I try to do it at the beginning with the others I just can't remember it all.

<div align="center">(14 March 2002 Pupil journal, Appendix 2.1e)</div>

The learning strategies listed by my pupils included traditional ones of learning from modelling, rote learning, multisensory and co-operative learning (Slavin 2003). These strategies were task-specific in that each pupil chose strategies that they found appropriate for specific learning tasks. In their journals the pupils have engaged in positive self-talk, identified learning strategies and their transferability to their other learning needs. These journals therefore provide evidence of the metacognitive awareness of the pupils, in that the pupils are writing about what they know and how they come to know it.

I now discuss my own perspective on journaling with examples of how it provided data about changes in my practice and philosophical understandings.

Opening my journal to public scrutiny provided evidence of my own metacognition in terms of my developing thinking. In the following quotations I show my questioning of my role as I observed my children experiment with various learning strategies. Here is an example.

> I was called out of the room. The pupils continued discussing their next learning targets. Wow, they have continued learning without me. The tape-recording of their discussions, in particular the section after I had left the room, made me consider if I was dispensable.

<div align="center">(30 March 2002 Journal, Appendix 2.1b)</div>

I was questioning if my changes in practice had empowered pupils to learn in their own ways and also questioning if pupils had now the competence to transfer their learning to other situations. The quotation above demonstrates how I used journaling to reflect 'on action and in action' as described by Schön (1995, p.27) during my research project. To move beyond anecdotal jottings of incidents and actions recorded by me in a diary, I adapted the *Intensive Journal* method of Progoff (1983).

<div align="center">194</div>

It provided a format and process that covered the multiple aspects of my work within the boundaries of one journal. Journaling for me became exactly as McNiff and Whitehead (2002) say:

> You can document how your own perceptions changed over time and show how you used new learning to make better sense of the situations.

<div align="right">(McNiff and Whitehead 2002, p.94)</div>

The following example demonstrates my developing understanding of my role as a teacher in what was a new form of learning and teaching for me. I became aware that my journal provided data on how I was able to monitor my practice in order to change and move forward. An example of this was my reflections and the actions that followed one journal entry.

Table 7.4: My Journaling

Date	Log	Dialogue	Reflection	Meaning
14 May 2003	W has his head on the table when he writes.	How can he write like this? Is he the only one who does this? No. Some others in his class do it.	How can I check if this is common to other pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)? Ask him. He says the letters jump less when he is close to the page.	Why didn't I think of asking W in the first place? His reason ties in with some of the specific learning disability (dyslexia) literature. In future talk to the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) more.
	W's legs are twisted around the chair legs.	Is this a balance thing? Do others do this?	I will make a checklist of actions that Pupil W does. I will observe classes from 2nd to 5th as they write and tick if pupils without specific learning disability (dyslexia) pupils have similar movements.	W and other pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) toe tapped and did quick knee shaking. These movements seemed to help their concentration rather than decrease it. So I need to encourage rather than discourage it.

	W's books always seem to be at awkward angles	Does he realise what he is doing?	Is this related to lateral preferences? I will check if he sees, hears, catches and kicks with his right side, left side or both.	W does have mixed laterality. So do B, J and S. [pupils who participated] and all play in goals. They have difficulty running backwards and catching balls from different sides. Yet they are very good in goals.

I noted the variety of movements pupils make when they were sitting quietly writing or reading alone. Together the pupils and I built up a photographic record (Appendix 2.4f) of them at work. The sample below from this record shows a pupil with legs twisted around chair legs to steady himself as he wrote.
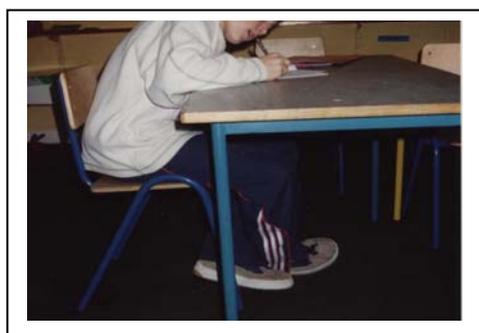
Picture 7.6: Showing a pupil's position when writing

I developed ideas about the pupils' toe tapping, quick knee-shaking and other such movements, which could be connected to co-existing difficulties of Attention Deficit Disorder. I found that the practical relevance of my conclusions were that both the children and I gained a new understanding that their movements, which may have seemed to be unusual, individual and disruptive movements were in fact common and helpful to pupils' concentration while they worked.

I found that journaling could be conceptualised as a metacognitive activity in which I became aware of my new learning about the practice and the philosophy behind it. Through journaling I reflected on my pedagogical approaches. I presented my understanding of my own teaching methods and their relationship to the work of well-known educational theorists, such as Skinner (1954), Thorndyke (1917), Piaget (1970, 1971 and 1977) and Vygotsky (1978 and 1986), at the 14th International

Special Education Conference (McDonagh, 2002). In my presentation I produced evidence to show developments in my teaching from a behaviourist model, to a constructivist model, and finally towards a form of teaching that showed my commitment to the social creation of knowledge. Through that process I have gained an in-depth understanding of how I position myself in terms of ideas of knowledge generation. In 2002 I had begun to place myself as a mediator of my children's knowledge, coaxing them through the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978 and 1986). Through further reflection I have since reconceptualised my role as a mediator. As one of my validation group said,

> You are doing more than that. You are allowing the children to be the mediators of their own knowledge as well. So not only are you mediating but the children are also mediating.

<div align="center">(12 July 2004 Validation meeting record, Appendix 2.5d)</div>

I came to realise, with the help of my validation group, that I was engaged in a form of developmental inter-relational activity in that my new theory of practice would not have happened without my activities or without the activities of my pupils either. Therefore there was a reflexive form of parallel knowledge generation – a mirroring – going on in my research or as McNiff and Whitehead (2006, p.32-33) term it, a generative transformational process in which I was creating new and more refined forms of knowledge.

I have come to recognise that I have adopted a new perspective that appears to be contrary to traditional perceptions. I have come to understand that journaling is a powerful process for positive reinforcement and self-talk for me as a teacher. This understanding is beneficial because, like many other teachers, I felt marginalised because knowledge about pedagogy was presented in a top-down approach with third level institutions being the arbiters of what constitutes best practice and valid theories of learning (McDonagh 2004b). Ideas around marginalisation drew me again towards developing a living theory of learning to teach for social justice. In drawing comparisons between my own learning experiences and the experiences of my pupils, I am conscious that I too am part of my living practical theory of contributive justice. I too am contributing to my own living theory of justice, grounded in my practice, to address the marginalisation that I had felt.

I claim to now understand how my personal and professional identities are interconnected as I explained in the metaphor of the 'waves' and in the previous section on positive self-talk. Like Young (2000), I believe that identity is a complex interweaving network of relationships in which individuals are engaged. The dialogical form of logic and knowledge creation that I have engaged with is a logic of creation that positions identity as a complex interweaving network of relationships between participants.

7.4   Articulating and explaining my emergent living theory of contributive social justice

My growing awareness and metacognitive reflection around my practice led me to revisit my understanding of my commitment to social justice. At the beginning of my research, social justice, for me, meant the opposite of injustice and a reaction to an apparent injustice. As I described in Part One, bright children with obvious talents (which were not necessarily academic talents) were labelled as 'learning disabled', as a condition for accessing tuition for their academic difficulties. I came to see this situation as unjust. This understanding has been informed by changes in my practice, detailed in the section above. These changes occurred because of the form of self-study action research I had chosen. My research is about learning for, with and from pupils (McDonagh 2003). My new understanding of justice is from a tradition of research work that values voice and personal experience (Griffiths 2003; Sullivan 2004; Roche 2003). That tradition has shifted the focus from theorising about justice (Rawls 1971and 1999; Kant 1965; Hume 1740/1962) towards a living form of social justice with and for justice (Dunkwu and Griffiths 2002). My research resonates with what Griffiths (2003) calls 'practical philosophy' because it engages with the conditions of all people regardless of their academic or social positioning. It is philosophy 'as, with and for' (Griffiths 2003, p.21) rather than a philosophy 'about' and 'applied to'.

In this section I examine conceptual issues around social justice and compare my living practical theory of learning to teach for social justice to that of Griffiths (2003). Reading Griffiths's *Action for Social Justice in Education* (2003) helped me

shape and articulate my theory of learning to teach for social justice. In the remainder of this chapter I will refer to her model for social justice in education (Figure 7.1 below), as I describe, explain and analyse the links between my findings and my practical living theory of contributive social justice. Griffiths's cyclical approach as in Figure 7.1 is analogous to the cyclical nature of my learning in my research.
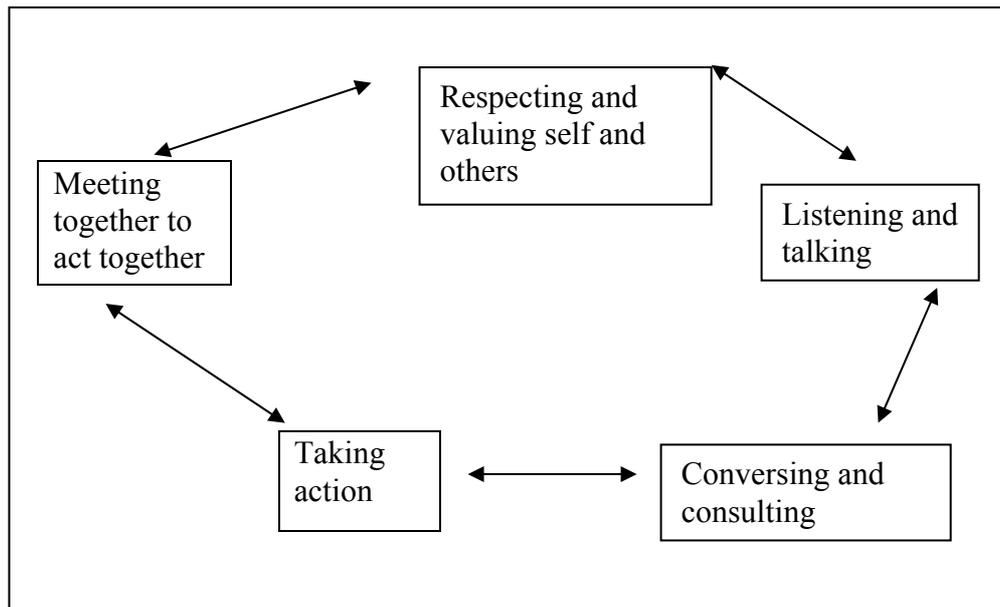
Figure 7.1: A model for social justice in education (Griffiths 2003, p.60)

Griffiths's (2003) work is about others' actions and she takes the view that social justice is a verb – constantly under revision and never resolved (Griffiths 2003, p.55). She states that the good for each person both affects and depends on the good of all. In practice she envisages this idea, as working in small face-to-face groups. In this way she includes 'little stories' and 'grand narratives', showing how practical social justice is about localised issues as well as large scale theorising about them. Her theory of social justice involves both 'recognition' and 'redistribution' whereas the terms that have arisen in my research are 'awareness' and 'contribution'. I believe that my pupils and I engaged with all these features (as in Table 7.5 below) in order to improve their learning and my learning experiences.

Table 7.5: Linking my research practices to Griffiths's (2003) theory of practical social justice.

In my research, data to support my theory of social justice is found in	Griffiths's theory of social justice includes
Discussions at weekly meetings of groups of up to eight pupils. The pupils were not from the same classes and comprised boys and girls aged 9–12 years (see my research design Chapter Six)	small face-to-face groups.
Background injustice issues (Chapter Three) are shown to be addressed by reflective journals about new learning in my research design (Chapter Six); my journal (Appendix 2.1a-d) and pupils' journals (Appendix 2.1e-g)	'little stories' showing how practical social justice is about localised issues
Background injustices in the system of educating pupils with specific learning disability (see the contextualisation of my research in Part Two and its significance in Part Five).	'grand narratives' showing how practical social justice is about localised issues
New learning for myself and my pupils in Part 4.	large scale theorising about them
In Chapter Eight changes in learning situations and strategies were generated through interactions Pupil to pupil; Pupil to teacher; Me to pupils; Pupils to me. The expansion of recognition and redistribution to wider school community is explained in Chapters 10 and 11.	'recognition' and 'redistribution'
Pupils learned about different ways to learn spellings individually and in groups and so all improved their learning (Chapter Eight). Improved ways of learning for pupils improved my understanding of teaching and my teaching of them (Chapter Nine).	good for each person both affects and depends on the good of all

Table 7.5 gives a framework of practice but there are no references in it to personal or epistemological values. I have spoken in this chapter of how I came to recognise my own learning and so in the remainder of this chapter I will explain how I came to a contributive theory of social justice from within my practice.

I have demonstrated how my new form of pedagogy enabled my pupils to make explicit the latent fund of personal knowledge they have about the effects of specific learning disability (dyslexia). As part of this process I have also made my own learning explicit in my teaching. This is innovative and contrary to the dominant form in educational research, which, as Griffiths (2003) highlights, assumes the idea of working from propositional theory. She speaks of 'theory into evidence into theory into action' (p.47) where researchers begin by explaining theoretical frameworks and end with practical outcomes. I have however worked in a form where experience and action move into reflection, then into action, and then further reflection with many of these activities also happening simultaneously. In self-study action research I found that actions are informed by, and inform, lived experience.

My developing living theory of learning to teach for social justice relates to the ideas of Griffiths (2003) when she says,

> The when, from whom, how and what of learning remains
> unpredictably mysterious and intertwined with human
> relationships…No wonder learning escapes systems and fool proof
> methods.

<div align="right">(Griffiths 2003, p.18)</div>

I found that individual awareness of *what and how* learning occurred in my practice involved an intertwined process of peer relationships and discussions of others' learning strategies. I perceive my research as a search that will never finish. This ongoing search resonates with Plato's search for explanations of his world.

> He devoted his life's work to this search but he also slowly discovered
> and continually warned by his own example, that it was a serious
> illusion to think that any human could arrive at a final goal.

<div align="right">(Hogan 2001 cited in Griffiths 2003, p.53)</div>

The unfinished character of learning itself, as I analysed it in my research, was pinpointed by my validation group when they said about my evidence,

P said: So it's about the uniqueness of the individual, their capacity for freedom of choice, and change.

M said: Change. On-going learning. Ability for on-going learning and change.

(November 2003 Taped conversation and transcript, original in Appendix 2.5g)

I was however experiencing difficulties in making links between living forms of theory and a distributive form of justice. Within a distributive form of justice I perceive justice to be conceptualised as an object. The concept of a distributive form of justice can be best understood from a propositional perspective. Instead my changing practice and my reflections on it centred on my own living perspective. These two perspectives could not be reconciled within my research. The idea of distributive justice is a concept in which justice is distributed equally. This form of abstract conceptualisation is not commensurate with my own epistemological stance, which is grounded in my ontological values. The living theory of learning to teach for social justice that I developed in my practice offers openness for all to contribute according to their capabilities. Their contribution can lead to a more just situation for themselves and others. The prerequisites for this theory are providing first the freedom for the individual to gain confidence in his or her own abilities; and second the freedom for reflection and metacognition. The living practical theory of justice that I am claiming to have generated has grown from within my practice. I believe that contributive justice is participative. It is based in a dialogical form of logic that encourages imagination and creativity (Whitehead 1976). The practical living theory of learning to teach for social justice that I am claiming to have generated involves contribution rather than distribution.

In this chapter I have shown how I created a more just situation for myself and for my children with specific learning disability. I experienced learned helplessness prior to this research around how best to improve my own and my pupils' learning. I have produced evidence of my own learning around the ways in which my pupils learn. I have analysed how my pupils can be shown as able learners, each with his/her own learning style and capacities. I reversed the normative situation where those children are often marginalised through not having their needs met within the

educational system, or through being dismissed as disabled learners. I found that pupils with specific learning disability had previously experienced learned helplessness and had been perceived by teachers as 'lazy'. The evidence in this chapter shows how I facilitated a new form of communication and voice for my pupils through their paintings. This chapter shows how I have found a voice for my pupils and myself.

The concept of voice has been a key feature in my research. The role of children's voice has been established by The National Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland 2000), which made important strides in allowing children to express their opinions. Shevlin and Rose (2003) suggest that 'Such legislation has placed an onus on professionals to give greater consideration to pupils' voice' (Shevlin and Rose 2003, p.8). The importance of pupil voice in my research can be seen in the following quotation from a conference on Critical Debates in Action Research (McDonagh 2003) in which a researcher commented on my facilitation of the voices of my pupils:

> The combination of the children's voices and your reflections on their learning opened the doors of the classroom and pushed out the walls – a way for other educators like myself to *be* in your classroom and learn from the lived experiences. The very simple yet multilayered idea of asking pupils themselves how they learn, and the realisation that these children have a very clear sense of the ways that work for them struck me very forcibly.

(22 June 2003 Correspondence Appendix 2.5f)

I claim to have made space for the voices of those normally silent to be heard. These voices tell stories of which I and other educators may not be aware. This occurred because self-questioning is at the centre of my classroom practice and my research methods. I have highlighted the need for community enquiry in 'aware' reflection in order to understand my own thinking and knowledge generation – a feature that tends not to be present in traditional forms of educational research. For me the voice of the researcher has to be self-questioning – 'the reflexive principle' (Winter 2002, p.151). This idea of self-questioning is equally central in metacognition. Winter reminds us, however, that each voice has to 'question itself in relation to the other voices as part of the research work of moving forwards the

debates between voices' (Winter 2002, p.152). The dialectical principle, he argues, allows for a plurality and variety of voice, which adds to the transformative potential of the research.

In this chapter I am claiming that rather than adopt a traditional propositional conceptualisation of justice, for example that of Rawls (1971 and 1999), I have generated a living theory of contributive justice, as part of learning to teach for social justice, that is informed by ideas to do with people's capacity to think for themselves and negotiate their own ways of learning. I have shown that justice in education is a live concept that can be understood in relation to people's practices by providing opportunities for the children who participated in my research to become aware of and investigate their own learning successes and transfer their new understandings to other situations. For me, ensuring social justice involved becoming aware of and investigating my ways of teaching. Furthermore, by seeking accreditation for the theorising of my practice in this PhD thesis, I can be seen as opening opportunities for others to generate their living theories, which could in turn form a knowledge base for the teaching profession (Snow 2001). For both my pupils and myself justice means transforming our positions of marginalisation within the education system.

I claim to have developed an emancipatory form of practice that took into account the practical learning of both teacher and pupils. To do so I became involved in new ways of thinking and theorising that celebrate my own capacity for knowledge creation, a form of social justice in learning, in that it recognised our individual capacities to learn and think critically. These ideas are grounded in my existing values around freedom and the capacity of all to be knowledge creators. My dialogical research approach permitted all participants to be valued and take a full part in the research process, thereby creating our own answers and generating our own living theories.

I claim to have maintained equilibrium of power between those participating in my research and myself, which Noddings (2002) suggests could be problematic when working within values of care. I have also maintained open-endedness in my practice and theorising in the face of the dominance of propositional forms of theory, and in

doing so have demonstrated that the values, which underpin my research, inform the logic in which it is grounded.

I am moving towards the generation of a living theory of social justice, which is based in how one lives one's life. This has some similarities with the Platonic stance of developing theory from the questions one asks about the world in which one lives. I am living my theory and communicating my theory in the ways I live. My theory is transformational. It is grounded in an open-ended form of questioning, grounded in the human capacity for learning and in particular my own capacity for learning and on-going learning. Personal theories of learning and practice 'transform continuously into each other' (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, p.255). This continuous rolling fluidity is reminiscent of the metaphorical fifth wave, which incorporated the strongest influences in my research, namely my pupils and myself.

7.5   The living standards by which I judge my findings

I now want to show that the standards by which I judge my research are living in my practice. To do so I have placed photos below of my pupils presenting their reports in which they explain dyslexia to themselves and others. The pictures were taken from a video, made by a class teacher L, when a cohort of pupils who participated in my research presented their reports on 'Explaining dyslexia to myself and others' to teacher L's class. When the video was made by the class teacher, a resource teacher, a student teacher, the school Principal, thirty-five pupils aged (nine to ten years), eight pupils who were members of one cohort of my research participants (aged nine to twelve years) and myself were all in the classroom.

.

Pupil L reads from her report to pupils in a mainstream class other than her own class. Pupils appear to be engrossed in her report.

Picture 7.7: Presenting reports to a class
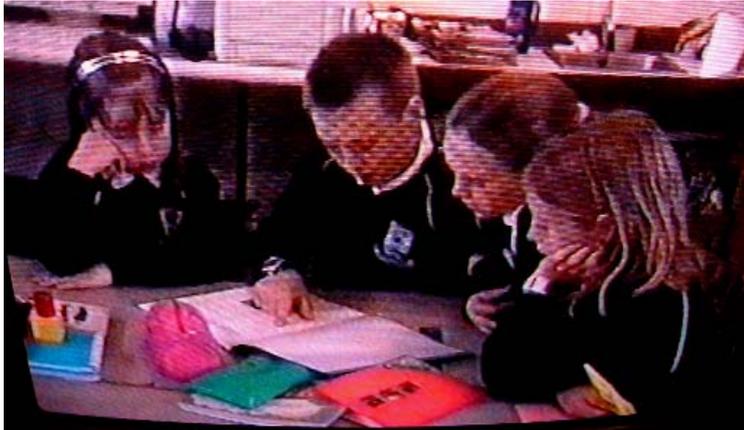
Pupil G is sharing his report 'Explaining my learning difficulties to myself and others' to pupils in a mainstream class that was not his own class.

Picture 7.8: Sharing reports with a mainstream class

In picture 7.9 pupils question Pupil G on his report.

Picture 7.9: Peer critique of reports

Pupil S is sharing her report 'Explaining dyslexia to myself and others' with pupils in a mainstream class that was not her own class. School Principal and a student teacher (standing) also appear to be engrossed in her report.

Picture 7.10: Sharing reports with the wider school community

Pupil H smiles broadly as she skips back to her seat. Applause from me, the school Principal and all in the classroom rings in her ears. She had stood in front of the class and answered their questions.

Picture 7.11: Having new learning valued

I had provided my pupils with opportunities to research their own understanding of specific learning disability (dyslexia). They had presented their reports to their peers and teachers. The pictures above show how my pupils validated their claims to new knowledge and understanding about dyslexia and about awareness of their capability to learn.

At this point I offer an explanation of how my values came to act as my living standards of judgement. Both I as a teacher and the pupils who participated in my research had freedom to voice our own ways of knowing within education systems that values objective knowledge. I had shown compassion in recognising the learned helplessness of my pupils and myself and we had learned from and with each other. We continued our inclusive ways of learning and sharing our new knowledge and understanding of dyslexia into the other classrooms of our school. In doing so we achieved a form of justice to counter the marginalisation caused by existing provision and dominant propositional theory. I had changed my practice to one of greater equity based on my new learning from my pupils' research and my research. In compiling these reports my pupils and I demonstrated a form of human dignity where we came to value our personal ways of learning as well as learning with others. What was happening in the classroom in the pictures above was part of my new epistemology of practice where knowledge was transferred in oral and collaborative ways

The data throughout this chapter is derived from actions, which acknowledge the uniqueness of my individual pupils and their capacity to contribute to learning and change. These actions were grounded in the Christian values that I hold. I have already articulated these values in tables 3.2 and 5.1. When I wrote about addressing my own learned helplessness in a significantly different way to those teachers in the research of Kerr (2001), I demonstrated compassion in that I recognised my needs in my pupils and my pupils' needs in me. By adopting an internal locus of control I have confirmed my belief in self-efficacy, by which I mean a belief that one's behaviour can make a difference and a belief in the capacity of the individual. This was a demonstration of my commitment to human dignity by recognising the capacity of others and by showing care for each and every individual I encountered.

My values around justice were shown as I was developing my living theory of learning to teach for social justice. I was not only speaking but also acting in ways that set about correcting conditions of learned helplessness and in doing so actualised the ideas around the equality of humans – both pupils and teachers. In doing so I demonstrated my respect for the capabilities of all my pupils. My value of wholeness can be seen in my acceptance and commitment to the reconciliation of a plurality of approaches to teaching and learning, mindful of the need to recognise body, spirit and mind of all involved in my research.

There is evidence of my value of service in my commitment towards living my values in the changes I have brought about in my practice. The listening, talking and communicating with my pupils, as I have described in this chapter, about how they understood specific learning disability (dyslexia) was based in my belief in equality. In promoting positive self-talk and reflection as antidotes to learned helplessness I provided opportunities for a form of freedom which acknowledged a capacity for self determination in thought, speech and action for the good of myself and my pupils. The following quotation provides evidence of the change in my own learned helplessness.

> You spoke of a different learning experience of an older sibling with the same disability as a younger sibling and the more individualised treatment of the younger sibling through your improvement of your practice. Now you speak of no longer feeling a helplessness in your practice because you are creating a more just system of education in your classroom based on your belief in your capability and the children's capability to learn.
>
> (21 November 2004 Transcript of validation meeting, original in data archive Appendix 2.5d)

The significance of the living form of theory that I am developing is that I have brought into life the aspirations of the rhetoric of The Task Force Report on Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002b) and Understanding Dyslexia (Ireland, Department of Education and Science and Northern Ireland, Department of Education 2004). The validation of my living theory of justice lies in evidence of these values being lived out in my practice as both a teacher and researcher. In this chapter I have demonstrated in practical ways the values on which I base my understanding of justice – values around freedom, respect, trust and service – that redress and transform the injustices described in the background to my research.

7.6   Summary

I have spoken about how I learned to overcome my learned helplessness, and enable my pupils to do the same. I have challenged dominant theories in the literature about how to deal with learned helplessness. I have highlighted that, for sustainable learning to occur, people need to learn for themselves how to improve the quality of their own lives, rather than have someone intervene on their behalf, which is what the dominant literatures suggest.

In practical terms I have shown that both I, as a teacher, and children with specific learning disability, were able learners. I provided the children in my research with opportunities to use positive self-talk as an antidote to the demotivating influences of learned helplessness. By providing opportunities for learning through encouraging voice – as in my children's artwork – I have reconceptualised my practice and highlighted what I am doing differently, as I recalled when I wrote in my journal:

> I am upside-downing things. Teachers are traditionally seen as the leaders in classroom knowledge not the children. This is upside downing it. I am generating theory as practice and that is also upside down.

> (10 May 2003 Journal, original in data archive, Appendix 2.1c)

This quotation incorporates the image of the turbulent, unsettling metaphorical fifth wave of influence on my research, which helped me to find strategies to transform negative aspects of my research context into life-affirming situations for both my pupils and myself. Within this fifth wave both the pupils and I have built on the power base of our strengths and created a new reality, where my practice is centred on a pedagogy of liberation, which is grounded in my commitments to change and the valuing of others.

CHAPTER EIGHT: The potential significance of my living theory of learning to teach for social justice

8.1   Introduction

In the previous chapter I showed how my living theory of learning to teach for justice was grounded in my practice; a practice that is about helping pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to find ways to avoid being disabled by written words within their school contexts. My living theory of learning to teach for social justice in relation to pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) required changes in my practice. I now want to explain why these changes happened and their potential significance. Change in how one teaches comes, I believe, from new personal knowledge and the practice of teaching itself rather than from propositional theory or commercially produced 'How-to-teach-it' programmes. So, in this chapter I want to explain what it was that aided me in changing my practice towards one that was more socially just, and indicate its potential significance.

My personal new learning is at the core of the changes that I have made. This process of change was influenced by my pupils' own action research into how they learned spellings. I reflected on their research, related it to the literature and found that their new learning influenced my learning. Their action research was happening alongside and as part of my own action research. We all developed living theories from studying our practices. I can describe and analyse our findings in terms of (a) organisational issues around pupils' learning and my teaching of those with specific learning disability; (b) conceptual issues around understandings of learning theories; (c) understandings of what counts as educational knowledge.

In this chapter I am showing the formation of collaborative partnerships in education, where my children and I worked in an atmosphere of mutual respect; learning from and about each other while endeavouring to overcome obstacles within school structures in terms of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. The changes that have occurred in my practice are not only practical actions but also reflect changes in my thinking. These changes in my thinking are related to my own new learning, which can be seen as in relationship with pupils' learning. The

influence of their learning on my learning has convinced me that all individuals, given the opportunity, can make important contributions to new understandings of teaching and learning. The validity of my claim that these changes in my own practice influenced the changes in the children's practice was tested at several levels – in the classroom, in conference presentations and research seminars.

There are two main sections in this chapter. They comprise account of (1) how pupils engaged in action research projects alongside mine, and (2) how I engaged in action research projects alongside the pupils. In each section I describe the action research, reflect on it, then analyse my new learning from these reflections and how it influenced my practice. There were four recurring key themes within my new learning:

1. First, I developed an understanding of the relationship between my pupils' learning and my own learning. We engaged in a dialogue of equality when we worked together to tease out our understandings of specific learning disability (dyslexia). During that time the pupils and I brought new personal knowledge and understandings to the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia), which had not been previously researched in this way.

2. Our co-construction of new ideas can be seen as a valuing of the person. I provided pupils with the opportunity to be free to realise and exercise their value and knowledge.

3. I critiqued my own stance in relation to my pedagogies. I offered an interpersonal form of teaching that is different from the dominant didactic practices of teaching children with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

4. Throughout my learning process I have taken into account my specific ontological and epistemological values. In doing so I have found ways to transform the marginalisation in dominant school provision of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) through the imposition of traditional forms of theory and learning on those pupils. I have moved towards a more just from of practice, in which all talents are valued and all may legitimately make their contributions.

8.2   Pupils engaged in action research projects alongside mine

This section is about how my new ways of teaching involved my children to a greater extent in their own learning than before. In doing so, I demonstrate again a shift from the perspective that learning theories can be applied to practice. From this perspective, teaching is understood as training in skills to be practised, where the teacher is a trainer and pupils are objects to be trained. I organise my text to show the actions that I took, and the learning that resulted from the action. The episodes I outline here can be understood as cycles of action-reflection.

~Action-reflection cycle one: 'How I learn spellings'
I describe how my children became personally aware of how they learn. Each child answered the question, 'How do I learn spellings?' during one-to-one sessions with me. I encouraged them to speak but did not suggest any methods. Their answers were tape-recorded. The table below shows the various ways in which the first cohort of eight children, aged 11 to 12 years, learned spellings and in the second column I relate their own words to different learning strategies. In answering my question, 'How do you learn spellings?' the children indicated the inappropriateness of a one-size-fits-all approach. The table below shows not only that the range of strategies corresponds to the number of children, but also that there was no replication of strategies.

Table 8.1: Methods of learning spellings identified by children compared with learning strategies (originals in data archive see Appendices 2.4a and 8.10)

The children said, I learned spellings by	Learning style/strategy
the sounds of the words	Auditory
trying to find how many bits. I first count how many vowel sounds are in it.	Visual
rhyming the words	Phonemic Awareness
breaking the words up	Syllabification
going one bit after another	Sequencing
learning them off by heart	Rote learning
looking at it three times and saying it three times, then writing it three times	Multisensory approach

The activity above was repeated by the second cohort of eight children, aged 9 to 10 years and by the third cohort of children, aged 7 to 8 years. The same question was posed by myself in the former case and by another resource teacher in the case of the latter. Some of the additional strategies mentioned by these groups are in Table 8.2. They demonstrate combinations of strategies.

Table 8.2: Additional methods of learning spellings identified by children compared with learning strategies (originals in data archive – see Appendices 2.4a and 2.10)

The children said, I learned spellings by	Learning style
Saying, no sing-songing, the letters out loud.	Auditory
Seeing it written on the ceiling.	Visualisation
Saying the bits I know and go for the other bits.	Visual and Phonemic Awareness
Looking at the beginning and then at the end. They're easy. And then I look for the middle bits and learn them.	Syllabification combining visual and auditory
I start with the first bit, then the end bit, then I put in the middle.	Sequencing
I keep saying them over and over.	Rote learning
I write the letters big with my marker and say the sounds at the same time. I write them in the sand and on the board, then I write them with my eyes shut. After that I know them.	Multisensory approach

I found that my children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) had individual ways of learning spellings. I used the strategy of recording pupils' ideas on other occasions to help the children find out if they had individual ways of learning other problematic areas for them – for example how they attacked unknown words and how they tried to understand unfamiliar texts. The significance of these two areas will be discussed later in this chapter. This data was gathered in ways that took into account pupils' difficulties in reading and writing. By tape recording their comments I demonstrated my respect for individual pupils in that I found an oral method for them to give information that highlighted their capabilities rather than their difficulties. I will explain in the next section how this provided evidence that the pupils learned in a variety of ways; in fact they used most of the strategies commonly used for learning spellings (Westwood 2003, p.166-180)

Reflection on cycle one

Some of my children had scored up to 5 years and 4 months below their chronological age in spellings. Children's poor scores on standardised spelling tests are perceived as symptomatic of long-term memory difficulties (Snowling 2000), which are common to many who have dyslexia. I am not arguing the merits of testing spellings outside the context of continuous writing. I am focusing on spelling tests because the testing of words in isolation is currently used in many classrooms as an indicator of spelling ability. Within individualised resource teaching the discrepancy between the children's achievement level and potential becomes particularly apparent through comparisons between their oral and written work, in particular how they spell. When such discrepancies become obvious to the children themselves, at the senior primary level, poor self-perception (McCormack 2002) and features of learned helplessness could also become obvious. Therefore my investigation of the learning of spellings for children with specific learning disability is not only relevant to academic advancement but also has importance for pupils' self-image and self-esteem.

My new learning from cycle one

The significant new learning for me in this part of my research was that children with specific learning disability, in choosing their individual styles and strategies, demonstrated their metacognitive awareness of how they learned.

In terms of school structures and the teaching of spellings, current strategies used to aid the learning of spellings by children with specific learning disability can be identified in terms of three forms of differentiation:

- o Setting spellings at a lower level than those of the mainstream class.
- o Limiting spellings to essential spelling lists, for example social sight words and the 100 most commonly written words.
- o Teaching strategies for learning spellings.

The first two approaches present differentiation in terms of content only. In both approaches teachers' lowering of their expectations of their pupils' ability to learn has important overtones for pupils' self-esteem. It affects a child's 'perception of his/her abilities, attitudes and values' (Slavin 2003, p.82) and hence his/her self-

esteem, which is governed by values 'that each of us places on our own characteristics and behaviours' (Slavin 2003, p.82). In the second approach, teachers limit pupils' field of learning. However when subsequent low scores on spellings tests occur children can develop an expectation of failure. In this way learned helplessness is introduced. The third form of differentiation engages with processes of learning. Yet teachers often control children's ways of learning within a behaviouristic approach where the teacher decides how spellings are to be learned, teaches them and rewards the pupil when the pupil demonstrates what has been learned. This approach ignores valuable data about children's learning strengths available from the psychological testing required by the Department of Education and Science to diagnose specific learning disability (dyslexia). For example the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children III (Wechsler 1992) identifies specific skills, which could be tapped to aid the learning of spellings, such as perceptual organisational or processing speed skills.

By contrast I encouraged children to voice their personal strategies and styles with the question, 'How do you learn spellings?' Considering the children's knowledge of their learning and how they learn I began to consider conceptual issues around theories of learning.

Conceptual issues around theories of learning

Tables 8.1 and 8.2 above point to the fact that the pupils in my research had articulated individualised strategies for learning spellings with a limited overlap of strategies. This demonstrated the personalised nature of my children's ways of learning. These ways were not significantly different from the variety of strategies named in current literature for children without specific learning disability (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999b).

The achievements of the children in my research, however, challenged the description of them in normative discourses as 'learning disabled'. They had shown themselves capable of articulating their tacit learning strategies. This is an important finding given that the learning of spellings is a significant feature of specific learning difficulties (dyslexia).

> The dyslexic student has great difficulty building a vocabulary of
> words recognised by sight.

<div align="right">(Westwood 2003, p.8)</div>

The causes of this difficulty, says Westwood (2003), as it relates to spellings, are poor phonological awareness (that is ability to segment and blend sounds) and a naming speed deficiency in which the child cannot retrieve words, syllables or letter sounds quickly from his or her long-term memory. Westwood's advice for teaching spellings is as follows:

> Dyslexic students are often found to be particularly weak in
> phonological skills and may rely too heavily on faulty visual memory
> for recall of letter patterns. Training them in phonemic awareness and
> the application of basic phonic knowledge appears to have a positive
> effect on spelling ability.

<div align="right">(Westwood 2003, p.172)</div>

Therefore Westwood advocates a 'training' or behaviouristic approach to teaching and claims only that it 'appears' to improve the learning. I agree with him that his advised approach can only appear to have results because the form of research that he is reporting deals only with findings that are observable by an outsider. I have explained at the beginning of this chapter how such a methodology gives limited success. So I am making the point that the pupils in my research have articulated individual ways of spellings in ways that have not been recorded in research programmes, such as that of Westwood (2003, p.166-180). I am also claiming that I have provided pupils with specific learning disability the freedom to express their ways of learning, and this has enabled them to generate their own new knowledge and develop their capacity to resolve their problems for themselves.

In my research I have emphasised the children's capacity to develop their own awareness of how they learn – they have developed their capacity for metacognition. By metacognition I mean 'knowledge about one's own learning and how one learns' (Slavin 2003, p.203). In recent years there has been a shift from the theoretical to the practical relevance of metacognition for teachers and students. For example, Wray (1994) argues that 'students can enhance their learning by becoming aware of their own thinking as they read, write, and solve problems in school' (Wray 1994, p.103).

Many studies have focused on a fundamental question: Can instruction of metacognitive processes facilitate learning? A key factor in the reported success of these processes is their ability to enhance motivation and self-esteem (Theide, Anderson and Therriault 2003; Altermatt and Pomerantz 2003). The form of metacognition that I have come to understand from my practice differs from these understandings of metacognition, as I now explain.

Although I have found no reports linking metacogition to the learning of spellings for children with specific learning disability, there has been research into the value of metacognition to enhance reading comprehension of those with specific learning disability (Wray 1994; Theide, Anderson and Therriault 2003; Altermatt and Pomerantz 2003). But many of the strategies, which purport to develop metacognition, incorporate a behaviouristic approach of teacher-chosen, self-questioning codes to help comprehension as in the model of Palincsar and Ransom (1988). In addition, Wray (1994) advocates teacher modelling of metacognition. Wray's writing (1994) builds on the work of Palincsar and Ransom (1988) and Tonjes, (1988 in Anderson 1988), among others. Since metacognition means 'knowledge about one's own learning and how one learns' (Slavin 2003, p. 203), teacher modelling of pupil metacognition (Tonjes 1988 cited in Anderson 1988) presumes that there is only one way of learning – one size fits all – and that what teacher models is the correct way to act. I take issue with this monistic view, from the grounds of my years of practical experiences of teaching both adults and children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) in a range of teaching settings. As a resource teacher, I have found the need, as I explained in the first part of this chapter, to engage with the thinking behind teaching strategies and to become aware of how they encourage metacognition.

Influences on my practice: New understandings about what counts as educational knowledge

I want now to examine the importance for my ways of teaching of the idea of providing opportunities for children to have a voice in their own ways of learning and the importance of this issue to educational knowledge and research. Increasingly practitioner educational research emphasises the idea of giving voice to research participants. This notion raises three issues. First, within the concept of giving voice,

participants can be positioned as objects of research, which in turn denies their voice in that 'the power relationships in the research process are weighted towards the researcher as an expert on children, and on how to study children and on what to study about children' (Woodhead and Faulkner 2002, p.12 cited in Christensen and James 2002). Second, in many papers, researchers consider the meaning that underpins voice rather than the voice of the participants per se. This interpretative research lens has a dominant impact on the narrative heard at all stages of research from the formation of the initial question to dissemination of findings (Punch 2002a and 2002b). Third, the researchers' use of propositional forms of theory-based understandings can lead to a reconstruction of participants' experiences in terms of a selective portrayal of their voice (Stavaros 2004).

My research challenges the conventional notion of 'giving voice' to research participants in educational research and highlights a form of research that aims to generate educational theory and changes in a teacher's practice by valuing the voice of research participants. A major change in my practice was that I found that I have created an opportunity and 'a space from which the voices of those not normally heard (in education) can be heard' (Lather 1991 cited in Scott and Usher 1996, p.31). This change was grounded in my values around human dignity, equality and freedom. I have shown that children with specific learning disability can identify personal methods of learning differently, which might in future be a guide to appropriate teaching strategies for schools.

~Action-reflection cycle 2: 'How We Learn Spellings'
Each child described during an individual session how he or she learned spellings. The individual sessions, in action-reflection cycle 1 were audio tape-recorded and transcribed. The children were offered opportunities to listen again and add to their recordings on subsequent weeks. A second recording was then made, during an individual session, where children listened individually to each other's recordings and were given time to reflect and comment. Again I tape-recorded their comments. I made a third tape of each cohort, as a group where the children talked about the recordings they had listened to. The originals of these tapes are in my data archive (see Appendix 2.4a and 2.4b). I transcribed these tapes and the children or I sometimes annotated the transcripts of their conversations to refresh their memories

during their discussions. An example of an annotated transcript is in Chapter Six. On these recordings it is possible to hear their peers, from within the cohort, evaluating the children's ideas. The transcripts were made public to other resource teachers who commented further on the new learning of the pupils. An example of this triangulation process appears later in this section. First I explain what happened during the course of the pupils' discussions on 'how we learn spellings'.

The value on which these changes in my practice were based was freedom in that I provided pupils with opportunities to take control of their own learning processes. This freedom was grounded in my respect for human dignity and the capabilities of the pupils.

Having listened to and questioned each other's strategies for learning spellings the children showed that they had developed new understandings of their learning when they said,

> We all learn differently.
> (March 2003 Recording and transcript, original in Appendix 2.4b)

My facilitation of this process enabled them also to become self-study action researchers in terms of improving their own learning. They realised this themselves when one said,

> I find the best way for me.
> (March 2003 Recording and transcript see Appendix 2.4b)

I provided a setting where pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) now had the freedom to discover more about their learning processes and find their unique most effective ways of learning. I am saying that my practice was a living example of the realisation of my ontological values of respect, justice, empathy and service as well as of my commitments to the idea of knowledge as personal yet created within relationships. I am also explaining how I came to judge the quality of my research in relation to the values that informed my research.

The next question that my research addressed was, 'Can an awareness of learning processes be developed and thus improve learning and recall of facts?' I investigated this over one school term for each cohort. Pupils spent one month evaluating each of three new methods of learning spellings that they had not previously used and which they heard from their peers during their discussions about the 'how I learn spellings' tapes of cycle 1. Suitable spellings were set and tested by pupils or resource teacher or class teacher as appropriate. Each pupil recorded his/her spelling achievements on a simple daily or weekly sheet similar to the one below.

Table 8.3: Pupil R's spelling record

Word	How I learned it	When I began	I can spell it on	I can still spell it on	I can still spell it on	I used it in my writing on
	By the sounds of the letters	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date

The pupils counted how many words they could recall correctly in each method they chose. This action research process resulted in the children evaluating their personally most successful way of learning spellings. I had helped the children in my research to take control of their own learning processes.

The result of the children taking control of their own learning was that they came to value the importance of personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958), as demonstrated in the quotations from the pupils and in the section of triangulated transcript that follows:

Table 8.4: Triangulated transcript on spellings

Transcript	My comments	Teaching colleagues' comments
I learned spellings by saying the letter names real fast. I tried R's way. I use the sounds to write the words. I don't have to say the letters anymore. The words tell me how to spell them	*S has changed his method of learning spellings. His writing is more imaginative. He is not just sticking to words he is sure that he can spell automatically. He makes good phonic guesses at words but he is not sure how to spell.*	9 December 2004 Transcript brilliant. Child S has devised his own strategies for learning and for attempting sums too. When given a sum he can now explain different ways of tackling it to his class. Open discussions about learning and his confidence in his own learning have improved his maths results from the 2nd percentile to the 88th over the past two years.

The comments from teaching colleagues provide evidence that the children extended their new learning beyond the learning of spellings. This occurred because the value an individual places on his/her own learning is crucial not only for motivation to expand their learning further (Slavin 2003) but also to build self-esteem and self-perceptions as an able learner. My research facilitated open discussions where my children's learning has been opened up to the critique of their peers and other teachers. These critiques were invaluable to help me make changes in my practice.

Reflection on cycle two

To answer the question, 'How do I learn spelling?' children described orally a process they carried out – a language skill requisite attainable by children in second class (aged 7 years approximately) as stated in the Drumcondra Profiles (Shiel and Murphy 2000). My research experiences taught me how to change my teaching by a process of personal knowledge creation, which begins by providing the learner with an opportunity for voice in his/her own learning. My view of personal knowledge creation can be compared with Polanyi (1958), Zeichner (1999) and McNiff (2004) as personal yet having the potential to be an educative and transformative influence on others as well as the power to transform myself. Polanyi (1958) explains the significance of personal knowledge while Zeichner (1999) develops the idea that research by teachers into their personal knowledge and practices can contribute to a knowledge base for the teaching profession.

The question, 'How do I learn spellings?' which I put to children with specific learning disability, can be seen as an investigation into the development of metacognitive processes, which Flavell (1971 and 1977) explains as a process where the person, task and strategies interact to influence memory performance. This idea positions the person as a knowledge generator who stores and retrieves information and has the ability to monitor his or her memory activities in specific memory situations.

Current dominant practices in teaching spellings to children with specific learning disability can be described as attempts to provide suitable learning tools. An illustration of this is the research of Stirling (1989), which proposes the following essential tools for adolescents with dyslexia; the 'study of vowel sounds, doubling

the consonant following a short vowel, root words, and laws of probabilities' (Stirling, 1989, p.268). Currently many of these tools are in use for younger children in my school, both in learning support and resource settings. On the other hand Cripps (1988) links joined handwriting to the catching of spellings. By contrast the much-recommended multisensory approach for the teaching of spellings employs all the available senses in learning – hearing, saying, seeing and writing (Reid 1998). However one can take issue with this approach on the grounds that children with dyslexia have difficulty integrating auditory and visual memory skills (Atkins and Tierney 2004). In summary, tools or fix-it strategies are promoted and have some degree of success, yet the learning of spellings remains hugely problematic for those with specific learning disability.

In relation to methods of learning spellings, the question remains whether those with specific learning disability are different from their peers. In her comparative study of children with and without dyslexia and aged between 8 and 10 years, Knee (1991) found that 'learning-disabled and normal children had the same rates of verbal learning, forgetting, and memory development, and were equally able to utilize semantic categorization' (p. 89). But significantly she suggested that reduced memory efficiency in dyslexia appeared to result from 'verbal encoding difficulties rather than memory deficit per se' (p. 90). This finding is supported by the links between verbal IQ and learning to read and spell found by Atkins and Tierney (2004). Even when encoding was achieved, McNamara and Wong (2003) found that students with specific learning disability did not use retrieval strategies effectively and that some students with specific learning disability may have a production deficiency that affected their retrieval of previously encoded information. My research showed me (and hopefully others) that individual pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) can find their own individualised ways of learning.

The work of Graham and Harris (2002) represents a shift from models of direct teaching as described previously to active child-centred construction of learning. They investigated a form of spelling instruction for poor spellers, which required the learner to make memory links by following the instruction to 'first access their lexical memory for the target words' (Graham and Harris 2002 p.102). Their model can be clearly linked to Vygotskian theories of learning (Slavin 2003). When these

findings are placed with those of McNamara and Wong (2003) and Knee (1991), it can be seen that a focus on both the individual learner and memory are not sufficient for the learning of spellings by many children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). The two actions in which I investigated spellings involved an awareness of one's processes of remembering – in other words, metacognition. I return to metacognition and my developing ideas about it later in this chapter.

My new learning from cycle two

I, their teacher, have learned from them that children with specific learning disability learn in many different ways. The implications were that if the children could not learn in the ways in which I teach, I must learn to teach in the way in which my children can learn (McDonagh 2002). The value I place on participants' voice is grounded in the idea of emancipation through empowerment. This is similar to Freire's idea, in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994), that dialogue in teaching is a co-operative activity involving respect where one person did not act **on** another, but rather where people worked with each other, as I now explain.

As a researcher and teacher I have come to believe that I cannot give participants a voice but rather my work provides participants with opportunities for voice. Through my search for an appropriate form of voice I have come to accept that there are multiple ways of learning and knowing. As the Platonic view proposes, there is no one 'right' way of knowing and I have found that the acceptance of multiple ways of knowing can lead to dialogue. Such an acceptance also creates a freedom, which grows from informed choice because it involves exploring many ways and excluding none. In investigating the learning experiences of children with specific learning disability, I have provided a practice-based emancipatory methodology of research in which opportunities were made for children's voices to be heard.

I gained significant insights into the nature of teaching children with specific learning difficulties by listening and allowing them to formulate ideas together. The children voiced a theory of learning spellings and created personal knowledge dialogically. They also demonstrated the value of metacognition in learning. As a result of permitting my children to represent their personal learning orally, I as a teacher ceased to perceive myself as the professional 'knower' in the classroom and

realised that I too was a learner. This follows the thinking of Zeichner (1999), who places the teacher as a learner in his USA studies of the power of self-study in educational research.

The self-study, practice-based research that I engaged with includes the idea of knowing in action which Schön (1995), following Boyer (1990), terms the 'new scholarship' tradition. The new knowledge generated by the pupils in my research enabled me to take issue with established education theory for teaching children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) as evidenced in the work of, for example, Hulme and Snowling (1997), Pollock and Waller (1997), Reid (1998) and Thomson (2001). These authors based their thinking on a medical model of rectifying a deficit in the children and offer various remediation and compensation techniques. In contrast to this, my study led me to seek to identify learning abilities rather than deficits in my children and to base my teaching on their abilities. In doing so I reconceptualised knowledge about dyslexia. I shifted from a traditional epistemological stance that positioned knowledge as reified, external and measurable to a new understanding of knowledge as personally developmental and negotiated through dialogue.

Impact on practice: Teaching spellings to children with specific learning disability (dyslexia)

I found that children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) are aware of how they learn. I claim to have come to a new understanding of how some children with specific learning difficulties learn. Children with dyslexia can develop personal learning strategies. I arrived at this new knowledge of practice from listening to and talking with my pupils.

I teach in accordance with the ways in which children state that they learn. I have afforded the children a freedom to come to understand their own abilities to learn and to value talents that had been suppressed previously. I have offered them freedom to grow in their identity as learners. They came to perceive themselves as able humans who had been disabled by a system of teaching spelling that was inappropriate for them and were now enabled to learn by their own efforts. I had offered them the right, within a relational form of pedagogy, to 'become as singular

as possible and to develop maximum creativity for themselves' (Kristeva 2002 in Lechte and Margaroni 2004, p.162). I changed my teaching of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). By teaching in the ways in which children state that they learn, I now teach to my children's strengths as well as their needs.

Criteria by which my teaching can be judged

My new understandings of teaching were underpinned by values of human dignity, wholeness and caring. The evidence of this comes from responses from class teachers, from respondents following paper presentations and by my validation group of peer researchers. Here is an example:

> Your theory acknowledges the uniqueness of the individual and their capacity for freedom of choice. You have demonstrated with great clarity how your data/evidence, in the form of artwork and recorded conversations, can support this theory.
>
> (27 November 2004 Correspondence from a validation group member, see Appendix 2.5d)

My living theory of practice was founded on a belief that all individuals, given the opportunity, can make important contributions to their own and others' understanding of teaching and learning. This was demonstrated in my own capacity to encourage children to become independent thinkers. This idea was both validated and challenged by researchers in my validation group, who asked,

> Were you aware of this unique capacity in yourself and was that what enabled you to enable the children or was is it as a result of your work and something intuitive you did anyway?
>
> (4 November 2004 Transcript of validation meeting see Appendix 2.5g)

Another described my learning as follows,

As valuing the uniqueness of each individual child and their capacity – that each child's ability to learn is unique and their capacity to learn and continue learning is unique. You are testing your findings about your practice by focusing on your influence in the children's learning. In this you are using your values as standards by which you make judgements on your findings. Initially you concentrated on the change in the children but came to realise that you were also changing in your relationships with these children.

(21 November 2004 Correspondence from a validation group member, see Appendix 2.5d)

I claim that the significance of my new learning extended beyond the teaching of spellings, as is shown in the following episode. I invited my children to speak in a group setting about their learning in general. In taped and transcribed conversations in which they initially identified their learning difficulties in terms of curricular or subject areas, with sentences such as 'Irish and Maths are hard for me' or 'Reading is hard for me but I try my best anyway.' As they continued to converse, the children began to identify specific areas of personal difficulties such as, 'It's hard to understand the meanings of the stories and to understand it' or 'Long words are hard to remember and spell' or 'Writing is hard for me, I can't write straight.' In this way children named priority personal learning/teaching targets, which is traditionally the role of the learning support teacher (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2000) or resource teacher (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2002a).

In brief I have become aware of the significance of involving individuals in the process of their own learning.

8.3   I engage in action research projects alongside the pupils

The pupils and I have worked alongside each other on our action research projects and now I want to say why and how our learning together was important. My living theory of learning to teach for social justice was greatly influenced by my pupils' learning and by my learning. I describe how this occurred, and follow my descriptions with my reflections on our actions, my new learning and its influence on my practice.

~Action-reflection cycle 3

As a researcher, I was dedicated to the process of theorising my practice. My theorising was grounded in my commitment to pupils' capabilities despite their label of specific learning disability (dyslexia). The form of theorising I chose was spontaneous and live. Included in the thinking behind my belief in my pupils' abilities was that I wanted to make a living and worthwhile difference in their lives. I intended to show how my pupils would come to value what they know and how they come to know it. I am reminded of Buber's (1923/1962) description of an educator:

> Only in his whole being, in all his spontaneity can the educator truly
> affect the whole being of his pupil. It is not the educational intention
> but it is the encounter which is educationally fruitful.

(Buber 1923/1962 in Miller and Nakagawa 2002, p.85)

My encounters with pupils changed our relationships. In practical terms this meant that I, as the teacher, was no longer instructing them in learning strategies for spellings because they had discovered their own effective and personalised strategies. At another level we had reversed our roles and were learning with and from one another as we worked alongside one another. As my research progressed the pupils' awareness of their own learning capabilities also appeared to be influenced by our encounters. The pupils' new consciousness about how they understood specific learning disability (dyslexia) changed our relationship in that they became aware that I, their teacher, did not understand specific learning disability (dyslexia) as well as they did. This is shown in two quotations taken from my research transcripts in Appendix 3.3.

The first quotation is part of a transcript in Appendix 3.3 where a teaching colleague, who had listened to the first cohort of pupils' reports on their understanding of dyslexia (I will describe this report in the next section of this chapter), said to the pupil,

> We should make a handout so that parents and other teachers could
> learn about dyslexia from you.

> (March 2003 From transcript of pupil / class teacher discussion,
> Appendix 3.3, original in data archive Appendix 2.4d)

This teacher adopted a level of equality in his relationship, a sense of togetherness with the pupils, in communicating information to others. Similarly the pupils perceived themselves as individuals who could talk with teachers. The quotation below demonstrates how pupils experienced changes in their relationship with teachers:

> Pupil S: I haven't talked to teachers like that before. But I thought it would be a good idea 'cos they would know what it was like to be dyslexic and they would know what to do if they had a dyslexic person in their class.
>
> Pupil B: I've never had as much fun talking to a teacher. I thought that when Mr. [Teacher S] and Mr. [Teacher M] left, that they had actually learned something from the pupils not the other way round. They walked out agreeing with us for once. I never had so much fun talking to teachers.
>
> (March 2003 From transcript of pupil/ class teacher discussion, original in data archive Appendix 2.4d)

Both the pupils and the teachers, including me, gained new understandings of the pupil–teacher relationship from these encounters where the pupils demonstrated their conscious approaches to learning. According to Yoshida (1962), Buber described changes in consciousness within encounters by telling about stroking a horse on his grandparents' farm. There was a bond of mutuality between Buber and the horse as the stroking continued. Buber tells how he looked at his hand and became self-conscious of his stroking movement. The relationship between himself and the horse immediately changed in ways that Buber termed I–Thou and I–It, as he explains:

> This difference marked the two different kinds of relationships in which a person relates to the other or to the world.
>
> (Buber 1923/1962 in Miller and Nakagawa 2002, p.128)

From an objective perspective the stroking of the horse remained the same yet Buber's understanding of the differing relationship was the seminal idea of his major works on I–Thou relationships.

> The primary word I–Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relationship with the thou; as I become I say thou. All real living is encounter.
>
> (Buber 1923/1962 in Miller and Nakagawa 2002, p.85)

My relationship, and possibly some of my teaching colleagues' relationships, with the pupils changed from I–It relationships and now exist as I–Thou relationships, in that we engage in real, living, reciprocal, whole-being encounters. My acute awareness of what was changing in our relationship led me to understand the necessity for I–thou relationships in teaching and learning. At this point I return to the research of Kerr (2001). The teachers of pupils with dyslexia involved in Kerr's (2001) study adopted an I–It relationship with the pupils they taught, whereas I adopted an I–Thou relationship. From an objective perspective our roles remained similar yet my conscious control of my own learning and understanding of specific learning disability (dyslexia) from my pupils' perspective enabled me to change my learned helplessness into my living practical theories of social justice, teaching and learning. My pupils and I became co-constructors of knowledge within the process of developing their and my living theories.

Reflection on cycle three

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have spoken of how in the last decade of the twentieth century, teacher research constructs

> the role of the teacher as a knower and agent in the classroom and in larger educational contexts
>
> (Cochran-Smith.and Lytle 1999, p.16)

and as
> co-constructors of knowledge with their pupils.
>
> (Cochran-Smith.and Lytle 1999, p.22)

In the previous pages I have explained why my theories were so greatly influenced by my learning in tandem with my pupils' learning. Now I want to draw on the work of Wenger (1998) to explain how this occurred.

Wenger (1998) describes how communities of practice can become the social fabric of learning. I believe that Wenger's ideas could describe the co-creation of knowledge that occurred between my pupils and myself during the course of my research. As I have explained at 8.2 above we learned alongside each other; we learned with and from each other; we shared in a learning process. When the pupils came together to discuss their understanding of dyslexia, each cohort became a community eager to work together, to share and critique their ideas within that community and to extend their ideas to the wider school community by presenting their reports in which they explained their learning difficulties to teachers and pupils throughout the school. Wenger (1998) describes similar interactions as a community of practice. What I have described in my research is the development of a learning community. Wenger speaks about the negotiation of meaning, the preservation and creation of knowledge and the spreading of information (Wenger 1998, p.251). My research has demonstrated the negotiation of understandings of specific learning disability (dyslexia), the co-creation of new knowledge and the influencing of others to create their new understandings.

Wenger (1998) offers his perspective on knowledge creation within communities of practice as follows.

> A well functioning community of practice is a good context to explore radically new insights without becoming fools or stuck in some dead end. A history of mutual engagement around a joint enterprise is an ideal context for this kind of leading edge learning, which requires a strong bond of communal competence along with a deep respect for the particularities of experience. When these conditions are in place, communities of practice are a privileged locus for the creation of knowledge.
>
> (Wenger 1998, p.214)

The communities of learning that developed during my research have been shown as a locus of knowledge creation. The form of knowledge we created was personal yet it existed within our relationships. My confidence in our newly formed identities as knowers and knowledge creators encouraged the development of my living theories from within my practice. Wenger's (1998) work offers an explanation of this transformative effect of a learning community:

> Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do it is an experience of identity…. It is a process of becoming – to become a certain person or to avoid becoming a certain person. Even the learning that we do entirely by ourselves contributes to making us into a specific kind of person.
>
> (Wenger 1998, p.215)

Both I and the pupils in my research experienced that transformative practice of learning in a community. Our community of learners offered an ideal context for developing new understandings because the 'community sustains change as part of its identity of participation' (Wenger 1998 p. 214).

My new learning from cycle three

My learning and my pupils' learning became a tidal wave of influence on both our thinking and practice within our contexts. In earlier chapters I have used the metaphor of waves to explain the influences on my research context and on myself. In Chapters One and Two, I explained the first wave of influence as the practice of my Christian values and the dominance of injustice for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), despite a school system that claims to cherish the individual. Two further waves of influence in my context – the theory-practice divide and the successes or failures in my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) – were described in Chapters Three and Four.

The theories that I have generated in my research were influenced to some degree by these four metaphorical waves but the major influence was the learning that occurred for both myself and the pupils. I am claiming that our learning combined and that:

- o Together we found our voice
- o We addressed our learned helplessness
- o We combated our marginalisation
- o We questioned (i) dominant pedagogies and (ii) dominant learning strategies
- o We accepted a fluid reality seeking no finite answers
- o We celebrated our capacities to learn.

Together we were a powerful force – a metaphorical tsunami.

Implications for teaching

In the previous parts of this chapter I have spoken about how awareness of my own learning contributed to my pupils' learning and to my own actions and theorising of my practice. In this section I provide data from pupils' journals in which they recorded their daily achievement. By relating this data to my epistemological value of the importance of personal knowledge in teaching, I show my new understanding of metacognition.

I have given the children in my research freedom to investigate their processes of remembering spellings. The practical methods to achieve this demonstrated that I valued the development of the individual's potential. I have shown in practical terms that the changes in my practice during the course of my research had immediate implications for the children's learning experiences. So I have put into practice ideas about development as freedom (Sen 1999). Although both Sen and I speak about developing capability, our approaches are different in that Sen based his writings on examples from others' lives whereas I am writing about my own development and how it can be seen in the developments in my pupils' learning. Salto (2003) relates Sen's work to education, stating that 'when dealing with children it is the freedom they will have in the future rather than the present that should be considered' (Salto 2003, p.25). I am challenging Salto's application of Sen's ideas in education in that I am offering the children in my research immediate freedom to develop their capabilities by learning in appropriate ways for them. These present changes could also influence their future development and capacity.

I have shown that the learners' capacity to think and learn for themselves is ignored in traditional ways of teaching those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I have changed my practice and provided opportunities for learners to become aware of and value their ways of learning.

In my practice I found that

    (a) Children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) can have successful individual ways of learning.

    (b) Metacognition can be an effective learning strategy for children with specific learning disability.

(c) Metacognition can alleviate learned helplessness in teachers and children.

(d) Knowledge can be mediated.

(e) Learning from and with others can improve self-perception and change public perceptions of what counts as educational knowledge.

The practical relevance of this part of my research is that pupils have been given opportunities for voice to enable them to identify their personal ways of learning and evaluate their effectiveness.

I have learned to teach in ways that value the voices of children. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) describe how teachers can be 'knowers and thinkers rather than consumers of others' knowledge and by sustained conversation become co-constructors of knowledge' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999, p.16). I believe that creating opportunities for voice for all research participants – even if they are children, who are labelled as disabled learners – enables them within a dialogical form of knowledge creation to become valued knowers and thinkers.

My research resonates with emergent theories of metacognition. In previous research such as that of Wray (1994), metacognition has been considered from a behaviourist perspective as a set of fix-it strategies, but more recent research (Scardamalia 2004; White 2004; and Xiaodong, Schartz and Hatano 2005) reconceptualises metacognition as a habit-building phenomenon – an idea that is close to my reconceptualisation of metacognition as both a personal and social strategy to enhance learning. The research of Xiaodong *et al.* (2005) demonstrates that observing other people being reflective can lead to more effective reflective practices, which is similar to the processes of reflection and positive self-talk in which I engaged and encouraged pupils to engage in. White (2004) supports similar ideas of meta-socio-cognitive development in her research into how social modelling and collaborative enquiry can foster these concepts in young learners. The social engagement of my pupils when they conducted self-study action research projects into how they learned spellings resonates with White's (2004) approach. Scardamalia (2004) claims that new knowledge requires metacognition, as well as a ratcheting up of interactions between group and individual, based on the premise that as humans we enjoy playing with ideas, thus increasing our capacity for learning.

Scardamalia's explanations could also explain why the pupils in my research took to and enjoyed the social-metacognitive activities.

Ideas about how my teaching can be judged

I am aware that I need to offer ideas about how the quality of my teaching can be judged. I have developed a range of strategies about how this can be done. My first strategy is to check my self-perceptions about what is happening. Here is an example of how I have done that.

I too adopted a metacognitive stance in my work. Thinking in a self-critical way about my practice was a new form of thinking for me and brought an awareness of new perceptions in previously taken-for granted teaching and learning situations. The three rough sketches below from my reflective journal represent my understanding of how learning was taking place as I taught pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) before and during the course of my research.

Sketch One   Sketch Two   Sketch Three
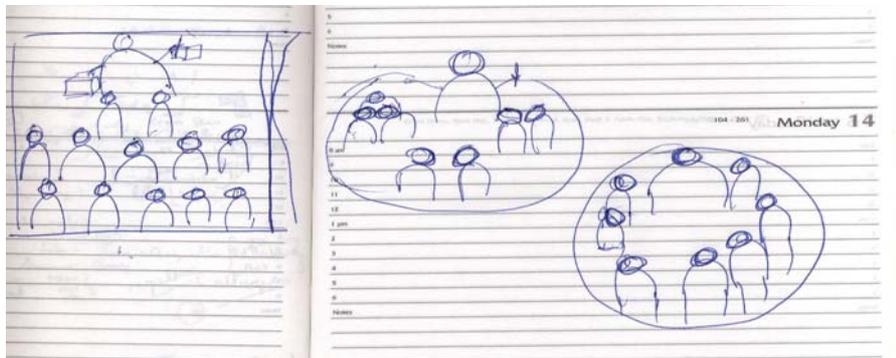

Figure 8.1: Sketches from my reflective journal

Sketch One depicts me standing in front of rows of pupils, where my teaching involved knowledge transmission using a didactic teaching method. Under my sketch I wrote,

> In my class eager faces of pupils await the new ideas from books about dyslexia and commercial programmes.
>
> (22 February 2002 Journal see Appendix 2.1b)

This first sketch shows how I considered learning happened when I taught recommended programmes for dyslexia such as Alpha to Omega (Hornsby, Shear and Pool 1999), the Multisensory Teaching System of Reading (Johnson, Phillips and Peer 1999) (see Appendix 4 for details).

Sketch two (Figure 8.1) represents my perception of how learning was happening as I taught the first cohort of eight children in the first year of my research. Learning was happening differently here. It was active rather than passive, as in Sketch One. It involved a degree of co-operation between the learners. Learning was happening co-operatively, in small groups of two or three and individually, using strategies appropriate to each subgroup in my class. I wrote beside Sketch Two,

> I am the orchestra conductor. I bring all the individual and co-operative learning together in harmony.
>
> (22 February 2002 Journal, see Appendix 2.1b)

Beside sketch three (Figure 8.1), I wrote, 'We learn from and with each other in openness' in my journal (Appendix 2.1b). Sketch three represents my understanding that both the children and I were learning from and with one another.

The sketches show my developing understanding of my role in facilitating the learning experience. My way of teaching, as depicted in that Sketch One, shows that I am holding the 'power' and the learners are passive recipients; in Sketch Two I am also controlling how learning is to take place and with whom because I have grouped the pupils and decided the activities; in Sketch Three I show my relinquishment of power in favour of the learner. I arrange our seating in a circle as a move towards developing the kind of relationship within which both teacher and learner could learn and teach together. Figure 8.1 indicates a shift from dominance towards collaboration; from inequality towards equality and from passive learning to active learning. I am explaining how I have moved from closed epistemologies and closed behaviourist-oriented practices to new open epistemologies and open-ended practices.

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In my attempts to make judgements about the quality of my teaching, and also to establish the validity of my research claims to have improved the quality of my teaching, I began to present my research findings in public fora as paper presentations. I received affirming responses in the following correspondence from one conference participant,

> What is happening to you is that – I think – you are reframing your own experience as a teacher in light of a new perspective … I suspect that in encouraging children (or anyone) to find their voice – oral or written – you are in some deep sense validating them and their lives and identity. This seems to me an aspect of the caring principle in education.
>
> (4 July 2003 Correspondence, see Appendix 2.5f)

I also received evidence of my changing thinking and teaching in the following extracts from a validation meeting when a member of a validation group wrote,

> You are challenging the dominant form of theory by showing that your theory of learning is grounded in practice, your own and your children's.
>
> (14 November 2003 Correspondence see Appendix 2.5d)

As my work progressed and was subjected to rigorous validation processes, I continued to make a case for participants' voices in research (McDonagh 2003). I explained consistently that a major block to my children's learning was that they had no voice in it. I explained how I had shifted from a traditional understanding of the role of theory in teaching and learning, where educational theories are depicted 'as a Grand Central Station where theories are sifted, interpreted and applied' (Government of Ireland, Oideas 1992, p.97). I now understand living theory as a form of theory where there is harmonising of theory and practice because the practitioners who are researching their practice develop living theory from within their living practice.

My theorising of my practice can be judged against my epistemological values as well as my ontological values, as I now explain. The personal new learning for me,

generated through my research, has led me to reconceptualise my practice and understanding of what counts as educational knowledge.

For me, the significance of my learning and my theorising of practice is that I have learned to recognise, evaluate and live towards my educational values in practice. The principles that underpin my practice are my commitment to and faith in the unique capability of the individual to learn and respect the other. I have reconceptualised my practice as a form of service to the other, grounded in respect, caring/compassion and equality. Noddings (2003) also claims to work within these values. However, her form of theorising differs from mine in ways that highlight the significance of the living form of theory that I have developed. She offers explanations of how values inform others' practices. In my research I am showing how my embodied values emerged through my practice as well as how they became the standards by which my research can be judged (Whitehead 2000, p.99 and McNiff with Whitehead 2002, p.165).

I now want to give a practical example of these ideas. In Table 7.2, I gave an excerpt from Pupil J's learning journal in which he stated that he never knew how much he had learned until he wrote up this journal. Twenty-four children's journals of achievement are in my data archive. The children's diaries form a daily self-affirming record of a variety of successful learning, which contrasts with their label as having a 'learning disability' and the normative focus on difficulties those children experience in schools (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). The pupils' reflections on their own learning demonstrate an awareness of personal learning and learning strategies (McDonagh 2004b). From this and other similar research episodes, I realised why it was necessary to involve individuals in their own learning in the first place. By taking an active part in their learning, pupils could enhance their self-esteem and combat learned helplessness. I had come to a new understanding of the importance of personal knowledge within the teaching and learning of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia), and this new knowledge influenced my practice.

My new learning from these episodes also had importance for other resource teachers as seen in this answer to a questionnaire (Appendix 7.3), which I distributed after a presentation of my work to a meeting of twenty-five resource teachers.

> It is extremely relevant. It focuses on the pupil, on how he/she learns and what strategies work best for him/her.
>
> (December 2004 Correspondence from programme co-ordinator, Dyslexia Association of Ireland Workshop, see Appendix 2.9)

I am claiming that I have found a way of teaching that can positively influence the learning experience of my pupils. In support of this claim I produce the following statements from professional colleagues.

> Initially you concentrated on the change in the children but came to realise that you were also changing in your relationships with these children. You described how your work with children, who have specific learning disabilities, has led you to question the dominant understanding of the concept of disability. You, instead, have chosen to premise your work on an understanding that all children learn in individual ways and your approach focuses on the abilities of the children rather than on disability.
>
> (24 November 2004 Correspondence from validation group member Appendix 2.5d)

> Yours is a theory drawn directly from your practice as a learning support teacher and you clearly demonstrated a critical engagement with the issues and concepts involved as well as an impressive critical engagement with education theories. This engagement, along with the close monitoring of your practice over a period of years, has led you to form new theories of teaching and learning that are grounded in your aim to improve your practice, and thereby the educational experience for your students.
>
> (24 November 2004 Correspondence from Critical Friend B, see Appendix 2.5c)

I believe that not only have you achieved your aim to improve your practice, but that you have gone beyond it and theorised your practice also. I believe, too, that you have generated new and sustainable educational theory from within your practice. As you went along you learned that, given a supportive and caring classroom environment, children have an unlimited capacity for developing strategies and methods of learning that are unique to themselves. You then tested this theory against existing theory and found that yours was more representative of a holistic understanding of learning that was based on the reality of each child's needs and experience. You showed how your values of respect, justice and fairness have acted as the standards by which you make judgements about your practice.

(4 November 2004 Correspondence from class teacher/ researcher Appendix 2.5a)

These extracts show how my values could be understood as my standards of judgement and were living in my practice. In the last extract, for example, the teacher claims that my values of 'respect, justice and fairness' have acted as standards by which I made judgements about my practice. I have provided a 'supportive and caring classroom environment' where children have freedom to develop strategies and methods of learning. In keeping with my values of human dignity, freedom and wholeness, I have allowed them opportunities to develop their uniqueness.

8.4   Summary

This chapter has explained how my learning and my children's learning have influenced changes in my teaching. I provided children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) with opportunities to demonstrate that they had successful individual ways of learning. I explained how my new ways of teaching helped young people to see themselves not as consumers or objects within the school system but rather to gain confidence around their own capacities to learn. I have demonstrated my developing understanding of children's different ways of learning.

The changes in my practice are rooted in my commitment to social justice and are grounded in my own capacities to generate theory from my practice. My actions, during my research, are a manifestation of my learning.

I have investigated various forms of teaching. I have found that effective teaching for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) can encourage personal, procedural and dialogical learning. These ideas and practice have grown from my study of the relationships between individuals and their creation of knowledge, in that, together with the pupils in my research, I have come to understand, apply and extend the processes, skills, attitudes and knowledge by which the pupils in my research improved their learning capacity (Pollard 1997 and McNiff 2002)

My new ways of teaching challenge the three models of disability that I discussed in Section Two. Medical models of disability highlight deficits and then teach to rectify them, whereas I have identified abilities in pupils' learning and I worked with the children to use their singular abilities. I have challenged the educational model of disability within which the person is potentially disabled by interactions with institutions, structures and the environment, and replaced this with educational enabling within a learning environment where metacognition and personal knowledge are combined with socially created knowledge. I have challenged the psycho-social model of disability by returning freedom of choice of learning styles to the learners. I have re-established the power of the learner in the classroom within the learning process. I include myself as one of those learners.

Improving teaching and learning rests on the knowledge creating capacity of each individual in the system (Delong 2002). I believe that there is a need for teachers to frame their practice as living theory as I have done.

PART FIVE: ENSURING THAT THE CONCLUSIONS I HAVE COME TO ARE REASONABLY FAIR AND ACCURATE

Chapter Nine: A discussion of my new learning – Testing my living theories

9.1   Introduction

In this chapter I explain how I carried out systematic validation processes to test the validity of my claims to knowledge. I use an example of how I tested my living theory of learning to teach for social justice. I explain how my validation process involved getting critical feedback at all points of my research, in relation to whether I can claim with justification that I am living out the Christian values as I stated them earlier in this thesis. This requires ensuring first that I have solicited feedback from all relevant participants in my research. I speak about how this feedback is related to the Christian values, which are the same as the ontological values on which my research is based. I complete this chapter with a description and analysis of another new learning for me in relation to significant new understandings about the methodology of self-study action research from my experiences of disseminating my research.

9.2   My systematic validation process

I begin with a practical example of my validation process. In Chapter Five there are five pictures (Pictures 7.7 to 7.11) of my pupils presenting their reports on 'Explaining dyslexia to myself and others' to members of our school community. The video from which these stills were taken was part of the feedback about their self-study action research projects into how they learned spellings and about their new understandings of specific learning disability (dyslexia).

Before the presentation we gathered in my classroom. Anxious whispers from my pupils reflected their concerns. Concerns about the reactions of the pupils in the mainstream class: 'What will they think?' 'I'm nervous.' 'They will love your piece about George Washington's difficulties in school.' 'I think that they will really love

the bits about the famous people. I did.' 'Will they be surprised at how many ways we know to learn spellings?' When we returned to my classroom after the presentation there was a flurry of excitement as the pupils described the mainstream pupils' reactions to the report. 'They said that they didn't know there were so many ways to learn spellings.' 'A, B, and C (names) said that they wanted to try a different way of learning spellings now.' 'They never knew till we told them.' 'They said that they didn't know how hard it was for us to learn too.' 'They never knew there were famous people who weren't good at school.' My pupils claimed that they had 'explained dyslexia to themselves and others.' Their presentation, together with the questioning and class discussion that followed it, provided feedback on their claim to have gained a new, personal understanding of dyslexia.

In Chapter One I articulated the standards of judgement by which I would judge the quality of my research. Now I want to summarise the validation processes I used to test the validity of my research claims. For example, in Chapter Seven, I presented data and articulated how these data showed my commitment to justice. Then, using the literature, I explained how the form of my actions demonstrated my belief in self-efficacy and in the capacity of the individual. Accordingly, the process of judging my claims to new knowledge required first the articulation of my values and a report of their existence at a conceptual level in my new practices. In addition my new practices were explained in relation to my values. The most critical standards were that my thesis demonstrated my values in action as part of my living and reconceptualised practice. So what did this look like in reality? My validation processes required getting critical feedback at all points within my research process.

~Getting critical feedback at all points of my research
In Chapter Seven I included correspondence from a critical friend that provided evidence that my values were being lived out in my practice as both a teacher and researcher. This was part of how I tested my new understandings against the critical responses of others. There have been examples in the last two chapters of the many people from whom I received critical feedback. These included my participating pupils, the pupils' peers in mainstream classes, teaching colleagues, critical friends, resource teachers from other schools; tutors, programme co-ordinators and workshop directors with the Dyslexia Association of Ireland; doctoral and university

colleagues and those from the academy who attended educational conferences at which I spoke about my research. The importance of this variety of validation sources was that people from both inside and outside my research were critiquing my work. All these people were reasonably familiar with various aspects of my context.

I had to be somewhat opportunistic in finding ways of getting feedback. My methodology was not tidy or linear so I cannot describe it as a series of developmental stages, or even as a narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Each data-gathering episode developed its own momentum. That was why I found triangulation such a vital process of comparing my perceptions with the perceptions of others (McNiff and Whitehead 2005, p.67). For example, I have already told how I have placed my comments on my pupils' work alongside comments from an art therapist and resource teacher in order to compare our views (see Tables 5.2 and 8.4). The experience of placing my new learning before academic colleagues at conferences was harrowing but interactive forms of presentation were most informative. I was overjoyed that teaching colleagues confirmed my research findings during my pupils' presentation of their projects to them.

Their validation and my data are in my data archive, which I have listed in Appendix 2. This archive includes my reflective journals and my pupils' journals; my correspondence with my supervisor and critical friends; validation correspondence and audio tape-recordings from pupils, teaching colleagues, two critical friends, members of my validation group, and audience members at conference presentations; questionnaire responses from pupils and teachers in mainstream classes and from resource teachers, the Dyslexia Association of Ireland Workshop Programme Co-ordinators and Directors. In keeping with my theme of finding appropriate forms in which to facilitate participants' voices, my archive also includes tape and video recordings and photographs, pupils' reports and artwork. Data from my practice of teaching includes pupil profiles, individual pupil educational plans, and pupils' record sheets of their learning from commercial programmes, and lesson plans for lessons that were observed by other teachers (see appendices 5.2a and 5.2b).

Another critical feature in my validation process was that I required not just evidence from others that I had changed my understanding and my practice, but I also wanted evidence that these changes had been critiqued against my values. There are further examples in the remainder of this thesis of how this occurred in my research.

~Justifying that I am living out the values articulated at the beginning of this thesis

I am talking about how my claims could be related to my values. For example, in the previous chapter, I told how dialogue provided a way of coming to new understandings about teaching spellings for children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). In the course of our conversations and action research projects, I afforded participating pupils a freedom to come to understand their own abilities to learn – to value talents that had been unrecognised previously. The values of freedom and capability were embedded in my research actions and in the new learning that followed. The pupils and I were learning together and our actions embodied these values.

In order to justify my claim that I am living out the values that I am expressing throughout, I want to explain how I understand our learning together as the embodiment of the values of freedom, equality, empathy and respect for the capability of the individual. In practical terms I have shown in the two previous chapters that my pupils and I have addressed our marginalisation and learned helplessness by finding our voices, and within our fluid relationships we have celebrated our capacities to learn.

I now want to show that our learning constitutes values-in-action, and these values live in and are the justification of my research claims. I speak first about my understanding of our changing relationship during the course of my research. This includes the idea that the pupils became co-constructors of knowledge. Next I want to explore the relationship between this learning relationship and my core research values and in particular to issues of development as freedom (Sen 1999) and the concept of development as freedom in education.

I am claiming throughout that I can show the relationship between my pupils' learning and my own learning. Specifically,

1) I have helped the children who participated in my research to come to know in their own ways.

2) I have found ways to help children come to value what they know and how they know it.

3) I have reconceptualised curriculum as a knowledge generating exercise in which pupils can participate, as well as teachers. In this way I have arranged the conditions of learning for my students in terms of offering them fuller participation in creating their own knowledge.

To elaborate:

1)   I have helped the children to come to know in their own ways. This was achieved when the pupils and I acted within a relationship of reciprocity. Our learning was interdependent; I gained new insights from pupils' ways of learning and I modified my ways of teaching; the participating pupils gained new insights within my new ways of teaching and modified their ways of learning which in turn informed my thinking. We acted and learned in a reciprocal relationship. I found that effective learning for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) included personal, procedural and dialogical learning. These ideas and practices developed as individuals created their own knowledge. I have demonstrated how I have come to understand, apply and extend the processes, skills, attitudes and knowledge by which the pupils in my research improved their learning capacity (Pollard 1997 and McNiff 2002). Throughout this entire process I was attempting to live towards my values of empathy, compassion, equality and freedom as set out in Table 5.1.

2)   I have found ways to help children come to value what they know and how they know it. Together with the pupils I have developed new understandings of specific learning disability (dyslexia) that identify pupils' capabilities in learning. I have explained in Chapters Seven and Eight how I have worked with these pupils to use their singular abilities. I have combined the educational enabling of these pupils within a learning environment where metacognition and personal knowledge were united with the social creation of knowledge. I found ways to help children and

myself come to value what we know and how we know it. We have re-established the power of the learner within the learning process.

Freedom, human dignity and social justice are the central values on which I base these claims. I have removed many obstacles that hindered my pupils' learning. I have recognised and facilitated the freedom of individuals with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to learn in ways that suit their individual needs (see Chapter Eight). To explain why it was necessary to provide freedoms of this type in order to allow the developments of the pupils' learning and my learning, I have referred to the work of Sen (1999), who says,

> It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of individual freedom. To counter the difficulties that we face, we have to see individual freedom as a social commitment.
>
> Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency.
>
> (Sen 1999, p.xii)

I have allowed pupils opportunities for freedom of action in bringing their new understandings of dyslexia to other pupils and teachers in the school. I have established pedagogical practices that permit the pupils to decide how they will learn spellings. I have changed my teaching so that pupils can expand their capabilities and value their abilities, as they recorded in their learning diaries. In facilitating my pupils' actions, my work is commensurate with the ideas of Sen (1999) that

> the expansion of the 'capabilities' of persons to lead the kinds of lives they value – and have reason to value.
>
> (Sen 1999, p.18)

I am claiming to have moved from a situation where marginalisation led to learned helplessness and when learned helplessness was tackled in a traditional approach, as explained, for example, in Kerr (2001), which led to further marginalisation. In Chapter Seven I explained how this situation applied to both my pupils and myself and how I interrogated it. My research set up a counter cycle of confirming capabilities that led to the development of personal confidence and competence,

which in turn led to a willingness to contribute to others' knowledge (see Chapter Eight). Sen (1999) tells of similar negative cycles where 'economic unfreedom can breed social unfreedom, just as social or political unfreedom can also foster economic unfreedom' (p.8). He tells, but does not demonstrate as I have done, how this cycle can be broken in a two-way relation between

> 1) social arrangements to expand individual freedoms and

> 2) the use of individual freedom not only to improve the respective lives but also to make the social arrangements more appropriate and effective.

<div style="text-align: right">(Sen 1999, p.31)</div>

My research links issues of freedom, human dignity and social justice, which were included in the third aim of my research.

3)   I have reconceptualised curriculum as a knowledge generating exercise in which pupils can participate, as well as teachers. The pupils and I actively participated in addressing justice and epistemological issues by finding ways to exercise our voices in a system which was dominated by propositional knowledge. I have explained how I invited pupils to participate in creating their own knowledge. I was conceptualising social justice as the freedom to contribute. In practical terms this meant pupils taking responsibility for their learning according to their personal ways of learning.

My research was based on ideas of emancipation through the acquisition of knowledge (Freire 1994). I built on Rawls's (1971) ideas of justice as fairness and developed a practical living theory of learning to teach for social justice, which has some similarities with Young (2000), where my practice was shown to exhibit the values on which I base my understanding of justice. Young (2000) speaks of 'being able to engage in the world and grow' (p.184). Young's work describes self-development within communities. My work offers a similar perspective and speaks of social justice where the individual is afforded opportunities to develop the confidence and freedom to contribute to social justice for himself or herself as well as others. The values that can be used to justify my claim are those of service to others in the interests of the greater good.

9.3 The importance of our new ways of learning to issues of development as freedom in education

My research aimed to establish socially just practices. I am now claiming that my research has the potential to develop new forms of discourses in professional education, by conceptualising practice as theory.

First I need to articulate my understanding of freedom as a condition for making a contribution to practice discourses. For this I draw on the work of Sen (1999). I speak about not only academic or economic development, but also about ideas of the relationships between individual development, social development and freedom. In this way freedom and development are dialectically and practically linked and as such form an important context for my study of how I helped my pupils to improve their learning experiences. In justifying what I have done I am asking whether I have lived towards my values of freedom, compassion, human dignity and service.

What I believe has happened in my research is that first, pupils have contributed to my learning as a teacher and second, I have contributed to their learning. For example, the dialogues and actions that arose from my questioning of my practice as outlined in Chapter Seven show that I was actively engaging with ideas around equality, freedom and respect for the wholeness and capability of both the individual learner and myself. I have shifted the locus of power in learning to the individual in order to create a new reality of learning where my children were not devalued because of their learning differences. I claim that the pupils and I are creating our new understandings of how learning occurs in relationship with others.

I have learned during my research programme that the policy rhetoric of inclusion, which values individuals with specific learning disability (dyslexia), can be realised through my practice. This practical realisation has been a transformation of my ontological belief in the capacity of all humans to learn, regardless of age, intellectual capacity, or ability to read, into a living practice.

Sen (1999) writes of the quality of life being assessed by our capacity to exercise our freedom. I have shown in my research that the quality of my pupils' education and my pedagogy can be assessed by the degree of our freedoms to learn in ways that value the development of the individual. In Chapter Seven I have demonstrated how I have facilitated the freedom for pupils to voice their preferred ways of learning, and this has contributed to pupils' development in terms of self-esteem and identities. Similarly in Chapter Eight I have demonstrated how I have facilitated the freedom for pupils to evaluate their own work and to learn in their chosen learning styles. I claim that these freedoms in turn have contributed to pupils' academic achievement in learning spellings.

Sen (1999) speaks of development as the everyday realisation of the lived capacities of humans. However, his form of theorising is propositional. His theory of development as freedom is about what people are able to be and do – a celebration of the uniqueness of individuals. His theory goes beyond a distributive theory of justice and justice as fairness (Rawls, 1971) and also beyond Griffiths's (1998) theory of justice as practice because these theories are limited by using a propositional form of logic and by focusing on resources rather than on individuals' capacities. My theory of developing capacity is a living form of theory, through which I can offer explanations for what I have done, while incorporating Sen's propositional ideas. I can show how I have endeavoured to enable the pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to transform their capacities for thinking and learning. Quotations from the pupils themselves and their teachers support my claim that I have achieved this (see Chapters Seven and Eight).

In order to develop a capability approach for me as a teacher, I have engaged in dialogue with pupils and that dialogue in turn has led to self-development. The evidence for this claim is that both my pupils and I have addressed our learned helplessness and found ourselves as capable knowers and learners. I now understand myself as a practitioner who is capable of improving and theorising her practice. I have developed a relational process of teacher agency, which has not only developed my own thinking and practice but also developed how I can influence others, specifically the pupils participating in my research, to act for themselves. My approach has been informed by the thinking of Young (2000) whose ideas about

inclusive forms of justice include the proposition that personal individuality can be achieved through a positive interaction between individuals and their society. Young envisions a democratic world order, where knowledge is developed with others. I am offering my living theories about an inclusive approach to knowledge generation, which unites personal knowledge, and metacognition, and socially developed knowledge.

I have demonstrated that educational research can be grounded in a form of knowledge that values learning and the development of the person. Furthermore I believe this is a necessary condition for educational research because, as I came to understand, social facts cannot be isolated from the domain of ontological values and these values in turn inform the epistemological stance one adopts.

~Conceptual issues around developing theory from practice

I have explained how I developed a living theory of teaching and learning that is inclusive of others' views and ways of learning. I have also explained how I have developed my own living theory of learning to teach for social justice, in which my teaching celebrated the potential learning of the children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I did so within a context and background that was largely grounded in propositional knowledge and placed little value on personal knowledge. I have explained that the philosophical and values base of much of the reported research in the field of specific learning disability (dyslexia) ignores personal knowledge and the human perspectives of both the learners and the teachers. I am claiming to have transcended the tensions in this by offering a form of living theory and logic, which is grounded in my values of respect for humans and their capabilities.

My initial research aim was to enable pupils to move towards achieving their potential. My research has enabled me to modify my practice in terms of how I can develop new forms of pedagogy that will enable the children to be in control of their own learning and to shape their identities as capable and competent learners.

I have developed a new living theory of practice, which is my explanation for how I have come to improve what I am doing for the benefit of myself and the children

in my care. Throughout my research there have been two strands: my learning and my pupils' learning. My learning is reflected in my pupils' learning. For me, self-study action research has influenced changes in my own thinking about educational knowledge and how it is created, in that I have become actively critical. I gave an example of this in Chapter Eight when I explained how my ways of teaching had changed from propositional to dialogical forms of teaching for knowledge creation. Apart from thinking critically about my teaching, I have actively demonstrated how I created it in the ways that I helped children develop new knowledge about their own learning.

I developed a practice in which the children I taught also became self-study action researchers investigating their concerns, as in the learning of spellings, as documented in Chapter Eight. In addition they researched their cognitive ability for learning in their learning journals (See Chapter Eight and Appendix 2). I am claiming that my ways were more enabling and more just than traditional forms of research into specific learning disability (dyslexia), as explained in the background to my research (Part Two). The insights that I have gained have been at personal and substantive levels, including ideas about organisational processes to do with teaching and learning. In addition to this I have gained further important insights from the processes of disseminating my research, as I will now explain.

9.4   Further key learnings from the dissemination of my research

I presented my research in the three formats below at educational conferences:
- o Traditional forms of paper presentation
- o Collaborative research presentations and
- o Interactive symposia.

I have found that more traditional forms of oral paper presentations tend to use a propositional form of logic (Dunleavy 2003). By contrast, an interactive symposium can often imply sharing research with colleagues, students, communities and broader publics. It 'usually requires opening up the research to discussion and critique on many levels so that the work may continue to develop' (Berry 2004). Such interactions reinforced the findings of my classroom research

that personal knowledge can be created through dialogue and have transformative potential. My experience and understandings of making my research public in interactive symposia at educational conferences has led me to a new understanding of my research within the context of educational networks of communication for a new scholarship of educational enquiry through practitioner research (Whitehead 2004a and McNiff 2004).

Traditional forms of paper presentations: Reflection-in-learning / reflection-in-action

In McDonagh (2002) I presented my research reflections on how I teach. These reflections resonated with the pupils' reflections on how they learned spellings in that both were reflection-in-learning, which mirrors Schön's (1995) idea of 'reflection-in action'. I presented my 2002 paper in a traditional didactic format within a group session of papers followed by some clarification questions from the audience. One question, later, over coffee, remains with me today. It was, 'How did you come to link the theories to your practice?' That question was significant for me in that it held a key to my new epistemology – one that positioned personal knowledge as relational. Winkler argues for the linking of reflection and theory when he says,

> Teachers' experiences – and practical knowledge derived from it – are not sufficient to develop teacher expertise. Theoretical reflection in turn produces qualitatively different insights about teaching and learning, which can provide teachers with conceptual tools to establish new links between what they know and what they do.
>
> (Winkler 2001, p.438)

Winkler has adopted a common perspective that theoretical reflection can be viewed as an exercise in matching one's practice to pre-existing propositional educational theories. The question about how I theorised my practice moved my work to a new level. By testing my data against epistemological and ontological values-as-standards, I provided evidence of theorising in my practice. The question aided the development of new (for me) knowledge about my practice and also challenged my ways of thinking and presenting my learning.

I have adopted a metacognitive position; the generation of new knowledge in my research included dialogue with my own thinking. This critical questioning also highlights the usefulness of community enquiry to aid and critique one's reflections – a feature that tends not to be present in traditional forms of paper presentations.

Collaborative presentations: How I think and learn

When I presented audiotapes and videos of my research practices at the 2003 Collaborative Action Research Association Annual Meeting, researchers in the discussion that followed identified unhesitatingly and unequivocally that teaching colleagues in my workplace had learned from my pupils' theories of how the pupils learned (McDonagh and Sullivan, 2003). A video tape of these discussions is in my data archive (see Appendix 2.4e). During this collaborative presentation my co-presenting colleague and I discussed and found similar conceptual and philosophical frameworks within our different and individual fields of research. Our collaborative discussions in drawing up the paper gave us an opportunity to explore our educative influences on each other and in our individual contexts. During these discussions we also created new knowledge together. To enable the audience to critique our work we asked the following two questions:

Has our presentation shown that we have contributed to improved educational practices?

How can our work contribute to educational theorising?

The audience responded that we had improved educational practices. They did not attempt the second question. We concluded that our collaboration in developing this paper presentation had contributed to the development and validation of our own living theories but had not contributed to their dissemination. So I now consider the potential significance of interactive symposia for the dissemination of self-study action research.

Interactive symposia: new understandings about research epistemology

I begin with an account of an interactive research symposium at which I presented my work. At the Critical Debates in Action Research Seminar (2003) at the University of Limerick, I presented a paper (McDonagh 2003) that included pupils' artwork and their voices as they explained their experiences of dyslexia. Papers at

that conference addressed specific critical and current issues in action research such as issues of validity, forms of theory, location, voice, legitimation, ICT and institutional implications. The interaction following the formal presentation of the papers took the form of an open forum on each topic. Discussion circles included presenters, invited key speakers and participants. The discussions initiated here were continued through email. The following quotations demonstrate the transformational influence of presenting practitioner research in a dialogical format because, as a university lecturer said,

> The combination of the children's voices and your reflections on their learning opened the doors of your classroom and pushed out the walls – a way for other educators like myself to be in your classroom and learn from the lived experience.
>
> <div align="center">(22 June 2003 Correspondence see Appendix 2.5f)</div>

~An epistemology where personal learning occurs through reciprocal interactions

I found a form of knowledge generation in which the researcher takes responsibility for his/her own learning within group settings. This concept is similar to Wray's (1994) and Slavin's (2003) strategy of individual responsibility within group learning. I took part (McDonagh 2004a) in an interactive symposium, which provided an example of this. The discussant wrote about this process of presentation as follows:

> Self-study does not end with the production of a written report or artefact – these are but one part of the process of self-study. Self-study work compels those that are working within it to share what they do with their colleagues, their students, their communities and broader public domains and to open up the work or discussion and critique so that the work may continue to develop. This group is taking their work forward in exactly those ways, and I applaud them for taking the notion of accountability seriously. This is a necessary act, and at the same time, a courageous act because in laying out your work to us there is considerable risk involved, you make yourselves vulnerable in the process. It is much easier to speak about the need for vulnerability than to actually engage in it, in the ways you have.
>
> <div align="right">(Berry 2004)</div>
>
> (To note: the group, referred to above, brought together nine individuals' presentations of self-study action research and spanned all sectors of education from teaching to teacher education and policy making across many continents. Each participant had multiple links of influence to the others in the group that added to

their web of learning togetherness. Their papers were web-accessed and participants' ontological commitments and practices were discussed by all present during the interactive presentation format.)

So I argue for the interactive symposium as a new form of generating knowledge in research – as an important feature within self-study action research. I do so because I believe it encompasses all the key processes for metacognition and social metacognition as I described them earlier. I am committed to it since metacognition is about understanding and developing one's own learning. In addition, the use of metacognitive processes in research places a value on the uniqueness of the research within a new scholarship of educational enquiry (Whitehead 1989) and further positions the interactive symposium within a new epistemology (Schön 1995).

Some of the implications of my dissemination of my work can be understood as the centrality of people and their social interactions in the generation of living educational theory, and living theory as grounded in people's capacity to theorise their individual and collective work as a form of social renewal. Both these elements are interrelated and mutually influential.

9.5   Summary

I have considered the importance of my learning and my pupils' learning to issues of development as freedom and have explained my ideas on freedom in education as contribution. I drew on Sen's (1999) ideas about freedom as development and I show how this provided a framework for my attempts to build pupils' capabilities and confidence.

I concluded this chapter by explaining how I developed my living theory from within my practice and generated important new insights from how I disseminated my theory to a wider audience. In the next section of this thesis I consider the potential educative influence of my research. I now move into a discussion of wider professional debates and possible directions in which my research has potential to influence future practice and research.

PART SIX: THE BROADER SIGNIFICANCE OF MY STUDY –
MODIFYING MY PRACTICE IN THE LIGHT OF MY NEW LEARNING

In answering the question, 'How do I modify my practice in the light of my new learning?'(Whitehead 1989), I am talking about more than changes in classroom strategies. I am considering the potential implications of my research for others in relation to the four major themes that have developed from my new learning. These themes are: first, I developed a critique of my own stance in relation to my pedagogy, as well as in relation to dominant practices of teaching children with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Second, I showed that the children and I could co-create knowledge. I understood myself as in relation with them, and they with me. I developed a dialogue of equals, which was a practice that celebrated human equality. This has implications for current systems of schooling, where children are regularly categorised and labelled. Third, I have grounded my relationships of equality in my ontological and Christian values. I have linked the idea of the value of the person with the idea that people must be free to realise and exercise their value. Fourth, I have come to understand that personal and social practices are informed and underpinned by specific ontological and epistemological values.

There are two chapters in this final section. In Chapter Ten I explain how my research has potential implications for other colleagues' learning, and for new practices for teaching children with special educational needs (dyslexia). I indicate some of the potential implications of my work, in terms of how other people such as professional colleagues have learned from me, and what people may continue to learn.

In Chapter Eleven I tell how my research has possible implications for other fields of practice. This includes the potential relevance of my research to areas of disability, disadvantage, education policy and provision. I also explain how I am contributing to new forms of theory and how my thesis may add to the existing body of knowledge. In addition I am addressing the idea of why people should listen to what I have learned in my research. I am not offering my work at a prescriptive level for others to repeat. I am suggesting that others consider if there is anything in my

living theory that is of value for their own contexts or that they can improve and build on.

I conclude with a metaphor to explain the fluid, uncertain, yet fulfilling processes I experienced while generating my living theory of practice about how I learned to teach primary school pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

CHAPTER TEN: The potential significance of my study

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter I want to show how my research has potential implications for teaching colleagues. I then explain this process of influence in relation to how the insights from my research had significance for me, as a person, a teacher, and as a researcher.

As a person I have realised the importance of articulating and explaining my ontological and epistemological commitments as they relate to my teaching. As a teacher I have developed ways of teaching that I claim have relevance for providing socially just forms of teaching and learning.

As I researcher I explain the importance of theorising practice in (1) my reconceptualisation of metacognition; (2) my ideas on reflection in action; and (3) my approach to practice as a form of living theory. I show how the ability to critique one's own pedagogical stance has significance for teacher professional development for the teaching of pupils with special educational needs.

Finally I examine the potential importance of my work for the education of social formations (Whitehead and McNiff 2006) and for new practices for teaching children with special educational needs (dyslexia).

10.2 The potential implications of my research for teaching colleagues

During the processes of my research two core issues have had significance for teaching colleagues: first is the power of the individual to be an influence for educative change; and second, I have shown that knowledge can be mediated between teachers and learners by providing opportunities for the learner's voice to be heard. Here are some examples where teaching colleagues have written about their experiences of these processes and which I can claim as evidence that colleagues have learned from my research.

Evidence of the educative influence of being open to the voices of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) exists in the following letter, which came from a teaching colleague following a presentation by Pupil J's report explaining his learning disability.

> Just a note to acknowledge your report on dyslexia. I apologise for rushing off midway through the presentation a couple of weeks ago. I can say however that in the 15 minutes I spent listening to (pupil) J and his fellow presenters, I learned more about dyslexia than I had ever known before – shame on me! I promised J the opportunity of a 'proper' presentation in our own classroom not only for me but also for his 28 classmates. A few days later he sat in front of his class and I watched as he grew in stature before my eyes and those of his classmates as he explained to them in his own quiet way what he had discovered and learned. He had a rapt audience throughout and fielded questions from his classmates with confidence.
>
> (12 March 2002 Correspondence from teaching colleague, original in data archive Appendix 2.5a)

The significance and the power of the learner's voice for educational change can be seen in another teacher's answers to the questions, 'What did you learn about dyslexia? What other questions do you have?' (Appendix 7.2) following a presentation of pupils' reports on their understanding of specific learning disability (dyslexia). The teacher stated that he had gained new personal knowledge that may influence his practice when he wrote,

> I learned a lot about dyslexia. There were certain things I hadn't realised. I think I would do things maybe differently with dyslexic children in the class.
>
> (2 March 2002 Correspondence from teaching colleague, original in data archive Appendix 2.5a)

I found that the new knowledge which resulted from the presentation of pupils' reports influenced school structures in terms of teacher understandings of and approaches to specific learning disabilities. Pictures 7.7 to 7.11 in Chapter Seven show a cohort of pupils presenting their reports on 'Explaining dyslexia to myself and others' in a mainstream classroom. The mainstream class appear to be engrossed in listening to and questioning the report presenters. The mainstream class pupils and teachers who were present responded in writing to the questions, 'What did you

learn about dyslexia? What other questions do you have?' (Appendix 7.2b). The Principal read their questions aloud. At the end of the session he responded as follows:

> I see these people here, presenting their projects [reports] and telling very publicly how they feel about having learning difficulties. I feel very proud of them. I feel that they have other skills, which maybe I haven't got. I think they have great courage to be able to do what they are doing.
>
> (Transcribed from video, original in data archive April 2003 Appendix 2.4f).

This and many other transcripts of conversations from my classroom are examples of the potential to position a resource classroom in a 'primary school as the foundation stone in the development of that learning society' (20 January 2002 my correspondence to critical friend, original in data archive Appendix 2.5b). I believe that my research offers a form of professional development and a possible pre-service approach, which would be in keeping with the Government working group policy document on preparing teachers for the 21st Century (Government of Ireland 2002). My research involved a reflective and caring commitment to theorising my professional practice; the government document recommends a similar approach to pre-service programmes:

> All courses, course content and other experiences should be designed with the objective of preparing teachers who are competent, caring, committed, reflective and have a keen sense of their professional responsibilities.
>
> (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2002, p.155)

My claims that my research had significance for teaching colleagues have implications for dominant theories on specific learning disabilities (dyslexia) that work from a propositional perspective (Hornsby 1995; and Snowling 2000). I have demonstrated the benefits of insider research and this has grown from the new epistemology of practice that I developed during my research. The idea of creating a new epistemology for a new scholarship of educational enquiry that is of particular relevance to teachers has been developed by Whitehead (2000), based on Schön's

(1995) idea of a new scholarship. I offer new understandings of knowledge that arose during my research as having the potential to influence how teachers teach.

The significance of my research in relation to my own learning is that I have changed myself. My research has had a major influence on my own learning in terms of practical, theoretical and personal knowledge. I discuss each form of knowledge in the following section. In doing so I first describe and explain my epistemological stance and then show how it has enabled me to generate a new epistemology of practice.

~How my new insights have significance for me

I attribute the changes that occurred in my practice first to how I have learned to theorise my practices and how to disseminate my new knowledge. Prior to my research my personal preference was for a logical, mathematical intelligence and learning approach (Gardner 1997). I have written about the difficulty I had adapting to other teaching and learning styles (McDonagh 2000). Stubbings (1997) points out that many teachers have difficulty teaching in ways that are not within their preferred learning style. Jung and Hull (1991) also found that those pupils who presented with the most difficult behaviours in class were the shadow of the teacher's own personality type and consequent teaching style. In this research I did not, however, follow the route of adapting to group learning styles such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal, and naturalist (Gardner 1993). I identified and engaged with pupils' individual ideas and ways of thinking in creating new and accessible knowledge with them (see Chapter Eight). I learned to change my practice of teaching by providing opportunities for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) to identify their own learning styles and strategies. I changed my ways of teaching to accommodate their learning approaches. My choice of research methodology and the form of theory I engaged with facilitated the changes in my practice. I learned that by engaging with open-ended forms of theorising I was able to develop a more socially just practice.

A second, further significance of my research in relation to my own learning about theory was that I came to understand the ontological base for my epistemological

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stance. I identified and articulated my own view of knowledge and knowledge creation by starting with practice and generating theory from within the practice. I learned the importance of personal knowledge in my ways of teaching. This does not mean that I am ignoring other forms of knowledge; I am reclaiming personal knowledge within my context where I found that dominant discourses about theory ignored it. I realised that knowledge was fluid and dynamic and seldom reified in relation to teaching and learning. What I am claiming here is important because I have integrated my ontological, spiritual and ethical values within practice-based knowledge. In doing so I have improved my own professional learning as well as developed new ways of enabling learning for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). This is part of my original contribution to knowledge.

The personal, professional and political learning that came from trying to improve my practice includes an understanding of how I have contributed to theories of social justice by developing new approaches to the learning of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). The significance of my research is also grounded in the argument that by engaging in forms of social action I have come to clarify and deepen my understanding of the complexities of my practice. I have contributed to a rigorous social knowledge base, which has the potential to inform and develop practice.

During the course of my research three key insights emerged. These insights were (1) my reconceptualisation of metacognition; (2) my understanding of reflection in action; (3) my understanding of developing theory from within practice.

(1) My reconceptualisation of metacognition
I explained in Chapter Eight my reconceptualisation of metacognition. This was part of what drove the changes in my practices and theorising through raising my own awareness of what I am doing. I have recreated my identity as a teacher, a researcher and a theorist through my critical reflexivity. I have asserted agency for myself in that I have challenged conditions of injustice in my context. In my choice of research methods I have acted with imagination, which was necessary to counter the conditions in my context. The conditions were both constraining and unjust. I have

opened up a plurality of ways of knowing by recognising that each pupil and I have our own individual ways of learning and coming to know.

(2) *My understanding of reflection in action*

I have arrived at an important new learning for me by reflecting in action. My methodology makes specific use of the metaphor of a mirror for reflection (see Part Three). In developing an understanding of my own and my pupils' identity I use images of mirroring. Mirroring and reflection were integral to my process of testing ideas within my self-study action research methodology. By reflecting my actions against the values base of my research, I can justify the form of action research I chose. I have found a form of theorising that recognises the plurality of the human condition and in particular the pluralistic forms of the relationships within teaching and learning. Walker (2005) offers a description and explanation of this concept, which resonates with my research:

> Through our speech and actions we reveal who we are, we 'appear' to
> each other, we 'present' to each other fulfilling what Arendt (1958)
> calls the human condition of plurality so that we learn and that we
> learn from each other.
>
> (Walker 2005, p.103)

Through reflection I have also come to an understanding of learning difference and the plurality of learning processes and strategies.

(3) My understanding of developing theory from within practice.

The theorising of practice is sometimes seen as a new skill in educational contexts where teachers' craft knowledge has been undervalued and under-researched (Day 2005).

> In the current educational climate of change, with its emphasis on
> teachers' continuous professional development, there is much to be
> gained from studying the craft knowledge of teaching, particularly
> from the perspective of the teacher.
>
> (Day 2005, p.21)

I believe that I have achieved what Day (2005) speaks of from the perspective of an observer:

> Privileged enough to observe successful teachers recognise their craft-knowledge at work even though they often struggle to define it coherently.
>
> (Day 2005, p.1)

I am claiming to have demonstrated not only that I have articulated craft-knowledge but also to have developed new knowledge about learning and justice for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and those who teach them. My research has shown how I am contributing to a new epistemology for a new scholarship (Schön 1995) by encouraging new ways of learning for myself and other teachers, which could contribute to their professional development.

Before explaining the potential significance of my research for others I want to make a final comment on the personal significance of my work. The importance of developing my living theory within a self-study action research methodology to me as a teacher, a researcher and as a person was that I experienced the transformative shift from experiencing myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead 1989) where my practice denied my values, to experiencing my practice as celebrating the joy of change. The writing of this thesis is part of that celebration of the gifts that I have received from learning with and from my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). Apple (1997) has articulated my sense of joy as follows:

> The gift that I have received from them is the knowingness that there is hope for all and a way by which every child can be reached. This way is very simple. It is honouring the abilities that the child has and the space that the child is in at the moment.
>
> (Apple 1997, p.307)

I have found that developing living educational theory has been a fulfilling process for me as a teacher, researcher and as a person. I have shown ways of improving professional learning and moving towards a more socially just form of teaching for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I have found that change in my

research is not gained through conventional 'authority based consciousness but by cultivating imagination and creativity within each student' (Apple 1997, p.308) and within myself. By articulating my sense of moral and ethical judgements, personal thoughts and societal concerns, I have changed and grown. I have established a supportive educational environment where my vision (see Table 3.2) became my reality and that of my pupils. Our experiences can spread hope to others who have learned to be helpless.

~Teacher professional development as grounded in the ability to critique one's own pedagogical stance when teaching pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia)

In producing this thesis as an account of my practice I am not offering it as a model of professional development. Instead I aim to help other practitioners to consider how they might examine their practice not only in the areas of supporting those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) but also in all areas of their work. This thesis is not a 'what to do' book. It as an account of what I did and why I did it. I present it as an invitation to others to reflect on their own practice and consider the benefits of theorising it, as I have experienced.

I want to identify the significant elements in my research that contributed to its success from my perspective as a teacher. I began my research from a position of learned helplessness in the teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). The community of learning that I developed with pupils in my school offered opportunities for the development of metacognition and social learning. I, as well as the pupils, raised my own levels of metacognition and social learning. Our interactions reinforced and confirmed me in my new thinking and new actions. In a similar way, the community of learning established within the university by my peer group of doctoral researchers (who became my validation group) and a college professor who acted as our supervisor developed relationships that reinforced and confirmed me in my new ideas about knowledge creation and theorising. Within this approach I gained the freedom and confidence to grow into my own voice in educational settings. I also gained sufficient confidence, when confirmed in my own ideas in these settings, so that I could contribute to more socially just forms of teaching and learning.

Often when teachers are asked to theorise their practice, they 'are tempted to reproduce the kinds of abstracted principles of theories that they feel are expected of them' (Van Manen 1995, p.47). In this way teachers often attempt to articulate in a conceptual manner active understandings of their work. This does not always produce useful practical theory because it frequently ignores the passions and intentions of teacher craft.

During my research I have critiqued my own stance in relation to my own pedagogies. I have also critiqued my stance in relation to dominant teaching strategies for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). This critique is of current importance for the professional development of teachers of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) because it addresses the core issues informing the new model of provision outlined in Circular Special Education 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). These issues, as I listed them at the beginning of this section, included (1) a whole-school approach and (2) providing appropriate learning for these pupils (Government of Ireland 1998; Day 2003; Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). The idea of inclusion is implied in this dual focus and is also stated in the circular.

(1) A whole-school approach
In terms of a whole-school approach, currently there is a gap in whole-school policy for specific learning disability (dyslexia) (Day 2003). Tansey and Ní Dhomhnaill (2002) found in their study of the perceptions and practices of primary school teachers with regard to dyslexia that,

> the majority of respondents worked in school that did not have a whole
> school policy on dyslexia though most (94.2%) perceived a need for
> one.

<div align="right">(Tansey and Ní Dhomhnaill 2002, p.17)</div>

My research offers the potential to influence how future policy could be informed. My living theory has contributed to professional development and provision by offering individual and group interventions in a manner that best suited the abilities of pupils. My approach included supports that ensured that the pupils' needs were

met not only throughout the school day but could be sustained outside school and into the pupils' future lives. My contribution was informed by and is in line with the spirit of recent government decisions such as the Education of People with Special Education Needs Act (Government of Ireland 2004a); Equal Status Act (Government of Ireland 2004b); Disability Act (Government of Ireland 2005); and Circular Special Education 02/2005 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). My research methodology demonstrated ways to allow for in-class as well as out-of-class teaching support as Circular 02/2005 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a) suggests. The changes in practice that occurred as I developed my living theory demonstrated the importance of a solid theoretical base in implementing change in education.

(2) Providing appropriate teaching

The individual and group settings in which my living theory was developed provided opportunities for personal reflection on learning by both teachers and learners (Chapter Eight); and for communities of learners (my pupils and I) to develop learning abilities and to create new knowledge together (Chapter Nine). These practices could inform how best to deploy teaching resources in the future. Circular Special Education 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a) aims to ensure that additional teaching resources are allocated differentially to pupils in accordance with their levels of need. My research offers different ways of conceptualising learning and differentiation of learning. It provides new ways to involve teachers in the learning of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). My new pedagogies offer a differentiated approach to learning in accordance with pupils' capabilities rather than their needs. In practical terms my research could help fulfil the rationale of Circular Special Education 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). There are however two significant differences between my approach and that of the circular. The circular focused on pupils' needs whereas I focus on individuals' abilities.

My research methods also allowed for the grouping of pupils with similar needs as appropriate in accordance with the rationale of the circular. Each cohort of pupils spanned an age range, whereas extra support provision previously happened on a class-by-class basis regardless of the individuality or similarity of pupils. I

developed inclusive settings for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia); I have transformed the contexts of marginalisation that existed prior to my research. An aspect of marginalisation was that the delays in psychological testing contributed to the difficulties of ensuring that additional teaching resources were provided in a timely manner. I have shown how it is possible to lessen the need for psychological testing because I do not recognise the ideas of deficit testing where pupils are tested to find gaps or deficits in their learning. Instead I have focused on a capability model by celebrating pupils' abilities.

I believe that my appreciation of the need for practical justice in teaching has already had an educative influence on the educational experiences of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) who participated in my research. I have also demonstrated how other teachers have been influenced by my work. I have evaluated my own practice and devised differentiated approaches so that learning is appropriate for my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). My actions have contributed to a whole-school approach to providing appropriate learning for these pupils. A whole-school approach to providing appropriate learning for my pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) is part of the rhetoric of the Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998), Day (2003) and the Special Education Circular 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a), and it has been enacted in my research.

The methodology of my research offers a comprehensive approach to the evaluation and change of teacher practice within the community of the school. This approach begins with the question, 'How do I improve my work?' (Whitehead 1989). It continues with a commitment to change informed by a checking of the ontological and epistemological positioning of the practitioner against his or her actions. It is a living and relevant way to theorise practice so that it may inform future practice and see how practice may inform policy and provision. It is a form of professional development that is grounded in the lived experiences of the teacher and is therefore of immediate relevance.

My work resonates with Zeichner (1999), who speaks of self-study research from teachers' perspectives and of how teachers have courageously exposed and then

confronted the shortcomings in their work and identified the gaps between the rhetoric and the reality of their practice. He praises the self-study genre of research when he states,

> The self-study genre of research in teacher education is the one clear example of where research has had an important influence on practice in teachers' education

<div align="right">(Zeichner 1999, p.12)</div>

10.3 The potential implications of my research for new practices in teaching children with special educational needs (dyslexia).

In this section I want to speak about the potential implications of my work, in terms of how other people such as professional colleagues have learned from me, and what people may continue to learn.

I gained new insights about knowledge acquisition from the dialogues and the learning relationships of individuals as they sought to understand their individual processes of coming to know. This can be seen in the following quotations from a critical friend.

> You seem to wish to move in the direction of knowledge as a form of personal enlightenment that can be developed through a process of action and reflection, and refined through dialogical practices. I really like the idea that knowledge is created dialogically, that as people talk and critique, their knowledge develops, and this knowledge is embodied within their relationships.
>
> (5 April 2004 Correspondence from Critical Friend A, original in data archive Appendix 2.5c)

That correspondence gives an accurate conceptualisation of what she observed in my practice. I have come to realise that there are links between the knowledge-constituted relationships described above and ideas about the education of social formations (Whitehead 2004a; Whitehead and McNiff 2006). Whitehead explains 'the education of social formations' as helping groups everywhere to 'understand how they can work together in a way that will help them to improve their social contexts' (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, p.44).

I will now explain my understanding of the processes of the education of social formations in an example from my specific context. The example I choose is a case conference to develop an individual learning plan for a pupil with specific learning disability (dyslexia). At such a meeting teachers, educational psychologists and the pupil with his or her parents might come together with the common aim of improving the learning of the pupil. Although this group has a common aim to understand how they can work together in a way that will help them to improve the learning of the pupil, each person within the group is already part of a social formation that is linked to their different roles and understandings of specific learning disability (dyslexia). Educational psychologists, who work with pupils with dyslexia at primary school level, aim to diagnose and identify patterns in specific learning difficulty (dyslexia) and explain them within the rules of their profession. Pupils aim to find ways to cope within the rules of the education system. The aims of teachers are to identify learning opportunities and to teach appropriately within current policies and provision. The individual aims of each group member can leave us less open to the possibilities of working as a group with the common aim of the pupil's learning. This can lead to debates at case conferences where our individual previous perspectives can take precedence over the aims of the new social formation around the table.

In contrast to this I have found during my research an approach that did contribute to the education of social formations. This process began when I deconstructed my understanding of theories of learning for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and offered a living practical theory of justice in learning and a reconceptualisation of metacognition. These understandings contributed to my development of a new epistemology of practice. I have disseminated my account of how I arrived at this concept so that it can be accessed by groups – such as teachers, researchers, academics, policy makers, psychologists, neurologists and members of the medical profession – who come together to improve the lot of those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). I believe my work has potential significance for them in that by accessing my account, others may consider my approach and understand how it can influence their approaches. This belief is grounded in my new

understanding of knowledge and knowledge creation and new forms of participatory working.

I also perceive links between my account, which explains my theorising of my practice, and my capacity to influence the education of social formations. Similar links have been made by McNiff (2006) and McNiff and Whitehead (2006). Examples of accounts that demonstrate the same capacity are O'Callaghan (1997), Abbey (2002), Delong and Knill-Griesser (2003), Rivers (2003) and Deery and Hughes (2004). Their accounts include descriptions of new forms of participatory working (O'Callaghan 1997); a teacher consultant's role in developing and facilitating interdisciplinary studies (Abbey 2002); the integration of issues of power and ethics in valid explanations of educative influence (Delong and Knill-Griesser 2003); inclusive support for an autistic student (Rivers 2003); engagement with the politics of institutional knowledge (Deery and Hughes 2004). Although the contexts of these researchers differ widely – from school inspector to school of midwifery – they resonate with many issues in my research.

The significance of my research in relation to the education of social formations is that I have placed my account of new learning in the public domain to test the validity and legitimacy of my claims that I have influenced my learning, the learning of others in my workplace and wider groupings. By wider groupings I mean those who work with pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and who wish to learn how to act in ways that recognise others as able to think for themselves. I want to show how the new learning that I have claimed throughout can inform new practices that can influence sustainable forms of social growth and educational knowledge. I am linking the ideas of the education of social formations and the dissemination of research. When I discussed how I presented my research in three different public fora, my explanations have potential significance for others who wish to adopt a self-study action research approach to their practice.

The new knowledge that I am claiming evolved from within my practice. My understandings developed from critical reflections on my learning and my pupils' developing understandings around specific learning disability. Pupils who participated in my research produced reports, documenting their personal

understandings of the affective domain of dyslexia and how they learned in different ways (see Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine). This new knowledge was not part of the normal, national curriculum for these children (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999b) nor had it appeared in any previous research known to me. I claim that the children's personal embodied understandings became explicit in the process of making them public within a reciprocal learning activity with peers. This course of action also provided evidence that I was valuing the individual capabilities of my research participants.

By working together, in a spirit of openness, to make our personal understandings of learning for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia) explicit, the pupils participating in my research and I have confirmed each other as valuable individuals and also confirmed our capabilities within our relationships. The research episode of developing and presenting reports on pupils' personal understanding of specific learning disability (dyslexia) was grounded in values of openness and fairness and of love and respect for the capabilities of the individual. Dialogue towards empowerment as spoken of by Freire (1994) is shown to be relational in my research processes. My research account has challenged conventional discourses about dyslexia that are rooted in the values of dominance and control (Chapter 3). I have also challenged how children have been devalued by being prevented from participating in their own process of learning and knowledge creation (Chapter 7).

My research has challenged my own self-perceptions of teacher power, and I have learned the power of encouraging the children to see themselves as powerful in creating knowledge (McDonagh 2003). I have helped pupils to come to know in their own way. The research episodes and analyses above have led me to understand the transformative nature of knowledge and that it is personal yet exists in reciprocal relationships. I claim this new understanding and its practical significance, and I am explaining its theoretical importance. In future, I wish further to explore its significance in the dissemination of self-study action research reports.

10.4 Summary

One of the more significant aspects of my research is that I have created a living theory of what I know and how I have come to know. Within this metacognitive approach I have developed a new epistemology of practice. I have also demonstrated how the development of new epistemologies can influence the way that particular groupings live and work together, and what kinds of discourses they can use to negotiate how they do this. Consequently, I suggest that my research has made a contribution towards the creation of a new social order that is grounded in the recognition and valuing of the other.

I make this claim because I believe that teaching colleagues, the participating pupils and I have been influenced to make changes. I am not claiming that I caused these changes but that I have influenced myself and others to make changes.

The living theory of learning to teach for social justice that I developed emerged in response to our needs and my wish to improve my practice. Together we have offered a form of educational research grounded in values of equality, freedom, caring and respect for the individual with specific learning disability (dyslexia). The importance of my research is that it has influenced both practice and theory in my context to move towards a more socially just form of teaching and learning for those with specific learning disability (dyslexia).

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Reflections

11.1   Introduction

I have titled this chapter 'reflection' because it is a look back on my research. I had set out to challenge injustice, as I perceived it, in the teaching of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and it was some time into my research before I realised the necessity for a deep inner focus on myself in my practice. This was because, as Hartog (2004) also found, what I had to learn lay in the gaps between my espoused values and my practice prior to my research. I became aware that my practice was value-laden and I experienced myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead and McNiff 2006, p.32). My emergent awareness of my values (as I explained in Chapter Six) contributed to transforming my ontological commitments into an epistemological stance, which had a three-pronged influence: (1) on my new learning; (2) on the methodology by which I validated my claims; and (3) on the significance of my claims.

To describe my experience of this transformation, I return to the metaphor of the waves (Coehlo, 1992 and 1997). The metaphor positioned me as buffeted by waves of influence and as part of a tidal wave of learning. I have now gained a new understanding that I am not neutral in this fluid, water metaphor. I too have had an influence on others, on practices and on the social world.

I begin the chapter by asking myself, 'Am I contributing to new forms of theory and will my thesis add to the existing body of knowledge?' I check if I am contributing to new knowledge by

1. Evaluating what I have achieved in terms of the ontological and epistemological stance I adopted

2. Questioning what is the relevance of my research to other fields of practice

3. Scrutinising the living relevance of my key commitments to issues of freedom and respect for the capabilities of the individuals in my research

I address my questions at three levels and I use these levels to frame this chapter. First I consider the theoretical challenge of personal and social practices in teaching, which are informed and underpinned by specific ontological and epistemological commitments. I then consider teachers and pupils as co-creators of knowledge – a concept that I believe has not previously been researched in the field of pupils with specific learning disability. The two major claims to new living educational theory that I have made in this thesis are grounded in my ontological and epistemological values, in particular my respect for the capabilities of the individual. This grounding of my new living theory of social justice has the potential to be of significance for other marginalised areas in education – for areas of disability and disadvantage – and for educational policy and provision. In the second part in this chapter I tease out the potential implications of teacher and pupils co-creating knowledge for schooling where children are categorised and labelled. I have shown how the pupils and I have co-created knowledge. I came to understand myself as in relation with them, and they with me. This demonstrated a form of just practice because I was developing a dialogue of equals, which is a just practice in terms of human dignity. Finally I reflect on the importance of linking the idea of the value of the person with the idea that people must be free to realise and exercise their values. I relate this concept to the area of disadvantage in schools.

My living theory of learning to teach for social justice in relation to pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) also has potential relevance for future educational policy and provision because new legislation has been enacted which supports many of the values on which my research is based. My research offers both practical and theoretical insights for providers of appropriate provision for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). A whole-school approach to providing appropriate teaching for these pupils (Government of Ireland Education Act 1998 and Day 2003) is now necessary because resource teaching has been withdrawn from them (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). Under the increased general allocation of support staff to schools in circular 02/05, class teachers now bear responsibility for pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). So I am suggesting that my research is both useful and timely.

11.2   I am contributing to new forms of theory and my thesis will add to the existing body of knowledge

I am claiming to be contributing to a new form of theory because my research has addressed the theoretical challenge where personal and social practices of teaching are informed and underpinned by specific ontological and epistemological practices. I have critiqued dominant forms of theory and practice on the grounds that they have led to further marginalisation and domination of those who are already oppressed; a category into which I have, at times, placed my pupils and myself.

I have shown the development of my living theory of learning to teach for social justice throughout this thesis and I invite the reader to judge if I have done so in ways that demonstrate the realisation of my underpinning ontological and epistemological values. I list these values below and have summarised how some of my research actions can be related to them.

- I have developed freedom for pupils to explain and demonstrate their abilities to learn and freedom for me to develop theory from within my practice. I have produced evidence of this in pupils' presentations of their reports, such as 'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others', to peers and teachers; and in the changing roles for pupils and teachers. Examples of freedom in learning were Pupil B's comment, 'I've never had so much fun', talking to teachers about his understanding of specific learning disability (a fuller transcript of this conversation is in Chapter Seven) and the teacher's written comment in the previous chapter where he wrote 'I learned more about dyslexia than I had ever known before – shame on me!' following a pupil's presentation in his class. Throughout my research I was theorising my practice, and the examples above show my practice as generating new knowledge within the real-life teaching and learning relationships of reciprocity and freedom.
- I have demonstrated empathy for how and why others learn as they do. By sharing research methods such as reflective journaling and doing action research projects alongside each other my pupils and I showed empathy towards each other. The pupils articulated their new awareness of others

when they said, 'We all have different ways of learning.' Their empathy led to a growth 'in stature' and 'peer respect' (teacher letter quoted in Chapter Seven). Throughout these processes the importance of personal knowledge was highlighted.

- Justice was evident in the ways in which the new knowledge, gained during my research, was disseminated throughout my school. I would describe this as a form of educative influence. The pictures, in the previous chapter, from the video of pupils sharing their reports 'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others' with classes, trainee-teacher, class and support teachers and school principal is an example of the development of knowledge through dialogue. My facilitation of this shows how changes can come about through educative influence, rather than restrictive curricula or timed targets. My educative influence encouraged others to engage in more socially just forms of teaching. These examples are of a practical justice where all contributed to developing new knowledge in a non-coercive way.

- I have encouraged equality in exploring the nature of relationships between people which foster knowledge creation within the kinds of relationships that avoid dominance or oppression. The reflective group discussions between research participants – the pupils and myself; between the pupils who participated in my research and other pupils in the school; between pupils and class teachers as detailed in Chapter Seven, demonstrated an atmosphere of equality. These reflective discussions were a core research method and were based in a conceptualisation of knowledge as both dialogical and personal. They brought an equality to the pupil teacher relationship which was not evident prior to my research as I showed in the artwork of Pupil B where a teacher is hated and in my original pupil profiles and teaching of commercially produced programmes for dyslexia.

- I have demonstrated forgiveness, which I explained in terms of making allowances for others and accepting that I don't know the full story. This includes accepting that there is no one right way of knowing and the need for a constant search for fuller understandings, by constantly questioning my understandings. My questioning is written into the text of this thesis in thought bubbles. It is in the reflective journals I have kept and referenced.

Questioning has been a vital part of my validation process and has been the key to the reconceptualisation of metacognition and social-metacognition in my research. These reflections, though grounded in personal knowledge, are about interrogating all forms of knowledge.

- I have respected human dignity. I came to this research from a commitment to the dignity of every human. By celebrating the learning capacities of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) I have come to two new insights that have changed my teaching and I hope will influence others. How I achieved this was by making space in my work for each pupil. A teaching colleague stated (see Chapter Five) that I 'made space for the voices of those not normally heard to be heard'. When I was confronted with pupils who were failing to achieve in literacy terms I did not see this as an indictment. Instead I confirmed their humanity as best I could by finding new forms of voice for them. The art, their taped discussion, the oral presentation all demonstrate that there are many forms of knowledge that are valid within a school setting.

- I have valued wholeness. I felt that the wholeness of pupils was denied by the form of pupil profiles that I compiled about them in the early part of my research, in that I focused only on the pupils' minds and not on their bodies and spirits. I attributed this to the form of knowledge that my profiles were grounded in. During my research, especially in the pupils' action research into learning spelling and through their journals, I came to understand and theorise that there are many ways of learning. My research methods had at their core (see diagram in Chapter Six) personal knowledge and dialogical knowledge and have led me to an acceptance of a commitment to the reconciliation of a plurality of approaches to life and knowledge. In devising and presenting their reports 'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others' my pupils became accepted as whole humans within a whole school setting. In my research I have engaged with issues of how I come to know and how my coming to know was informed by how I helped my children to come to know.

- I have demonstrated service. My decision to do this research came from a commitment to serve others. I wanted to take action to help my pupils but this meant more than doing something for them. To me service meant

working with others to help them to help themselves. In the diagram that I drew of my research methods (Chapter Six) the arrows that move to the sides of the page indicate that this work is continuous and will be even when my research finishes. An example of this can be seen in the Principal's comments (on video, original in archive appendix 2.4g) following my pupils' presentation of their report to a class when he cited pupils voicing a difficulty as a model to deal with educational difficulties and said,

> And if you tell us what that difficulty is, someone will help. If you keep it all inside no one will know. And the problem will get bigger and bigger. So you have shown that the way to solve a problem is to share a problem.

(April 2003 video, original in archive Appendix 2.4g)

My conceptualisation of service was of action towards harmonising theory and practice for the good of others.

These eight values have developed from the embodied personal commitments that I explained in Part One as the Christian based commitments by which I attempt to live. The difficulties I experienced in harmonising my values and my practice initiated my research. I am claiming that I am now living towards achieving that aim of harmonising my values and my practice.

11.3 My research has potential implications for other fields of practice

A major theme of my research was the idea of pupils and I co-creating knowledge where children are categorised and labelled as having specific learning disability (dyslexia). My idea is premised on the concept of valuing the individual and has potential importance for other fields of practice. The other fields of practice that have relevance for resource teaching are other forms of disability. In this section I articulate the possible relevance and influence of my research on those labelled with disabilities within our education system in primary schools (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a).

The focus of my claims about the creativity of the individual and their capabilities for personalised and metacognitive learning can be seen to have relevance for all those labelled with a disability. This is because my claims are grounded in ideas of ability and positive self-concept rather than disability. My research has particular relevance because of a major shift in Government provision for those with disabilities in schools in 2005. The Special Education Circular 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a) categorises disabilities according to their rate of occurrence as low and high incidence disabilities within primary schools. The low incidence category includes physical and sensory disabilities; emotional disturbance and autistic spectrum disorders; speech and language disorder; moderate and severe learning disabilities; multiple disorders including assessed syndromes in conjunction with one other, low incidence disability (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a, pp.16-20). Resource teacher support has consequently been withdrawn from pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) and mild learning disability. They are now included in the high incidence category of disabilities along with pupils, whose achievements are at or below the tenth percentile in English and Mathematics; and along with pupils with mild or transient learning disabilities resulting from identified speech and language difficulties or social or emotional difficulties (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a, p. 2). Prior to the issuing of this circular the latter group of pupils were taught by resource teachers mainly on a two-and-a-half hour allocation per week, and generally on a withdrawal basis (see Chapters One and Two of this thesis and McGee 1990 and De Buitléir 2002) or in special units or schools (McGee 2004, Nugent 2006). The change of provision gives only those pupils with low incidence disabilities resource teaching provision. Under an extra general allocation of teachers, schools were required to provide appropriate teaching for high incidence pupils without any extra professional development for those additional teachers.

According to the Department of Education and Science (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a) the core rationale for this change is

1. to make possible the development of inclusive schools;
2. to deploy additional teaching resources in a flexible manner;
3. to ensure that additional teaching resources are provided in a timely manner;

4. to ensure that additional teaching resources are allocated differentially to pupils in accordance with their levels of need
5. to allow for in-class as well as out-of-class teaching support
6. to allow for the grouping of pupils with similar needs as appropriate

(Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a, p.1)

My research is at the cutting-edge of this new system of provision because the implications of Circular 02/05 are that since September 2005 all school staff and not only the extra 2,500 resource teachers employed since 1997 (Dáil Question 806, 2005) have responsibility for these pupils. So my study of my practice has relevance for other mainstream class teachers and teachers appointed under the extra general allocation model who have recently been given responsibility for pupils with low incidence disabilities in addition to pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). To demonstrate this I provide practical examples below from my school of the influence of my living theory during the course of my research on pupils from each of the low incidence categories mentioned in 02/05. I describe practical changes for pupils with low incidence disabilities such as (a) physical and sensory disabilities; (b) autistic spectrum including behavioural and emotional disorders; and for pupils with high incidence disabilities such as (c) speech and language disability, and (d) mild learning disability.

(a) Pupils with physical and sensory disability

My ideas about capability teaching focus on ways of identifying individuals' learning abilities. Earlier in this thesis I described how I have implemented changes in my practice through a combination of reflections and dialogical methods of collaboration in the learning processes of the children participating in my research; I have told how I have generated a living theory of practice from within my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia). The learning relationship between my pupils and me was created within an ethic of sharing and respect for the capability of individual learners.

My contribution to my own professional development during my self-study action research has influenced other resource teachers in my school to adopt many of my changes in practice and to extend them to all resource pupils during the years 2003-2005. For example, a second resource teacher provided opportunities for a child with a hearing impairment to experience his abilities in art. These changes in practice

resulted in the hearing-impaired child receiving awards as well as national and local publicity for his artwork (Appendix 2.5f). Together the teacher and child also found ways to transfer his talents in visual perceptual skills to his ways of learning to read and write. Rather than being marginalised in a hearing world, this child was celebrated for his talents and enabled to learn literacy skills in easier ways. One of his paintings is framed and hangs alongside prints by Jack B. Yeats, Picasso, Renoir and other famous artists in our school corridor.

Pupil G's picture

Picture 11.1: Paintings on school corridor

My research suggests that educative influence is an effective form of professional development. For example, based on the influence of my work around voice, capacity and individuality, a resource teacher encouraged a visually impaired child in his singing abilities [he had an accurate ear], which he has transferred to help his memory skills in the rote memorisation of facts such as tables (Appendix 2.5i). In the validation of my own claims teachers have offered descriptions such as this of their own practice, which show that by listening, trying out and expanding on my ideas, teachers have been influenced to make changes in their professional practice within my school.

(b) Pupils with behavioural and emotional disorders
The conceptual basis of my efforts to celebrate the capacities for learning of children with specific learning disability (dyslexia) has possible relevance for those within the autistic spectrum as defined by the circular 02/05 (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). Those within this spectrum are believed to have a triad of impairments, which include challenges to social communication, social interaction and flexibility in thinking and behaviour. Treatments for these difficulties have

adopted a medical model of disability by prescribing medication and teaching within a strict behaviouristic approach. Structured Teaching is recommended for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, but I agree with Howley and Arnold (2005) who argue that

> this approach is misused with rigid adherence to structure that may limit progression in key areas of learning.
>
> (Howley and Arnold 2005, p.94)

In contrast to these approaches my research is significant in that it offers the concepts of metacognition and the social construction of understanding for individuals who have a disability according to current education norms. The form of knowledge creation that I have developed cannot be achieved in settings which adopt medical or behaviouristic models only. But my findings are supported in the literature (Blackman 1999; and Hayden 2004 and 2005) where some individuals have written about overcoming autism by gaining a metacognitive understanding of their difficulties although they have not named it as such. An example of this is 'Lucy's Story' (Blackman 1999), the story of a girl who rejected the treatments for autism and her selective mutism and made a personal commitment to understanding and controlling her autism and become a socially acceptable person. Her experiences involved a metacognitive approach; her new understandings were constructed by monitoring herself in social relationships with herself and others. As an outsider to Lucy's world, I, like all who know her, including professionals and family, do not understand her world. We do not understand the world of those with autism spectrum disorders and I am suggesting that my reconceptualisation of metacognition has potential implications for those with autism to come to an understanding of their difficulties. I am saying this because I believe a key learning for me in my research was the need to search for appropriate forms of voice rather than acceptance of normative forms of communication within an educational context. The application of my approaches for those with behavioural and emotional disability was confirmed by the following comments from two resource teachers:

> My practices are similar now to what you talked about. It is relevant for resource teachers but I think more needs to be done for class teachers. I think class teachers need to know a lot more, how to spot difficulties earlier so that children can get attention sooner.

It is very relevant for learning support and resource teachers. In an ideal 20:1 classroom too!

Teacher P acknowledged the benefits of my approach. However she is working out of a different epistemology when she talks of 'more needs to be done for' others whereas I suggest that self-study action research offers a methodology for teachers and pupils to act on their own behalf. The difference in what the teacher and I are saying is that I do not believe that 'more needs to be done FOR class teachers'. I am suggesting that class teachers could learn from my self-study approach to take control of their own practice in order to improve and theorise those practices.

(c) Pupils with speech and language disorder

The artwork, annotated transcripts and reflective discussions produced during my research are some of the forms of communication I engaged in so as to enable the voices of the children who participated in my research to be heard. This has relevance for the teaching of pupils with speech and language disorder. Although speech and language therapists diagnose and use multisensory approaches to remediate perceived difficulties, they work within a medical model of disability and at times use compensatory approaches. When those with stammers, who are able to sing, are encouraged to use the slow pace of singing and the appropriate breathing techniques singing requires to help overcome their stammering difficulties, this I believe is a practical example of a compensatory approach. My theory offers a different approach where children could develop their capabilities in other areas to help them overcome their disability. The difference between the compensatory approach of some speech and language therapists and my approach is that I am not devising compensatory strategies; instead I am enabling pupils to develop awareness of their own capability and also to devise their own compensatory strategies. An example of this was the pupils' self study action research project into their learning of spellings.

(d) Pupils with mild general learning disability

The categories of mild, moderate and severe general learning disability are assessed by psychologists and defined only by low levels of intelligence quotient scores (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 2005a). I have found that my approaches are least effective for this group of pupils because their reasoning and descriptive powers are not commensurate with their age (Scanlon and Mc Gilloway 2006). Metacognition, as I have redefined it, requires the ability to critique. Many pupils with mild, moderate and severe general learning disability may not be able to engage with my reconceptualisation of metacognition as personal and social critique of what and how one learns because of their limited IQ. Despite this, my research offers an epistemological and ontological approach that has relevance for these pupils. My living theory has been developed within a capability approach, which speaks to my values of human dignity, wholeness and service. Pupils with mild, moderate and severe general learning disability have innate survival instincts and capabilities and I believe that my freedom-for-development approach would encourage the building of learning on practical life skill needs (see Deirdre Walsh 2003). This is significant because a major focus of my research was to find a suitable and more just epistemological base for educational research and practice.

~An international perspective to my study

My research has highlighted the importance of linking the idea of the value of the person with the idea that people must be free to realise and exercise their values in schools. This has potential international implications for those placed at a disadvantage worldwide.

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A constant theme throughout my research has been the creative relationship between my pupils and myself. Within this relationship I perceive my pupils as my equals and this is grounded in my ontological and Christian values. Similar to Arendt (1998), I see others as valuable simply because they are people. This ontological stance has allowed me to create links in my research between the value of the person and the idea that people must be free to build on their own capabilities. I believe that the methodology by which I arrived at my living theory of social justice in my teaching of pupils with specific learning disability (dyslexia) is of key relevance for

the education of others marginalised as a result of social disabilities and who fall under the label of disadvantage within our school system.

My living theory of learning to teach for social justice can make a contribution to combat the marginalisation of those at a disadvantage in education at two levels; first I have removed issues of power from the teacher and pupil learning relationship by providing opportunities for the voices of all participants to be heard; and second my emphasis on a capability approach has provided the freedom to the marginalised pupils to develop as learners. In McDonagh and Sullivan (2003), Sullivan and I focused on 'themes of social justice and equality which developed from our separate research contexts' (p.1) as primary school teachers of marginalised pupils – disadvantaged travellers and pupils with specific learning disabilities. During our research and in our joint paper, we claimed to be 'Making the invisible visible – giving a voice to the marginalised' (McDonagh and Sullivan 2003). The term 'the marginalised' raises issues around empowerment and the question of who were valid knowers within our specific contexts. This led us to engage with ideas around knowledge creation both in theory and practice. Our work with marginalised children aimed to find ways to secure educational entitlement and transform disadvantage into opportunity. Sullivan (2006) claims to have achieved this and I, using a similar form of self-study action research, claim in this thesis to have done so too.

The explanation of the significance of my research to others at a disadvantage within the education system such as travellers lies in my emphasis on providing opportunities for those at a disadvantage to have a voice that can be valued by themselves and the institution in which they are situated. This was achieved by providing opportunities for positive self-talk and reflection (see Chapter Seven). My research has shown that this can only be achieved when the epistemological basis of their disadvantage has been examined and, as Sen (1999) suggests, 'constitutes participatory resolution of epistemological issues' (p.142). In other words the marginalised require opportunities to join in a valuable personal decision making process. This does not require the undermining of the institution, culture or society that is the context of the marginalisation. Nor is it about financial input. It does

require a freedom to develop a personal understanding, as I have explained throughout this thesis.

11.4   An ending

> Treasure is uncovered by the force of flowing water and it is buried by the same current.

<div align="right">(Coehlo 1992 p.25)</div>

Throughout this thesis I have used metaphors of water and waves. In this section I return for a final time to the words of Coehlo (1992) above. For me the quotation above speaks about the idea that when treasure is uncovered one should seize it; if not seized and used, the treasure can slip beneath the current and disappear. This metaphor can represent my research at several levels.

At one level the treasure chest of my self-study action research methodology was filled with innovative ways to changes practices and ways of thinking. This treasure held the key to the development of new forms of theory in which my practice as a teacher could be theorised and improved. The current represents forms of theory and logic. The waves that uncovered the chest were the personal insider forms of theory and fluid innovative logic that I chose. Propositional, outsider forms of theory would have provided ways to examine objectively what was happening in my context; however these forms of theory would not have facilitated changes in practice. They would have worked within a cause and effect form of logic. This would have stifled the innovative thinking that both my pupils and I engaged in. These traditional forms of theory and logic would have drowned my treasure.

At another level the treasure could represent my claims to my new living theory of learning to teach for social justice in relation to those with specific learning disability (dyslexia). The current represents forms of learning. The waves represent the influences of my learning and my pupils' learning. The uncovering of the treasure of my living theory occurred in the interaction between the waves of our learning. My learning influenced my pupils' critical learning and they influenced my critical learning. Together we tackled our learned helplessness which could have swamped our treasure and denied the development of our new living theories.

At the level of claiming to have generated new and original practical and theoretical knowledge the treasure can represent the significance of my study for myself and others. The current represents forms of knowledge. The waves that uncovered this treasure were the personalised learning and benefits derived from being involved with communities of learners. These waves included my openness to placing my methodology and findings firmly within my embodied ontological and epistemological values. I tested my new, original practical and theoretical knowledge against those practical and epistemological standards of judgement. The testing of my theory against living values maintained the living relevance of my research for the pupils who participated, for the wider educational community and for myself.

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Appendix 6: Individual pupil profiles and individual educational plans

showing changes in my understanding of theories of learning Error! Bookmark not defined.

Appendix 7: Sample questionnaires   **342**

Appendix 1 Ethical statement and letters of permission

1.1 Ethics Statement

Dear [name],

As part of my PhD research programme I am undertaking an action research into the learning experience for pupils, of primary school age, with specific learning difficulties in the context of individualised resource teaching in my own practice as a resource teacher in (Name) primary school. This ethics statement is to assure you that I will observe good ethical practice throughout the research. Ethical approval is also being sought from the University of Limerick

This means that

- the permission of my Principal and Board of Management will be secured before the research commences;
- the permission of the children and their written consent will be secured before the research commences;
- confidentiality will be observed at all times, and no names will be revealed of the school, children or staff;
- participants will be kept informed of progress at all times;
- all participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time and all data relating to them will be destroyed.

I aim to investigate;
  o How I teach pupils with specific learning disabilities
  o Improvements in my practice through changes in the content of lessons, teaching strategies, methods of assessing pupils' progress.
  o Changes in professional practice that may occur because of the above activities.
  o The influence of the project in the area of specific learning difficulties.

I plan to study the relationship between teaching style and learning capacity in my resource classroom, so I have chosen an action research methodology for this research. Pupils are co-researchers in this methodology. In this self-study project, I will engage with the living theory perspective of Whitehead (1993) and McNiff *et al.* (1992).

I enclose two copies of this ethics statement, one of which is a copy for my files and one of which is a copy for your files.

Yours sincerely,
Signature
Caitríona McDonagh

1.2 Sample letter to Principal / Chairperson of my school Board of Management requesting permission to do my research

My address
date

Name and address of Principal / Chairperson Board of Management
Dear (name),

Re: Permission to undertake research

As part of my PhD research programme, I am conducting a piece of action research into studying my work so that I can encourage children to improve their learning of English. I would be grateful if you would give your permission and support for this research.

My data collection methods will include audio and videotape recording the children and myself in conversation, photographs, diary recordings, field notes, reports. I guarantee that I will observe good ethical conduct throughout. I will negotiate permission to work with the children. I will secure permission from parents and children to involve them in the research. I guarantee confidentiality of information and promise that no names of the school, colleagues or children will be made public.

I promise that I will make my research report available to you for scrutiny before it is published, if you wish, and I will make a copy of the report available for your files on its publication. Ethical approval is also being sought from the University of Limerick

I would be grateful if you would sign and return the slip below at your earliest convenience.

I enclose two copies of this letter, one of which is a copy for my files and one of which is a copy for your files.

Yours sincerely,
signature
Caitríona McDonagh
_____

To whom it may concern

I, [name], Principal / Chairperson of the Board of Management of [name of school], give my permission for [your name] to undertake her/his research in her/his classroom and in the school.

Signed ....

[Name]

1.3a: Original letter to parents of participating pupils requesting consent to the research

My address
date

Name and address of parent
Dear [name],

Re: Permission to undertake research

As part of my PhD research programme, I am conducting a piece of action research into studying my work so that I can encourage children to improve their learning of English. I would be grateful if you would give your permission for [name of child] to take part.

My data collection methods will include audio and videotape recording the children and myself in conversation, photographs, diary recordings, field notes, and reports. I guarantee that I will observe good ethical conduct throughout. I promise that I will not reveal the name of the school, colleagues, parents or children at any time. If you wish I would keep you informed of progress throughout. My research report will be available at school for scrutiny before it is published.

I would be grateful if you would sign and return the slip below at your earliest convenience.

I enclose two copies of this letter, one of which is a copy for my files and one of which is a copy for your files.

Yours sincerely,

Signature

Caitriona McDonagh

_____

To Caitríona McDonagh,

I, [parent's name], give my permission for [child's name] to take part in your research.

Signed ....

[Parent's name]

1.3b Original letter to participating pupils requesting their consent to the research

Hi K,

I am trying to be a better teacher and I hope you will learn what is

the best way for you to learn.

Can I use your ideas to make our lessons better?

Can I tell other children, teachers and other people about our work

together?

Thank you

Mrs Mc Donagh

YES [ ]   NO [ ]

FROM _____

6 TH DECEMBER 2001

1.3c: Revised letter of consent to parents and participating pupils.
This letter was used from June 2002

<div align="right">Home address

Date</div>

Dear Parent,

I am writing to ask for your help with some further study I am doing. As a student of the University of Limerick, I hope to write a dissertation during the coming years. In it I intend to reflect on my teaching.

I would be very grateful if you would give me permission to use some of your child's class work – writing, taped conversations and comments. Any information I use will be handled in confidence. Your child's name will not appear in any published documents. You may withdraw this permission at any time.

I would be grateful if you would sign and return the form below. I would welcome contact or suggestions from you at any time during my research.

<div align="right">Thank you,

Caitríona Mc Donagh.</div>

Dear Mrs. McDonagh,

I, {name}, give my permission for [child's name] to take part in your research.

Parent Signature

{Parent Name}

Pupil's name

[Pupil's signature]

Date

1.4: Consent from others

Letter to colleagues requesting their involvement as a critical audience.

<div align="right">Home address</div>

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

Dear B,

As part of my PhD research programme I am undertaking an action research project to study my own practice as a resource teacher of pupils with specific learning difficulties.
The ethics statement below is to assure you that I will observe good ethical practice throughout the research.

This means that

- the permission of my Principal and Board of Management has been secured before the research commenced;
- the permission of the children and their written consent was secured before the research commenced;
- confidentiality will be observed at all times, and no names will be revealed of yourself, the school, children or staff;
- participants will be kept informed of progress at all times;
- participants will have access to the research report before it is published;
- all participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time and all data relating to them will be destroyed.

I will require critical feedback from you on lesson plans, diaries, fieldnotes, photographs, videos, audio tape recordings and tape transcripts, standardised and diagnostic test results.

I enclose two copies of this ethics statement, one of which is a copy for my files and one of which is a copy for your files. Please sign and return the form below.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Caitríona Mc Donagh

_____

To Caitríona,

I, B, give you permission to use my feedback as part of your research.

Signed .... [Participant's signature]

       [Participant's name]

Appendix 2 Items in data archive mentioned in this thesis

1.   Journals
   a My journal for 1996/7
   b My journal for 2001/2002
   c My journal for 2002/2003
   d My journal for 2003/2004
   e Pupils' journals for 2001/2002
   f Pupils' journals for 2002/2003
   g Pupils' journals for 2003/2004

2.   Correspondence from pupils
   a 20th June 2001 'Thank You' card from pupil
   b 20th March 2002 Pupil correspondence about his feelings
   c Pupil L's letter

3.   Correspondence with supervisor, critical friends
   a Correspondence with supervisor 14 April.2002 and 30 February 2003
   b Correspondence with critical friend 9 October 2001

4.   Tape and Video Recordings and Photographs
   a Tape 1: Individual pupils telling 'How I learn spellings'
   b Tape 2: Group discussions about utilising their various strategies.
   c Tape 3: Preparatory discussions by pupils when designing their reports on specific leaning difficulties.
   d Tape 4: Discussions with pupils and their mainstream class teachers following the pupils' presentation of their report on 'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others'
   e Video recording of 'Making the invisible visible – giving voice to the marginalised,' paper presented at the *Collaborative Action Research Network Conference,* Manchester, 15 September 2003.
   f Video recording of 'Presenting voice in action research', paper presented at the Invitational Seminar '*Critical Debates in Action Research'* University of Limerick, Limerick, 5 June 2003
   g Video tape recording oral presentation by pupils of their report 'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others' to class peers, teacher, student teacher, 2 resource teachers and school principal.
   h Photos of how pupils sat when writing
   i Photos of teacher and pupils at work

5.   Validation correspondence and audio tape-recordings
   a Correspondence from teaching colleagues: 2 March 2002; 12 March 2002; 6 April 2002; 19 March 2004; 4 June 2004; 4 November 2004; December 2004 and 30 June 2005.
   b Correspondence from critical friend B: 20 January 2002; 28 February 2002
   c Correspondence from critical friend A: 5 April 2004; 24 November 2004
   d Correspondence from members of validation group: 12 August 2003; 14 November 2003; 12 July 2004; 21 November 2004; 21, 24 and 27 November 2004 and December 2004.

    e   From audience member at conference presentation; 12 June 2003
    f   From audience member at conference presentation; 22 June 2003 and 4 July 2003
    g   Tape recording and transcript of validation meetings on 12 February 2003; 6 November 2003; 4 November 2004.
    h   RTE 2 Dempsey' Den announcement of 1st Prize in the Fingal Art Competition to Pupil G in my school.
    i   Audio-tape recording of Pupil S singing his multiplication tables to a Robbie Williams Song.

6.   Pupils' Reports and Artwork
    a   'Learning spellings: the best way for me' 2002
    b   'Explaining dyslexia to ourselves and others' 2002
    c   'Explaining our learning difficulties' 2003
    d   'Explaining learning difficulties to myself and others' 2004
    e   Pupils' artwork and my paintings about dyslexia including audio-tape recordings and transcripts of our conversations about them.

7   Responses from mainstream classmates to questionnaires designed and administered by the pupils who participated in my research

8.   Responses from mainstream class teachers to questionnaires designed and administered by the pupils who participated in my research

9.   Responses from resource teachers, Dyslexia Association of Ireland Workshop Programme Co-ordinators and Directors to questionnaires designed and administered by me

10.   Methods of learning spellings identified by children compared with learning strategies

11.   Ethical statement about data

The following agreement was made with the Ethics Committee of the University of Limerick in December 2001 (prior to commencement of this research) with regards to this material.

> *In submitting this Application Form I hereby agree to be bound by Guideline 5(g) and will destroy all documentation/footage which may reveal the subjects identity e.g. video footage, auditory and visual documentation etc. once the thesis has been completed. Data in the form of lesson plans, diaries, fieldnotes, photographs,videos and transcripts and testing mentioned in section 4(d) are to be retained safely during the life of the research process in my data archive and to be destroyed within a two years after completion of the thesis.*

12.   Letter to work colleague to validate contents of data archive

<div align="right">Address,

3rd February 2002</div>

Dear P,

I am writing to ask for your help with some further study I am doing. As a student of the University of Limerick, I hope to write a dissertation during the coming years. In it I intend to reflect on my teaching and learning theories.

During my research I will gather some data which is

(a) The property of the school, like copies, school reports and tests.
(b) The property of pupils, like copies, project work, recordings, photographs computer files and discs etc.

I would be very grateful if you would witness – using the form below – what is in my data archive when my work is completed. Your name will not appear in any published documents without your consent and prior viewing of the content. You may withdraw this permission at any time. I would welcome contact or suggestions from you at any time during my research.

Thank you,

Caitriona.

To whom it may concern,

I am aware of and have viewed all the items listed above in the data archive of Caitriona Mc Donagh.

Their representation in appendices is accurate

<u>Signed</u> (Name validation colleague) Deputy Principal of my school.

<u>Dated</u>   30 June 2005

Appendix 3: Transcripts from audio-tape recorded conversations

3.1a: Transcript extract from audio-tape recording of conversations between class Teacher D and Pupil K

Conversations between class Teacher M, Pupil K and me		
Actual words used in discussions	My comments	Triangulation comments
Teacher D said, 'K, You never told me that you could write easier if you sat at that angle.' Pupil K said, 'Yea' Teacher D said, 'What did I say to you this morning? Pupil K said, 'Sit up straight when you're writing.' Teacher D said, 'You could have told me. I would not have been insulted. Just put up your hand.' I said, 'Do you often put up your hand in class?' Pupil K said, 'Yes. When I don't want to be asked a question.' Teacher D said, 'You mean when you do want to be asked.' Pupil K said, 'No. When you ask a question and I don't know the answer I put up my hand. I avoid eye contact with you. I hold my hand and arm up straight. When my arm is up, you think that I know the answers. I don't wave my arm. You think that I am confident that I know the answer. I don't make eye contact. You look past me and pick on somebody else to answer.' Teacher D said, 'Do I?' Pupil K said, 'Yes' Teacher D said, 'You have got a very good strategy then. Do I do the same for other pupils?' Pupil K said, 'Don't think so.' Teacher D said, 'You learn something new every day. Thanks.'		

3.1b: Sample of conversation by pupils on their personal view on how dyslexia affects them.

Personal view on how dyslexia affects you.		
Actual words used in discussions	My comments	Triangulation comments
Br said, Well it doesn't exactly affect you at home; cause you're not doing any thin(g)s…like it... just at school. That's where you see, that's where you see that you have that specific learning difficulty. Cause when you're outside playing sport or something, no, but when you're doing maths or spellings, that when you find that specific learning difficulty… a problem…you… J said, Sometimes I always have to ask for big words to spell. By said, In school it affects you because teacher is always going too fast. And you can't understand the reading. You'd just read a page and you can't understand it.		

3.1c: Conversation extract where pupil discusses his own learning

Comparing own learning with others.		
Actual words used in discussions	My comments	Triangulation comments
By said, I was watching the boy beside me. We were copying the news from the Board every week or something. It was the first time we were doing it. And I started at the sentence from the wrong side of the page. I wrote it all backwards And the boy beside me said 'you're writing it all backwards.' I said, Had you not noticed you were writing the wrong way? By said, No. I said, Did you think the boy was wrong? By said, No I said, How did you feel when he told you? By said, I was slow.		

3.2a: Transcript of a discussion between one cohort of pupils about Pupil T's drawing of his feelings about dyslexia

Pupil T said, Do you want to see my picture? I was facing that way when I drew it.
    Pupil By: I think that the eyes are for the teachers and all that. They are always looking down at you. And they're always making you uncomfortable and all that.
    Pupil K: It looks like a face there's the two eyes and the mouth and all that. Oh yea the tongue. There's the lips, there.

Pupil J said, I think it's like a monster. With the eyes and the big nose. It has one massive eye and one little eye. And it has a kind of key rings. It has something beside the eyes.

Pupil K said, Lips.

Pupil J said, Yea. And the picture is kind of like lips and eyes.

Pupil K said, Yea and the nose.

Pupil B said, I think its like all the teachers, looking and saying and talking to you like and saying you're not good and all that.

Pupil T said, I'll tell you what I drew. Cause yea I tried to draw. Eyes. I tried to draw ears. Nobody recognised my ears.

Pupil J said, I thought they were key rings.

Pupil M said, I noticed your lips.

Pupil T said, And I tried to draw a crystal. You thought it was a nose. It was different. I used crayons for the rest and it was glitter. Will I tell you what I was thinkin' about when I drew it. What I see is dyslexia affects eyes, ears and talking. That's why I drew three things. And it jumbles them all up all over the place, looking like a monster – J was right. So sometimes eyes are getting messages. Sometimes ears are getting messages. Sometimes your eyes are seeing things that you hear differently. Sometimes ears are hearing things different from your eyes see them. That's my bad drawing of an ear. That's an ear in there. I wasn't very good at it. And anybody who has all this jumble of all this – like with dyslexia - eyes and ears and lips -- can see things crystal clear.

All said, Aha.

Pupil T said, And think about things crystal clear and talk about things crystal clear. So does that mean that you were wrong in what you saw in the picture. Yes, no, yes.

Pupil Br said, Cause we seen things crystal clear on the picture.

Pupil J said, Wrong because I saw monster ears and mouth.

Pupil K said, If you draw scribbles. People just go, 'Ah there is an eye. This is an ear.' People see different things in their own head.

Pupil By said, You can explain stuff by just scribbles and all that. Just what you feel. I done it.

3.2b: Transcript of a discussion between one cohort of pupils about their learning journals

Pupil G said, 'I like to do my journal because I get to think back over what I did in the last few days and write it down and it makes me feel happy that I have done all those things.'
Pupil L said, 'I enjoy writing in my journal because everyday I learn something different and everyday means that I am learning more.'
Pupil Sh said, 'It helped me with writing and spelling.'
Pupil D said, 'More people would be able to know what I do everyday and the days of the week.
Pupil C said,' I like writing in my journal because I learn new things everyday and I write them down so that I wont forget them. And it's a good way to help you with your writing and stuff like that.

3.3:   Discussion following a presentation of pupil reports to Learning Support teachers, (Teacher S and Teacher M).

Pupil B said, I you don't have it you don't know exactly what you're looking for. Maybe you don't have any of that but you might have it a slightly different way of having it.
Teacher M said, At the same time Not having had it, myself, I need any help I can, to help me to find out about it. Like I mean should somebody who helps a person who's afraid of heights… should the psychiatrist be afraid themselves…be afraid of heights himself or herself? Does that need to be the case? You know, should somebody who is afraid of spiders be treated by somebody who is afraid of spiders.
Pupil B said, Well I think it would be handier. Because they could tell them what would help them and then if that didn't help they could try something else.
Teacher M said, They'd probably trust that person more.
Pupil B said, If I was afraid of heights and someone who wasn't afraid of heights told me to go and have a look over, I'd say, did you ever try to look down at some thing when you were afraid of heights
Teacher S said, It's the last thing you would ask someone to do if they were really afraid
Pupil B said, Go face your fear that's the worst, that's the last thing I'd tell anybody
Teacher M said, There is a section here that I wouldn't even have thought of looking at. And it's called numeracy. You had it there. It is just about confusion with number, with signs and a difficulty with maybe remembering the order of things; such as days of the week, months of the year. I know it comes into maths when you have a word problem. When you have a sum written down and you have to go and make up the problem that goes with it. Well I wouldn't have realised that it came into the actual maths signs
Teacher S said, I think too, that the teachers are trying to do their best too. There are so many people in the class. And even though they put stuff on the board that doesn't suit you, they'll understand that, they'll make allowances for that.
Pupil R said, I think they should have different classes.
Teacher S said, By right in a way every pupil should have his or her own teacher.
Pupil S said, They don't tell their teacher they are all stuck in their maths and then they go home with their homework and they get it all wrong. And the teacher goes, 'What happened to you? The person next door to him can, and like, he's stuck on his

spellings and maths. And he'd be better off telling teacher instead of keeping it a secret.

Pupil B said, But it's no excuse. You can't say I've got dyslexia and I'm not going to try as hard. You shouldn't put it in the place of an excuse you should try and use it smartly. You shouldn't go to the teacher saying I'm dyslexic give me easier work.

Teacher S said, We should make a handout so that parents and other teachers could learn about dyslexia from you.

Conversation continues……to .'What are we good at?

When the teacher left I asked how the pupils felt.

Pupil S said, I haven't talked to teachers like that before. But I thought it would be a good idea 'cos they would know what it was like to be dyslexic and they would know what to do if they had a dyslexic person in their class.'

Pupil B said, I've never had as much fun talking to a teacher. I thought that when Mr. [Teacher S] and Mr. [Teacher M] left, that they had actually learned something from the pupils not the other way round. They walked out agreeing with us for once.

Appendix 4 Intervention programmes and alternative therapies mentioned in this thesis

4.1: Intervention programmes and alternative therapies

1. Hornsby, B., Shear, F., Pool, J. (1999) *Alpha to Omega: The A-Z of Teaching Reading, Writing and Spellings*, 5th ed., Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers. This is a phonetic linguistic approach to teaching reading, writing and spellings, which has been used since 1974. It is a structures programme in three stages with 5 levels of pupil activity books, Pelmanism cards and computer programmes.

2. Wordshark 2, 2L and 3 (1995 to 2006) 41 Mail Road, London W6 9DG: White Space Ltd. A computer programme based on Alpha to Omega 4.1 above.

3. Wilson, J. (1986 to 2003) *Phonological Awareness Training* (P.A.T.), London: Educational Psychological Service.
   This is a daily programme for reading, spelling and handwriting. It aims to develop phonological awareness; enables children to read and spell by making analogies; and provides strategies for word building and word segmentation skills. It can be used with individuals or groups and has 6 levels of pupil books

4. Johnson, M.,Phillips, S., Peer, L. (1999) *Multisensory Teaching System of Reading (MTSR),* Manchester: Didsbury School of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University.
   This programme was developed from Margaret Taylor Smith's Multi-sensory Teaching System (MTS) and is based on synthetic phonics where letter-sound correspondences are taught directly and pupils are shown that they can build words from individual sounds. The pack contains 2 Teacher Handbooks, Demonstration video, MTSR Book 1 and Book 2, Picture card packs, Letter card packs, Reading concept cards, Suffix cards, irregular word cards and small mirrors,

5. Cowling, K. and Cowling, H. (1993) *Toe by Toe: A Highly Structured Multi-sensory, Phonetic Approach to Literacy,* West Yorkshire: Cowling and Cowling. This programme claims to provide a highly structured, methodical, gradual and measurable method of teaching reading. It works on the premise that a 'barely formed image of a word, which is beginning to slip from the student's memory is grasped at that point and forged by the struggle to recall it' It teaching the reading of polysyllabic words through syllable division. Coaching the student through repetition, repetition and repetition carries this out.

6. The Dyslexia@bay^{TM} system (www.dyslexia@bay.com) involves a consultant screening a person with dyslexia for 41 individual thinking skills. A programme of mental exercises is compiled. The exercises involve visual processing skills to a level considered superior to the average student and skills of the non-language sections of the brain to help overcome deficient language skills, which are characteristic of dyslexic students.

4.2:   Samples of pupil record sheets

1. *There is no pupil record sheet in the Alpha to Omega programme*, instead there
   is a list of contents that is tabulated so that it can be ticked when the teacher
   has completed teaching each topic.

2. *Pupil record sheet from Wordshark*
   A printed pupil record is computer generated in the following format, giving
   game title and contents as well as date, scores and errors made.

```
WORDSHARK student record for Pupil J                          page1
Tues. Apr 16 14:38------------------------level   speed   errors   peeps   time
       buckets:oa/ow/o-e    Spelling Buckets              6        2       6:51
                            ********soak, nose loaf, note, coat, coal
Wed Apr 17 13:52------------------------level   speed   errors   peeps   time
       buckets:oa/ow/o-e    Spelling Buckets                              3:53


Wed Apr 17 14:08------------------------level   speed   errors   peeps   time
       buckets: long /short o    Spelling Buckets          5             2:03
                            ***********rot , note, grow, show, wrote
Thurs Apr 18 13:48-----------------------level   speed   errors   peeps   time
       buckets: long /short o    Spelling Buckets                        2:03
                            ***********
Fri Apr 19 13:33--------------------------level   speed   errors   peeps   time
       Find jigsaw: oa                               2               1:58
                            ************************boat, toad

       Card Pairs: oa                                                2:02
       Card snap: oa                                                 0:45
       Word search: oa                                               1:34
       Shark:oa                                                      2:32
```

3. *Pupil record sheet from. Phonological Awareness Training (P.A.T.)*

Name of pupil:_____Class:____Teacher: _____

Date	Worksheet Number	Worksheet Completed	Reading	Spelling	Dictation
	1	Date	/20	/20	/5
	2	Date	/20	/20	/5
	3	Date	/20	/20	/5
	4	Date	/20	/20	/5
	5	Date	/20	/20	/5

4. *Pupil record sheet from Multisensory Teaching System of Reading (MTSR)*

MTSR (UK Edition) BOOK 1: Pupil Record Sheet

Pupil Name:_____ Date of birth:_____

Teaching point	Lesson No.	**Date**				**Comment**
		Introduced	Revised	Removed from regular review	Checked for mastery	Pupil comment
Symbols	1					
Words	2					
Sounds	3					
Initial, middle, final	4					
i = (ĭ)	**5**					
t = (t)	**6**					
blending	**7**					

5. *Pupil record sheet from Toe by Toe.*

Coach or teacher mark a sheet similar to the one below. A slash is used to indicate a word, phoneme or syllable read correctly and a dot is used to indicate an error. Three slashes indicate that the student has mastered the target.

Day Month	10	11	12	13	Day Month					Day Month				
	04	04	04	04										
Prop	\	\	\											
Prom	.	\	\	\										
Pram	\	\	\											
Press	\	\	.	\										
Prod	\	\	\											
Prim	.	.	\	\										
Flab	\	\	\											
Flax	.	\	\	\										
Flab	\	\	\											
Flan	\	\	\											
Flux	\	\	\											
Flag	\	\	\											
Girl	\	\	\											

Appendix 5: Sample lesson plans showing changes in my pedagogy during my research

5.1: Sample Lesson Plan 2001 demonstrating that I used a multisensory approach

Area of curriculum: English: Group Lesson in Oral Language and Literacy for 5th Class Resource Pupils (aged 11years).

This lesson was part of the ongoing teaching of 3 pupils - grouped because of similar needs in literacy although they were from two separate mainstream classes. The length of lesson was 45 minutes. Another teacher observed the lesson.

Objectives/targets:

I hoped that the students would -

Summarise orally and answer lower and higher order questions on a text orally and then in writing.

Punctuate a short passage using full stops, commas, speech marks, capital letters, apostrophies, and question marks correctly when they re-write it. in a section of text..

Using simultaneous oral spelling technique, learn 4 spelling set by class teacher at a lower level than the remainder of the class.

Read 10 words each containing the initial consonant blends bl, pl sp, cl and cr.

Using a story ladder, write the first paragraph of a five-paragraph story.

Teaching methods and strategies:
- o Teacher and peer modelling
- o Practice and repetition
- o SOS method for learning spellings.
- o Using a format for story writing.

Materials:
- o Spellings set by class teacher.
- o Copies pencils
- o Story ladders.
- o Alpha to Omega Activity Pack 2 (Hornsby and Pool 1989).
- o Dyslexia Association of Ireland guidelines on SOS method of spellings.

Development of lesson as it occurred:

Introduction: I reminded pupils of story to date in the book she was reading (Guns of Easter).

Target 1

I read chapter five of Guns at Easter. Each pupil gave a summary of it. I pointed out and modelled the difference between a summary and a retelling of a story. They answered 4 questions on the chapter orally and then in writing.

Target 2

They punctuated as many sentences as they could in five minutes on p. 36 of Alpha to Omega 2.

Target 3

Using simultaneous oral spelling technique, pupils learned 4 new spelling which I tested them on and three other spellings from earlier in the week.

Target 4

Pupils read aloud and in turn 10 words each containing the initial consonant blends bl, pl sp, cl and cr

Target 5

Using the same story pupils discussed what they would write, by choosing a common title and composing 3 complete sentences each. I modelled a compound sentence and asked them to make one of their sentences a compound sentence. They then wrote their paragraphs.

Conclusion

Time permitting pupils rewrote any spellings, that they had spelt incorrectly, three times.

The lesson relates to the following strands of the mainstream curriculum (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999).

Strand 1. Receptiveness to language: Pupils will develop grapho/phonic strategies to enable the pupils to achieve greater proficiency in word identification

Strand 2. Competence and confidence in using language: The pupils will engage with books in a group setting. Pupils will engage in writing over a period through a process of drafting, revising editing and publishing. They will observe the conventions of punctuation.

5.2: Sample Plan and Lesson 2003 demonstrating that I used a metacognitive approach

Area of curriculum: English: Group Lesson in Oral Language and Literacy for 5th Class Resource Pupils. This lesson was part of the ongoing teaching of 3 pupils - grouped because of similar needs in literacy although they were from two separate mainstream classes. The length of lesson, which was observed by another teacher, was 45 minutes.

Special Considerations:

Pupil L had a resource teaching allocation of 2.5 hours weekly for Mild Learning Disability and needed clear simple instructions and direct rather than open-ended questions.

Pupil H had a resource teaching allocation of 2.5 hours weekly for specific learning disability. She had difficulty retrieving words so I supplied vocabulary when necessary.

Pupil G had a resource teaching allocation of 2.5 hours weekly for a specific learning disability. He also has a speech and language difficulty (receptive/hearing) so the other pupils and I faced him to aid lip-reading. I repeated answers from other pupils on occasion to ensure that he had heard them.

Objectives/targets:

I hoped that the students would -

1. Summarise, ask and answer literal and predictive questions orally in the context of individually chosen library book currently being read. To practice oral presentation, Pupil H would summarise and answer questions. Pupils L and G would be encouraged through visual cue cards (pictorial for pupil L) to ask predictive as well as literal questions.

2. Name, identify and place full stops, commas, speech marks, capital letters, apostrophes, question marks correctly in a section of text. This would be done in the context of group games.

3. Individually learn, test and check 3 pre-selected spellings using differentiated strategies.

4. Read consonant blends and nonsense words aloud and at speed in order to increase reading accuracy using visual rather than semantic and pragmatic cues.

Pupil L would read real words with consonant blends vowels and final single or double consonants (e.g. blot). Pupil H would read nonsense words with consonant blends vowels and final single or double consonants (e.g. flott). Pupil G would read three letter singular and plural words and syllables (e.g. pegs, cab)

5. Using a computer and dictaphone, pupils will plan, write or edit a story, which they would compose using story ladder, to improve paragraph formatting. Pupil L would prepare her edited text (in a Word document) for printing. Pupil H would edit and handwrite her teacher-transcribed story. Pupil G would tape-record ideas for future transcription.

Teaching methods and strategies:

o I encouraged attribution retraining through inviting pupils to engage in positive self-talk such as, "now I can do it" or "it is easy"

o In order to improve their reading, writing and comprehension during this lesson, the pupils engaged in reciprocal teaching where the pupils adopted questioning and critiquing roles, which have been modelled by me.

o Visualisation and verbalisation to aid comprehension.

o Individual learning strategies for spellings, which focus on metacognition.

o Co-operative learning and games.

o Timing the speed and recording the accuracy of reading.

Materials:

o Spellings set by class teacher - numbers, words from Dolch List and misspelt words from pupils' personal writing.

o Library books. Copies. Record sheets for library books, spellings, visualisation techniques and story ladders. Stories written by pupils previously.

o Ideas from commercial texts e.g. Toe By Toe, Visualization and Verbalization, Streets Ahead 3, Expert in English, Alpha to Omega Book 2.

o Cards containing initial consonant blends, nonsense and real words, punctuation marks, question cues.

o PC, tape-recorder and spellchecker

Development of lesson as it occurred:

Introduction: Recalling previous reading, pupils recorded any library books completed on a reading chart under the headings of title, author, date begun, return date and comments.

Target 1:   I invited pupil H to compose 4 sentences about the library book she was reading. The other pupils formatted a selection of questions to check information (who? where? what might happen next?) and 2 higher order questions, which she answered orally. Each pupil prepared and read one sentence aloud with expression from their library book. They used a five point strategy which they had previously devised (1) learn to read difficult words, (2) find where to stop (3) make sense of the piece (4) highlight important words with the voice (5) read the piece through silently. Pupils evaluated each other's ability to read aloud – using one complementary comment and then critique. I read a four-sentences story, which the pupils evaluated; then visualised and answered literal and imaginative questions about it. Pupils wrote a title for the story and answered, "what are you picturing for?" (by which I meant, state a personal use for the visualisation process)

Target 2:   In a form of reciprocal teaching pupils worked together to punctuate a text written by teacher in the following way. Pupils identified and named punctuation marks (e.g. full stops, commas, speech marks, capital letters, apostrophes, speech and question marks) while playing snap with visual cue cards. As an application exercise, pupils worked together to complete the task of editing teacher's text quicker than the teacher herself in the context of a "Beat the teacher" game.

Target 3:   Having chosen three words, which they had written incorrectly in earlier written work, each pupil looked at the words and decided their personal most appropriate learning strategy, to spell them e.g.

1. Pupil L used syllabification and colour highlighting

2. Pupil H used look, cover, write and check.

3. Pupil G counted vowels or digraphs to establish number of syllables in the word. Then traced the words in syllables three times while saying the letters; covered the word and wrote it with eyes closed.

I tested the spellings learned and 7 additional spellings from previous days. Pupils corrected the spellings and recorded their successes.

Target 4:   Initial consonant blends for Pupil G and nonsense words for the other pupils (written on card in large fonts) were placed on the floor. Pupil 1 stepped on 12 words or sounds as she read them aloud. Pupil 2 recorded the time taken and pupil 3 collected and counted those correctly read. The letter size and the physical processes involved in this activity helped pupils focus on blending sounds and phoneme-

grapheme relationships. In a form of co-operative learning the pupils rotated roles and repeated the exercise. Individual achievements were recorded in terms of number of correct words, date and time taken.

Target 5:   I conferred with each pupil individually about their writing of the previous day, not only to praise and encourage but as a scaffold towards improvement in setting new targets for today. My modelling of a process of critique included descriptive praise, highlighting good points, detecting what was not clear, helping the generation of new ideas and polishing the final product. Pupils were encouraged to use this model and join in critique for each other's work. Using a story ladder in order to improve paragraph formatting, pupils continued with the planning, writing, editing and production of written stories using PCs and a tape-recorder. Differentiated activities outlined in Objective/Targets 5 were carried out.

Pupils were asked to include words from their spelling tests in their stories.

Conclusion: Pupils recorded any words that they spelt incorrectly in their writing on their spelling sheets for use in the next lesson. Pupils tidied up their books and activities and orally answering my questions 'What did you learn today?' and 'What do you want to do tomorrow?'

The lesson relates to the following strands of the mainstream curriculum (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999).

- o   Strand 1. Receptiveness to language:

Pupils will develop grapho/phonic strategies to enable the pupils to achieve greater proficiency in word identification

- o   Strand 2. Competence and confidence in using language:

The pupils will engage with books in a group setting. Pupils will engage in writing over a period though a process of drafting, revising editing and publishing. They will observe the conventions of punctuation.

- o   Strand 3. Developing cognitive abilities through language:

Pupils will use basic key questions and checking questions to extend their knowledge. Pupils will keep records of personal reading.

- o   Strand 4. Emotional and imaginative development through language:

Pupils will discuss personal reading and writing and ideas encountered in literature. Pupils will read aloud from a personal choice of text and develop individually as

readers by experiencing success and the enhancement of self-esteem through reading.

5.3:   An observer of this lesson wrote,

> You use a most impressive range of appropriate teaching methods and strategies. Your interest in and knowledge of the affective domain of teaching and learning informs your teaching. You made excellent use of techniques such as attribution retraining and reciprocal teaching by, for example modelling positive self-talk, questioning and critiquing. It is quite clear that the pupils are well used to working in this way and they are obviously enjoying and benefiting from this, For example the pupils were able to reflect on their use of cue card in reading aloud, comment on each others reading and work very co-operatively to edit a text written by you.. Throughout the lesson you focussed on metcognition, asking pupils to reflect on for example their use of problem solving strategies. The group teaching context was a most appropriate forum for the use of these techniques.
>
> (4 June 2004 Correspondence in data archive Appendix 2)

6.1: Individual Pupil Profiles devised at the beginning of my research

Name	*M*		
Date of Birth	18.08.90		
Sex	male		
Class	6th		
Educational Assessment by psychologist	Test	Date	Results
	WISC	May 1997	Upper limit of the low average range. Non-verbal ahead of verbal.
	WORD	May 1997	Reading 6years Spelling 6.6 years Comprehension 6 years
	WRAT	16.09.98	Word Recognition 10th percentile Spelling 7th percentile Arithmetic 16th percentile
Standardised tests administered and marked by class teachers	Test	Date	Results
	Drumcondra Primary Reading Test	19.12.01	Vocabulary 32nd percentile Comprehension 16th percentile Total Reading score 23rd percentile
	Drumcondra Primary Maths Test	23.05.02	Total score 19th percentile
	Drumcondra Primary Reading Test	15.12.02	Vocabulary 30th percentile Comprehension 37th percentile Total Reading score 35rd percentile
Family and educational history	*M* is from a family with a history of specific learning difficulties. He has not repeated any class. He received learning support in a group of 4 to 6 pupils for 2 hours and 30 minutes weekly from Sept 1996 to Sept 2000. In Spring 2001 he followed the Phonological Awareness Training Programme by J Wilson (details in proposal) for 20 weeks. I believe this intervention programme caused his improvements on the Drumcondra Reading Test. I also have evidence of improvement on pre- and post- intervention testing on the Jackson Phonic Skills Tests. *M* attended speech therapy in1998. I was his learning support teacher and I became his Resource Teacher in September 2001. He has no known hearing or visual problems.		

6.2:   Sample Individual Educational Plan 2001

Name:	Class:
Address: Telephone:	**Commencement date:** September 2001 **Review date**: January 2001
Date of Birth:	

Summary of information available (formal and informal assessment.)
National Educational Psychological Service report

He/ she can	**Skills Needed**
Is a bright pupil Scores at 6oth percentile on standardised Maths Test (SIGMA)	Doesn't try hard enough Is capable of better results Has no phonological awareness skills Scores two years below class average on standardised English Test (MICRA)

Priority Learning Needs (curriculum area(s) and strands)
ENGLSH: Sight words and Phonics

PRIORITY LEARNING TARGETS:

Targets	Target Date	Date Achieved
1. Alpha to Omega workbook pages 1-19 2. Complete level 1 PAT 3.Toe by toe page 6- 30 4.Wordshark short vowel games 5.Read 20 words from Dolche common word list. 6.Pupil B will demonstrate that she knows letter sounds by indicating the letter when I say the sound on 10 occasions.		

Teaching Strategies
Modelling and practice

Materials/Resource **Alpha to Omega Book 1** *P.A.T 1.* Toe By Toe Wordshark 2L and Dolche common word list

Home Follow class Home work

6.3: Sample Individual Educational Plan 2003

Name:	School:
Address:	Class:
	Class teacher:
	People involved in constructing this IEP Class teacher, Special Ed. Teacher Parent, Pupil:
Telephone:	Commencement date: September 2003
Date of Birth:	Review date: January 2004

Contact Information:
Parents: Minder: Family Doctor:
Reports on file from Psychologists (name):

Additional Information/Concerns:

Summary of information available (formal and informal assessment; summary information for example from parents, class teacher, psychologist, speech and language therapists, etc.)

Summary of Strengths (including attainments, preferences, interests, learning style) and Needs

Strengths	Needs

Priority Learning (curriculum area(s))
Language, Literacy or Maths etc.

PRIORITY LEARNING: Pupil retains a personal copy of this section

Learning aims for the Period	Date Achieved
1. Pupil, having identified his personal learning style for spelling, will read and spell 20 words from the common list	

Teaching Strategies
Pupil composes higher and lower order questions on text, discussion of learning strategies, metacognition,

Materials/Resource
Class texts, common word list

Pupil input:

Home input

Appendix 7: Sample questionnaires

7.1: Sample questionnaires to mainstream classes about specific learning disability (dyslexia)

What does it mean to be intelligent?	Response
Are students with learning difficulties dumb?	Response
Should boys and girls tell their friends about their learning difficulty?	Response
Can you tell if someone in your class is a lazy student and is struggling to learn?	Response
Whose responsibility is it to help a boy or girl is having difficulty learning in school?	Response

7.2: Sample questionnaires to teachers and mainstream class peers following the presentation by pupils who participated in my research of their reports explaining specific earning disability (dyslexia) to themselves and others.

What did you learn about dyslexia?	Response
What other questions do you have?	Response

7.3: Sample questionnaires to resource teachers and to Dyslexia Association of
Ireland Programme Co-ordinators and Workshop Directors.

<div align="right">

Address
Date
</div>

Dear B,

Thanks for the opportunity to speak about my work at the resource teachers'
meeting in X on date. I was sorry that I didn't stop speaking earlier and allow more
time for discussion.

In the light of this I would be interested in your critical comments on the following
in order to clarify whether my work is of value to others:

1. Was anything in the content new to you?
2. What did I omit that you think that I should have spoken about?
3. What good practices, in similar lines, have you personally used?
4. Do you think that the approach that I used in my work is relevant for resource teachers, for learning support teachers or for class teachers and why?

Please feel free to write more comments than the space here permits. If you would
prefer, just let's have a chat.

Thanks, Caitríona