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## Links between inclusive education and inclusive research

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### Abstract

In recent years, particularly since the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), considerable attention has been given to inclusive education. The concept of inclusive research has also emerged (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003). Initially this was associated with people with learning disabilities but now has a wider application. The two concepts have some shared values and the links between inclusive education and inclusive research have been explored (e.g. Nind, 2014a). She argued that 'in inclusive research about inclusive education the problems, questions and answers would be recognisable to the teachers and learners involved – authentic for the educational community' (2014a, p.536). This article, in the context of M-level studies, considers these developments and school-based research linked to assignments.

Some background information about the concepts of inclusive education and inclusive research is provided. The links between them are considered. Then two brief case studies are presented to illustrate of how knowledge of these concepts has influenced the research of two M-level students in their final piece of work. In combination, these illustrate how the students considered whose knowledge to access, how to access it, how analysis might happen and the dissemination and impact processes.

The article concludes by linking these case studies to the discussion of inclusive education and inclusive research. It highlights how gaining insights into inclusive education can be an educational experience for all those involved – and meet the requirements of an award bearing course.

## Inclusive education

There is a global movement towards inclusion/inclusive education with a focus on providing universal access to quality education. It is a response to a situation where children who are viewed as different may be excluded from education, have different access to, or limited participation in education. Discussing the concept is complicated by a range of factors including, but not limited to, issues of definition, the multiple dimensions and the potential tensions with other policy initiative. The school-based research reported below was undertaken in England and therefore the focus is on these issues in England although similar challenges occur in other contexts.

In relation to the terminology, the terms 'inclusion' (Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009, Ainscow et al., 2006), inclusive education (Black-Hawkins and Amrhein, 2014), 'inclusive schooling' (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) and 'inclusion in education' (Booth and Ainscow, 1998, Osler and Starkey, 2005) are in usage and are sometime used interchangeably. Others authors distinguish between these seeing inclusion as a broad concept applying to all aspects of society and other term limited to educational aspects. In this case, inclusive education is often referred to as a 'process' with the 'product' a more inclusive society. There is a presumption that for inclusive education to occur there needs to be a process of transformation of education, both formal and informal. Mittler summarised the challenges and opportunities for schools;

In the field of education, inclusion involves a process of reform and restructuring of the school as a whole, with the aim of ensuring that all pupils can have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by the school. This includes the curriculum on offer, the assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' achievements, the decisions that are taken on the grouping of pupils within schools or classrooms, pedagogy and classroom practice, sport and leisure and recreational opportunities. (Mittler, 2000 p.2 )

Mittler associated inclusive education with **all** children which is not a universal approach. In the literature, 'inclusive education' has both a narrow and a broad meaning. For some, it is primarily concerned with children with special educational needs (SEN) and/or those with disability. It is also used more widely to refer to any group where perceived differences (e.g. gender, ethnicity) may have negative consequences. However, both these approaches appear to suggest that there is a 'them and us' situation (Booth and Ainscow, 1998). There is a danger that this can be interpreted as 'them' needing to be enabled to join an unchanged 'us'. Booth and Ainscow posit that inclusive education involves transformation of all. Others have questioned of why some are thought of as 'them' rather than equal members of society or as one author has termed it from 'you' to 'we' (Uzum, 2013).

These ideas of the nature of inclusive education and to whom it applies were synthesised by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2009):

Inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all children – including boys and girls, students from ethnic and linguistic

minorities, rural populations, those affected by HIV and AIDS, and those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and to provide learning opportunities for all youth and adults as well. Its aim is to eliminate exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitudes and a lack of response to diversity in race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ability. (UNESCO, 2009, p.4)

In some instances where the focus has been restricted to children with special educational needs/inclusion, the debate has narrowed to issues about placement which, at times, has been resulted to a debate about the continued existence of special schools. This over simplifies the issues. For example, Cigman (2007) distinguished between ‘radical inclusion’ and ‘moderate inclusion’. In the former, special schools are viewed as a form of segregation whilst the latter considers the special school in relation to a sense of belonging, being valued, and respecting human rights. This framing of inclusive education challenges the notion that inclusive education is simply a matter of placement. Being able to take part in the whole in the educational community and its activities alongside a tracking on social and academic progress are dimensions of an inclusive approach.

To foster the school-level development of inclusive education, a number of frameworks have been proposed some of which involve a process of self-audit to be undertaken by schools to identify areas for development. An internationally adopted tool is the *Index for Inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*. First published in 2000, more recently a third edition produced (Booth and Ainscow, 2011). By that date, the *Index for Inclusion* had been translated into 40 languages. It has been designed to encourage the involvement of multiple groups including staff, pupils, parents and It is organised around three dimensions; culture, policies and practices. For each dimension there are indicators and a series of questions to elaborate on these. For instance, dimension B focusses on policy. Section B 1 addresses ‘Developing the school for all’ and has the indicators

- B.1.1 Staff appointments and promotions are fair.
- B.1.2 All new staff are helped to settle into the school.
- B.1.3 The school seeks to admit all students from its locality.
- B.1.4 The school makes its buildings physically accessible to all people.
- B.1.5 All new students are helped to settle into the school.
- B.1.6 The school arranges teaching groups so that all students are valued.

Linked to these are a range of prompt questions designed to promote reflection amongst those involved. The audit process may increase (shared) awareness of a school’s strengths and areas for development but the Index provides limited guidance about how school-level transformations can be engendered.

There have been critiques of the *Index for Inclusion* including questioning inclusion being treated as a separate issue rather than as aspect of a wider school development approach (Norwich et al., 2001). The purposes in citing the *Index for Inclusion* in this context are threefold; to illustrate the breadth of issues viewed as relevant to inclusive education, to establish a link between inclusive education and school development and to highlight that the insights from multiple perspectives, including children, should be valued.

In relation to pupils with special educational needs, the revised Code of Practice (Department for Education and Department of Health, 2014) has strengthened to guidance about taking into account pupil perspectives. The principles underpinning the Code state that:

‘...local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN), **must** have regard to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child’s parents
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child’s parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
- the need to support the child or young person, and the child’s parents, order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes, preparing them effectively for adulthood.’

(2014, Section 1.1, Authors’ highlight)

This is a notable change from encouragement of pupil participation to a requirement, a ‘must’. This may be accomplished most effectively if participation pervades all aspects of educational activity.

### **Inclusive research**

The topic of inclusive education is complex and has been extensively researched. For instance, a search of the British Education produced 1,645 articles. Multiple foci are represented in these articles as are different research approaches including some that adopt or consider inclusive research. This section provides a brief introduction to inclusive research including an assertion that working in this manner is not of itself sufficient. It is also necessary that the research is high quality.

‘Inclusive research’ was the focus of a book by Walmsley and Johnson (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003) in the context of research in the learning disabilities field. They argued that the principles are more widely applicable and sought to explain and critique the concept. They portrayed the term ‘inclusive research’ as widely accessible and one that ‘embraces a range of approaches that traditionally has been termed ‘participatory’, ‘action’ or

‘emancipatory’ (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003, p.10) They summarised the characteristics of inclusive research as

involving people who may otherwise be seen as the subject for the research as instigators of ideas, researcher designers, interviewers, data analysts, authors, disseminators and users (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003, p.1)

In relation to learning disabilities, they argue that

- The research problem must be one that is owned (not necessarily initiated by disabled people).
- It should further the interests of disabled people; non-disabled researchers should be on the side of people with learning disabilities.
- It should be collaborative – people with disabilities should be involved in the process of doing the research.
- People with learning disabilities should be able to exert some control over process and outcomes.
- The research questions, process and reports must be accessible to people with learning disabilities.

(Walmsley and Johnson, 2003, p.1)

Despite, the original work being associated with those with learning disabilities, the principles of inclusive research have been adapted for use with other groups of learners. For example, they were applied in research into the experiences of student teachers on initial teacher education programmes (Black-Hawkins and Amrhein, 2014). A review of the research involving children provides examples of them undertaking the various roles outlined by Walmsley and Johnson. Some roles are more frequently referred to than others.

Nind has also addressed the question ‘What is inclusive research?’ (Nind, 2014b). Drawing on position paper 1 from the International Collaboration for Participatory Research, she illustrates that there has been an expansion the terms that she views as fitting within the more generic term inclusive research (e.g. Feminist Research; Empowerment, Evaluation and Democratic Dialogue; and Participatory Rural Appraisal). The term ‘inclusive research’ is presented as a valuable, accessible ‘umbrella term’ (Nind, 2014b, p.5). She draws attention to a commonality across the various forms of research within the umbrella as the shift in the balance in power between the researcher and the researched. This can be envisaged as a continuum from researcher-led to participant-led research. Inclusive research emphasises approaches where the traditional boundaries between the researcher and the researched are blurred or challenged. Children can act as, for example, co-designers, co-analysts, and co-disseminators.

However, positioning the research towards the participant-led end of the continuum isn’t sufficient to ensure the value of the research. Rather that case has been argued that it also needs to be high quality research (Nind and Vinha, 2012) which is, for instance, rigorous and ethical.

### **Links between inclusive education and inclusive research**

Given the complexity of inclusive education, it draws on multiple research traditions. This tracking the promotion of inclusive education on school placement requires a statistical approach whilst other research has been designed to access the views of children. Sometimes in researcher-led approaches, there has been recognition of the need for accessible communication resulting in the adoption of image/pictorial data gathering approaches. In other examples, as noted above, children have acted as collaborators.

However, there has been a debate about the relationship between inclusive education and inclusive research. (Nind, 2014a). The themes include the need to understand the lived experiences of learners, involvement in research as a dimension of inclusion and being research-literate as a characteristic of citizens.

### **Influences on Postgraduate students**

Frequently Post Graduate student see their critical study (i.e. the final 60 credit module on the MA programme) as an opportunity to undertake some empirical research. For students on the MA Special Educational Needs (SEN), this is sometimes links to one or more aspects of provision in their own school or associated schools. This can their increased knowledge of inclusive education and may influence practices. The MA SEN programme also introduces the concept of inclusive research. The two case studies that follow illustrate that students conversant with the ideas of inclusive research can adopt some of the principles in their approach to researching inclusive education.

Both the local students undertook school-based research; both were concerned with gaining insights into inclusive education; and explored inclusive approaches to research. Furthermore, both the students wanted to research this aspect with a view to improving the practices in schools i.e. engaging in a transformational process. Some may argue that the focus of the research was determined by the students rather than being identified by those involved (e.g. the children and the school staff) and that the research is therefore not fully inclusive. However, the approaches illustrate elements of researching in a more inclusive manner.

### **Case study 1 Joanne Callaghan**

This research focused upon the children's viewpoint of the transfer from primary to high school, comparing the reflections of post-transition children at the end of Year 7, with the hopes and fears of pre-transition pupils approaching the end of Year 6. The research asked the pupils specifically for their advice for their school so that future transition practice could be improved and asked the post-transition group for advice for their Year 6 counterparts.

### ***Inspiration for an inclusive approach to researching primary/secondary transfer***

Pinter and Zandian (2015) report on what began as an MA research project with children and highlight the specific challenges faced when adopting an inclusive approach, they summarise that: “research work involving children that is carried out for PG research, such as MA dissertations, may bring with it restrictions because of its strong orientation towards the final product.” (Pinter and Zandian, 2015, p.245).

However, Pinter and Zandian (2015) revisited their research after the completion of the MA as part of a follow-up and involved their child participants in the interpretation of the findings. They argue: “that the follow-up session provided a dynamic space where the children commented on the research approach and tools and shared their reflections about the findings.” (Pinter and Zandian, 2015 p. 236). Their findings inspired the research that I recently carried out for my M level Critical Study along with a drive to maximise participation of child participants into the research process, based on the premise that children are ‘experts in their own lives’ (Mason and Danby, 2011 p. 185) and the belief that research should aim to have impact that would directly benefit the participants themselves (Research Councils UK, 2014, LSE, 2015). The inclusive approach to research encompasses all of these considerations (Nind and Vinha, 2013).

Therefore, despite the acknowledged challenges of taking an inclusive approach to research when considering the requirements of an award-bearing course, in this case the dissemination process, as well as the data collection, was carefully planned to maximise the involvement of the participants so that their interpretation of the findings could be included and also to ensure that I had understood their voices accurately in my own interpretations. It is recognised that my research was restricted by the same constraints faced by Pinter and Zandian (2015) prior to their follow-up and therefore compromises were made in order for it to be achievable within the given time. For clarity it is necessary to outline how on a practical level this was carried out.

### ***The Data Collection***

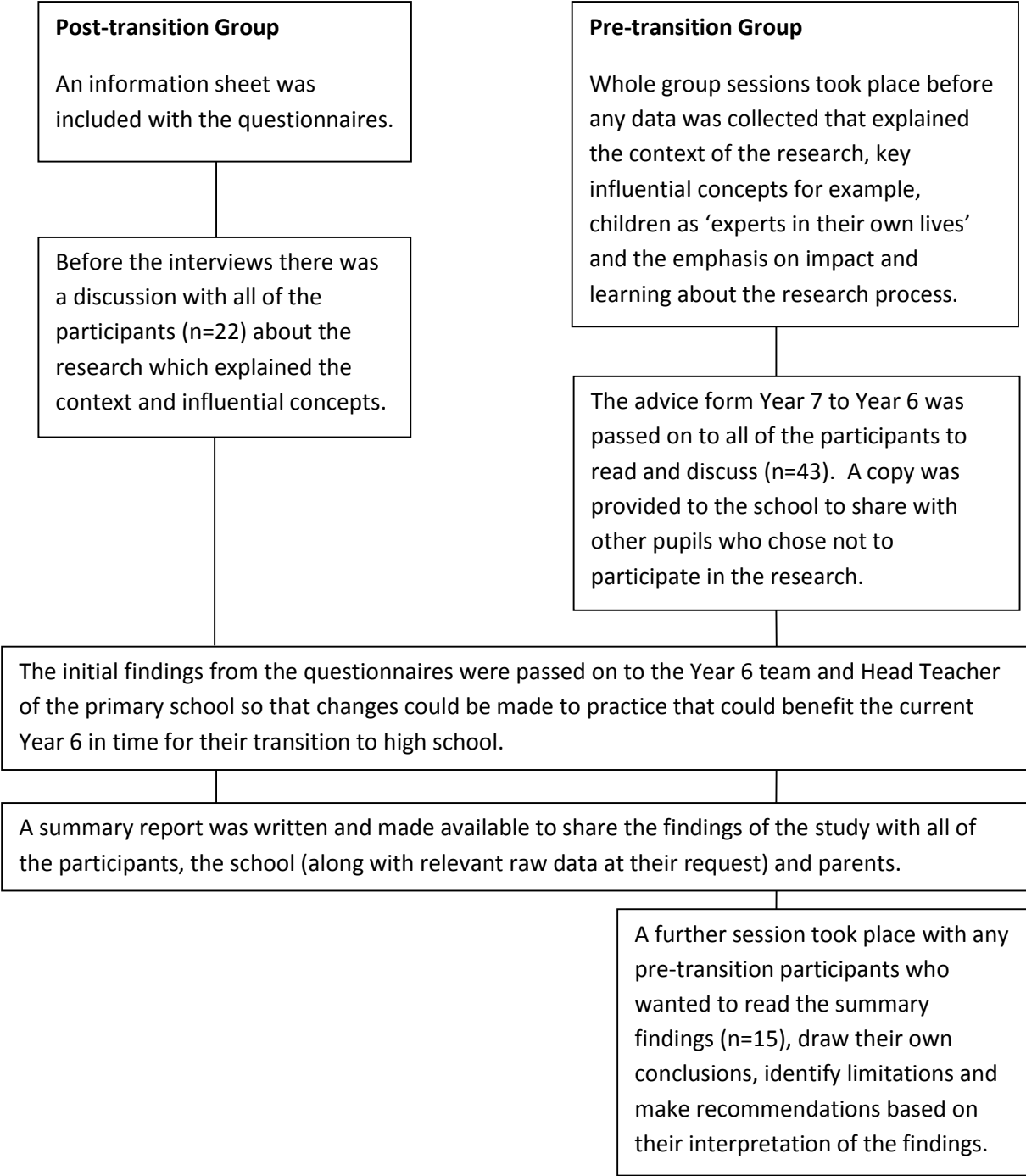
A mixed methodology approach was taken which included questionnaires and group interviews, with an emphasis on accessibility throughout. To ensure accessibility for all participants, drawing was encouraged as an alternative recording method for both groups, as well as scribes and readers being available if required for the pre-transition group.

### ***The Dissemination Process***

Emphasis was given to disseminating the findings to the participants and giving them the opportunity to evaluate the results and contribute to the final recommendations. Disseminating the findings to the school was also crucial so that positive changes to policy were able to be made based on the reported experiences of the pupils. For a more detailed overview of each stage of the dissemination process see Figure 1.



Fig. 1: The Dissemination Process



In this case it is acknowledged that the pre-transition participants were more active in this process than the post-transition group. This was simply down to practicalities and time constraints. It is necessary to evaluate and reflect upon the outcomes of adopting a more inclusive approach whilst fulfilling the prescribed course requirements.

**Was this successful?**

An early indicator of the legacy of the research was that policy in the primary school altered as a result of the findings of the study. After findings relating to homework and independence were disseminated the school decided to alter their practice and planned a new Year 6 project titled: “Are you ready for high school?” which in response to the feedback from the children included a longer, more open ended and self-managed homework project for the Year 6s prior to their transition.

As well as this it became clear that through making the research accessible this led to flexibility in terms of how responses were recorded within the questionnaire stage of the data collection, which led to a wealth of data, which although was challenging to analyse, was at times insightful. One example came from a pre-transition child demonstrating their feelings of anxiety about their upcoming transfer to high school, see Figure 2

Fig. 2: A Pre-transition Student’s Drawing that Illustrates Anxiety



However, because of what was considered achievable within the academic requirements of the task a recurring theme within my Critical Study was recognising what would be extended or changed as part of a larger follow-up piece of future research. For example, it was not possible to include the participants in the data analysis stage of the research, which is something that I would have developed with fewer time constraints.

Overall what was achieved was an insight into the pupils’ viewpoint, which was enriched by empowering the participants throughout and led to some proactive recommendations as to how the transition process could be optimised in future practice for the benefit of the children themselves.

## **Case study 2 Anna Cooper**

### ***Research Aims and Questions***

As a teacher and SENCo in a mainstream primary school in England, my research focus was guided by an interest in developing inclusive practices in the setting and I wanted to explore whether participatory research with pupils, particularly those with SEN, could be an effective tool to enable them to share their perceptions and experiences of inclusive practices in school. The exclusive involvement of children with SEN in participatory research has been challenged by Messiou (2006), who suggested that by *only* including children with SEN in participatory research studies, this behaviour in itself sets these children apart as different. However, Ainscow has described such pupils who do not “*respond to existing arrangements*” (Ainscow, 2014 p 171) as ‘*hidden voices*’ who, when listened to, can advance the improvement of schools. With this in mind, I invited five pupils from Year 1 to Year 5 with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) to take part in the research, with the option of inviting friends to participate with them. Parental consent and pupil assent was obtained from the five invited participants and the research questions posed were as follows:

1. What were the participants’ perceived barriers to their learning in school?
2. What were the participants’ perceived affordances for their learning in school?
3. What were my perceptions of the benefits of the participatory approach in eliciting pupils’ views to inform inclusive teaching and learning?

### ***Participatory research methods***

I selected participant-created photography as a means of data collection, with analysis and interpretation of these photographs occurring at a later stage through photo elicitation interviews (PEI), during which I discussed the contents of the photographs with the pupils. As part of an inclusive methodology, photography and PEI provided a non-written, visual and creative way for the pupils to share their views but still relied heavily on verbal communication for the interview, a style not suited to all of the pupils in the sample, particularly those who demonstrated withdrawn behaviours in class. I therefore offered an additional form of participation to all pupils, which used drawing as a means of communication, based on a method employed by Messiou in a recent EU Comenius project (Messiou, 2006). The pupils in Key Stage 2 (7-10 years old) were given the option of completing an illustrated proforma entitled, “If I were a teacher, I would...”, while the proforma for pupils in Key Stage 1 (5-7 years old) was entitled, “If I could wave my magic wand, I would...”. These were explained to the pupils and could be completed in written or pictorial form and returned anonymously to a box which was kept in a central location in the school.

### **Reflections on the research methods**

The selected research methods enabled all of the pupils to communicate their responses to the research question to some extent. The photographs facilitated the pupils' self-expression without the need for literacy skills, providing effective stimuli for discussion at the interview stage. The ability for most of the pupils to take the photographs independently enabled them to address issues which they may have felt uncomfortable addressing in the presence of an adult, such as those which challenged pedagogical practice in the school. Examples of the photographs taken can be seen in Figure 3 below.

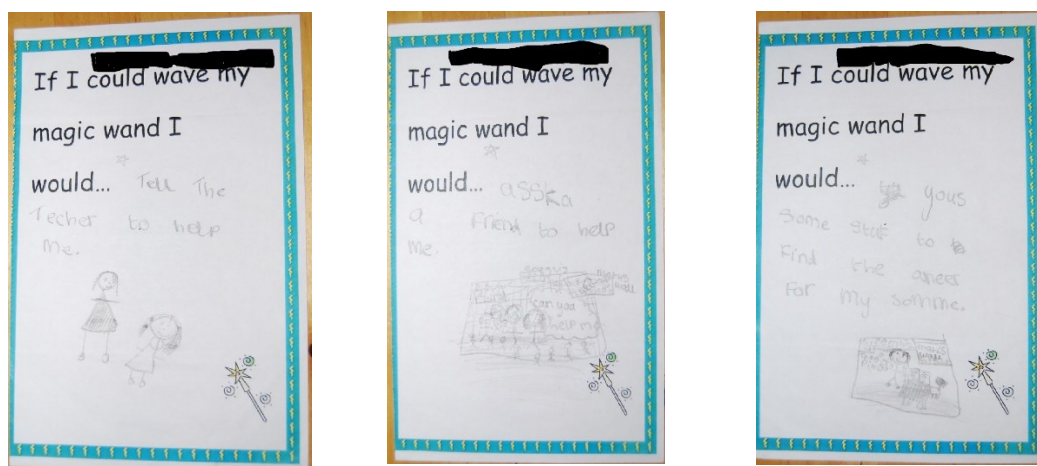
Fig. 3: Photographs taken by the pupils



The interviews enabled pupils to discuss issues that could not be photographed, though this was less successful with the younger pupils and those with additional emotional needs. One pair of younger pupils struggled with the formality of the interview and giggled throughout, unable to focus for very long. Questions were treated as if part of a quiz, with one pupil racing to provide the 'correct' answer, unable to reflect as the older pupils could, possibly due to a relative lack of emotional and verbal maturity. Another pupil became quickly distracted and withdrawn after I had addressed the fact that he had grabbed the earphones out of my hand, subsequently asking me to stop. For this child, who experienced difficulty in relating to others, the perceived intensity of the one-to-one interview was inappropriate and an alternative method should, in hindsight, have been considered, particularly given the potential power imbalance conveyed through my role as both teacher and researcher in the situation. One method which was noticeably less successful in terms of producing data was the "If I were a teacher..." / "If I could wave my magic wand..." proformas. Only one pupil responded to these (Figure 2), but this pupil only took three photographs for the study,

suggesting a variation in preference for research methods and reaffirming the importance of a multi-methodical approach.

Fig. 4



The involvement of friends alongside the participants increased the sample size and was beneficial in a number of ways. Pupils seemed excited to take the photographs with their friends, with one pupil likening the experience to being a spy! Pupils seemed relatively at ease speaking in the interviews with a friend present and they bounced ideas off each other. Difficulties arose, however, in ensuring the participants' voices were heard, particularly alongside friends who were more confident and articulate. Discussions of sensitive topics, such as academic achievement, also proved problematic in a group dynamic and measures would have to be taken in future research to minimise these effects.

### ***Personal reflection***

Beginning this participatory research study as a teacher and taught postgraduate student, much of the research process was new to me. Not only has this experience sensitised me to new theoretical aspects of the field, but I have also gained valuable research skills which have enabled me to explore issues in a more inclusive and reflexive manner. In my professional role, my belief in the need to consult pupils about their learning has strengthened, and the skills I have learnt to elicit these views will be invaluable in better understanding the learning needs of the pupils in my care.

### **Discussion**

The opening sections provided some insights into the issue related to inclusive education and inclusive research, with a bias towards children with special educational needs. The two case studies illustrate how these ideas influenced two students and how they applied the ideas in school-based research. They provide some insights into both the complexities

involved including the need for flexibility and the power of greater pupils' involvement. These are particularly valuable in light the requirement for pupil participation as laid down in the Code of Practice.

Further, the accounts perhaps illustrate the view expressed by Nind that

Challenging exclusion from research is conducive to challenging exclusion from education, but perhaps less threatening for those in the educational community to begin their thinking with. It could highlight the harms of oppression, the powers of collaborative problem-solving, and the potential for transformation. (Nind, 2014a, p.537)

Both the cases studies include references to the relationship between the adult and the pupils e.g. 'sensitised' and 'empowered'. These are ideas that are consistent with inclusive education and it could be argued that engagement in inclusive research has an educational dimension; a step towards being research literate. This is consistent with the account provided by Pinter and Zandian (2015).

If we accept the position that inclusive education is not about named groups of children where those labels refer to the children's resources or their background but involves **all children** then an awareness of inclusive research should be part of studies related to inclusive education. They share values in terms of valuing of others, creative approaches and co-working. A knowledge of inclusive research could provide a valuable 'new' direction for those involved into gaining evidence about inclusive education and how to transform educational settings.

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