

**Seeing Sense:  
The Effectiveness of Inclusive  
Education  
for Visually Impaired Students  
in Further Education**

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September 2014

## DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore how visually impaired students' learning journeys in educational environments vary by individual characteristics and prior experiences, and by the type and nature of the institution they attend. In particular the study aimed to uncover how both barriers to learning and good practice are understood, in relation to the enactment of inclusive education policies. Disability is formulated and enacted in the intersection between the individual, their impairment and psycho-emotional status, and the social context (Thomas 1999). For visually impaired students in further education settings, biographical experiences, impairments, and encounters with education all have an impact on their ability to access learning, to achieve educationally, and to formulate their sense of self and identity. The thesis draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted across three further education colleges, with six visually impaired Welsh students aged 16-25. Data were generated through interviews with student participants, staff members and peers, observation, and documentary analysis.

Findings suggested that inclusion is only successful if *tutors* provide valid learning opportunities for visually impaired students. Access to information and other learning opportunities such as demonstrations, practical tasks, and physical activity may be compromised by inappropriate teaching and support methods. Access is also significantly affected by the nature of the visual impairment, the modes of information retrieval, and students' attitudes and skills. The emphasis on the practical in further education settings makes this analysis particularly significant. Detailed specialist knowledge of appropriate teaching techniques and organisational considerations exists, but is located in the main in a very small number of specialist colleges across the UK. Analysis also identified two competing ideologies; commitment to the provision of inclusive mainstream learning environments as part of an inclusive society, or commitment to the provision of appropriate teaching in a specialist institution, to facilitate future inclusion in society.

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my original supervisors Dr. Jane Salisbury and Professor Martin Jephcote for their patient support through the tricky 'teething' phase of the PhD. Special thanks go to Professor Amanda Coffey, who stepped in as supervisor in my second year, and provided the clear and concise guidance and criticism needed to complete the thesis within my funding period. Thanks also go to the ESRC, who funded the project.

It is with immense gratitude that I acknowledge the contribution of the student participants in the study: Ffion, Steven, John, Alex, Tom and Keith. Without their enthusiasm and openness this project would not have been possible. They opened up their lives and feelings to me, and tolerated their 'stalker' with good grace! My thanks also to the many professionals who took time out of their busy schedules to discuss inclusion, disability, teaching and take-aways with me.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support during this long haul. This PhD has been made possible thanks to the regular provision of wine and encouragement from, amongst others, Tanya, Ruth, and the Llantwit massive.

I dedicate this thesis to my children, Cai and Taran, who have grown up with my 'book' as an extra member of the family. This thesis was scribbled at the sidelines of rugby and gymnastics tournaments, and formulated to the soundtrack of Eurovision and Metallica. Thanks for the bourbon biscuit crumbs in the laptop, boys, and sorry if I've put you off university.

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There are things known and there are things unknown,  
and in between are the doors of perception.

Huxley (1954)

# Chapter One: Introduction

For the discrete set of learners who are visually impaired, choices and experiences in post-compulsory education present a distinct set of challenges. Conversely, for the post-compulsory education sector, visually impaired learners present a range of unique needs relating to pedagogy, organisation, management and environmental factors. These arise in relation to communication of information, learning processes and safe and successful negotiation of the learning environment. Research into the experiences of visually impaired students in post-compulsory education is limited (Keil and Crewes 2008), particularly when compared with other disability groups. Little is known about the individual and institutional factors which influence the educational experiences of visually impaired learners in this setting.

This thesis thus endeavours to address some of these knowledge gaps, in terms of the provisions for, and experiences of, visually impaired students in further education in Wales, through description and analysis of ethnographic case study research conducted in 2013. In this chapter, the aim, research questions and design of the study will be briefly outlined, before the context of the study is explored, in terms of inclusion, visual impairment and further education provision. Then, the changing nature of terminology for visual impairment and further education will be addressed, before an outline of the structure of the thesis is given in the final section.

## 1.1 Aim

The aim of the study was to explore how visually impaired students' learning journeys in Welsh further education educational environments vary by individual characteristics and prior experiences, and by the type and nature of the institution they attend. In particular the study aimed to uncover how students, members of staff and other stakeholders understood barriers to learning and good practice in relation to the agenda of inclusive education, and the enactment of inclusive education policies in the further education sector. It is hoped that this study will provide policy-makers, teachers,

managers and other relevant stakeholders, such as disability support staff, parents and students with detailed insight into the experiences of visually impaired students in post-compulsory settings, and the learning journeys which lead to a range of educational outcomes.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Design**

The research questions were refined throughout the initial exploratory stages of the project; an 'open-ended' approach recommended by ethnographers such as Hammersley and Atkison (2007: 3) Thus the initial research questions were generated from the research aim (above), preliminary literature and policy review, and exploratory interviews with key informants. The following research questions therefore informed the exploratory phase.

- To what extent do the policies of inclusive education impact on the policies of specific institutions, and on the learning journeys of individual students?
- How do visually impaired students in further education institutions experience the practices of teaching, learning and disability support?
- What are the characteristics of educational provision and processes which promote effective learning journeys, and what presents barriers to learning and achievement?

Following subsequent analysis, the research questions were further refined to reflect the emphases emerging from the data:

- How do the policies of inclusive education and special educational needs impact on the policies and practices of specific institutions in the provision of teaching, learning and support for visually impaired students?
- What are the characteristics of educational provision and processes which promote effective learning journeys, and what presents barriers to learning and achievement?

- How do individual visually impaired student's characteristics and learning journeys affect the experience of teaching, learning and support in further education settings?

The study reported on in this thesis thus sought to explore the enactments of inclusion policies in further education institutions, and the experiences of these enactments by visually impaired students aged between 16-25 years. Detailed ethnographic fieldwork was completed as six student case studies in three further education institutions in Wales. Ethnographic observation of actions and interactions in learning and social contexts was conducted in each location. Interviews were also completed with visually impaired students, which focussed on their educational 'life histories' and their perceptions of barriers to learning and good practice in educational settings. These were supplemented with interviews with others involved in the learning process, including managers, teachers and peers, and with documentary analysis.

### **1.3 Context**

In this section the contextual framework of the study will be explored. Firstly issues in inclusion and special educational needs will be discussed, before attention turns to the needs of visually impaired students in educational settings. Finally the further education context for visually impaired students will be highlighted.

There have been radical changes in the conceptualisation of pupils and students with disabilities in the UK over the last forty years. Since the 1981 Education Act, educational policies for students with disabilities in the UK have been focussed on the identification of special educational needs and the provision of support to meet these needs (Vlachou 1997). The processes of statementing and assessment, outlined in the Act, draws additional funding from government and designates the staffing, equipment and organisation required to meet the needs of students (DfES 2001). The 1981 Education Act emphasised that students should be educated in the

mainstream wherever possible (HMSO 1981), but special schools, colleges and specialist units remained an option for those whose needs could not be met in the mainstream (Thomas and Vaughan 2004; see Chapter Three of this thesis). Those promoting an inclusive agenda within education have frequently argued that the special educational needs system does not promote a fully inclusive educational experience. Rather they believe that special educational needs processes isolate individuals, through the emphasis on medical diagnosis, individualised provision and segregation when needs cannot be met by the mainstream (Thomas and Loxley 2001; Kenworthy and Whittaker 2000; Hall 1997).

Both political and academic commentators have questioned the merits of the special educational needs system in the UK. Baroness Warnock, for example, author of the original Warnock Report (DES 1978) which was the basis of the 1981 Act, condemned the resulting system in a controversial pamphlet published in 2005 (Warnock 2005). Following the Government of Wales Act in 1998, the Welsh Assembly Government has taken increasing responsibility for educational policies, and in 2011 was given further law-making powers for education (Navarro 2012). However in relation to special educational needs, Government policies in both England and Wales appear to be following Baroness Warnock's changing perspective, moving away from the drive for a fully inclusive education system towards increased emphasis on the value of specialist schools and colleges (WAG 2010a; DfE 2011: 51; Runswick-Cole 2011). It appears that changing ideologies towards the special educational needs system are at a tipping point, which may have great implications for the options available to pupils and students, and for the organisation of the educational system.

There are two ideological positions central to the special educational needs debate. Proponents of the inclusive education approach argue that inclusion is a civil rights issue, and that any segregation damages the potential of the individual, and the cohesion of society as a whole (Reiser and Mason 1992; Christensen and Rizvi 1996). Others, however, approach the issue from an educational effectiveness position, arguing that the individual has a right to receive an effective education which caters for their disabilities and needs.

Lui (1995) and Hegarty (1987) for example, argued that the most effective placement is the priority. Their position is that insistence on inclusion in a mainstream institution, if the location is not fully equipped or organised to educate the student to their maximum potential, is damaging for the individual, and counter-productive to longer term goals for both the individual and the educational institutions themselves.

While issues of inclusion and special educational needs are common to all pupils and students with disabilities, different types of special educational need make different demands and present different challenges to the organisational, technological and pedagogical provision of educational institutions. Visual impairment is a low incidence disability (see below) which presents particular challenges to the educational system (Smith et al. 2001; Keil and Crews 2008). Provision of information, from pre-recruitment, through instructional materials, to post-course evaluation, is required in a range of formats. People with a sight loss need adaptations to the physical environment to enhance their safe mobility and orientation, for example, appropriate lighting, tactile guidance, consistent classroom layout, and signage in a range of forms (Pavey et al. 2002). There are also challenges to pedagogy that come with visual impairment, particularly when there is an emphasis on visual tools such as Power Point, and the use of models, diagrams, or visual demonstrations. Access to technology for visually impaired students is only possible with the availability of specialised speech, Braille or magnification packages (Hutchinson et al. 1998). In addition there are a range of eye conditions, each presenting unique functional challenges. For example, students with cataracts will be light sensitive and may require large print or use a low vision aid. In contrast students with retinitis pigmentosa may be night blind and thus require strong lighting, may use standard size print but may have problems negotiating obstacles when travelling (Corn and Koenig 1996).

It has been suggested that the low incidence of visually impaired students causes supplementary challenges in terms of specialist knowledge, services and provision (Kiel and Crews 2008). Only 3.9% of children identified as having a special educational need have a visual impairment (DfE 2012). In

post-compulsory further education settings, the incidence level is significantly lower. In Wales in 2012/13 there were 105 further education students aged under-18, and 325 students aged over 18 with a visual impairment as their primary disability, with an additional 25 students disclosing a multi-sensory impairment (Welsh Government 2014c: 24). In addition, prevalence studies indicate a significant rise in the proportion of people with a visual impairment after the age of 18, with only 0.083% (6,800) of 5-17 year olds registered severely sight impaired or sight impaired in the UK in 2000, compared with 0.141% (30,480) of those aged 18-49 years (Tate et al. 2000).

While there is a low incidence of visually impaired students aged 16-25, the educational choices available for them at post-compulsory level are still significant. There are three educational options available for visually impaired students when they reach post-compulsory age; remaining in a mainstream school until year thirteen (where such provision exists), attending a mainstream further education college, or becoming a residential student at a specialist college for the visually impaired (Kiel and Crews 2008). Each option involves a different funding mechanism, and may be determined by the available resources in each local authority area. This leads to significant variations in the provision of educational opportunities for visually impaired students, as domiciliary location may have a significant impact on the options available. This 'messy' policy context has been subject to review in recent years in Wales (WAG 2010a). The range of choices also compares unfavourably with options available in other countries, such as in the USA, where a specialist college in Texas, for example, works inclusively alongside mainstream provision to ensure all students are integrated with mainstream provision, but with the necessary specialist input (TSBVI 2012). They provide additional training in areas such as orientation, mobility, and communication.

It is evident from the needs of visually impaired students detailed above, that the support that is required to enable inclusive education is likely to be highly specialised in nature. This is particularly relevant to pedagogy, and to educational policy. In terms of pedagogy, James and Biesta (2007) argued that one of the most significant factors in achievement is the development of



a relationship based on the tutor's appreciation of the learning needs of the student. The nature of visual impairment, with its low-incidence but high complexity, may create challenges to pedagogical relationships, if the tutor does not have the thorough knowledge and skills required to provide an appropriate learning environment, or if appropriate support and adaptations are not available. In addition, in relation to educational policy, Braun et al. (2011) argue that educational context and the interpretation and implementation of policies, such as those for disability provision, may have a significant impact on the experience of the individual student within a specific setting. Many Welsh Assembly Government policy documents refer to the generic group of 'students with additional needs' (WAG 2006a). The enactment of a policy based around a generic group of students with disabilities may have particular restrictions when applied to the specific needs of visually impaired students.

## **1.4 Terminology**

In this chapter, in addition to outlining the aim, research questions and design, and context of the study, it is essential that attention turns to the issue of 'naming'. The following discussion will examine and justify the terminology used in the thesis, as a number of the terms used have been contested, conflated or misunderstood.

A number of disability studies scholars have discussed the significance of terminology in social perceptions of disabled people. In addressing the issue of naming, Clark and Marsh (2002), for example, suggested that much of the historical terminology relating to disability is now considered offensive, with a number of terms perpetuating patriarchal attitudes and perceptions of the 'needy' disabled. Similarly Barnes (2001:10) argued that terminology is a crucial aspect of language that contributes to the construction of disability. Vocabulary in relation to disabled people has changed over time, and the introduction of new terminology for disability at significant points in history can be seen to illuminate underlying values and ideologies in relation to

inclusion, as well as reflecting ongoing social prejudices (Christensen 1996: 64). Although deeply contested, the term 'disability' has been recognised most widely by disabled people (Clark and Marsh 2002), and has been adopted in this study as the term recognised by the participants themselves.

In terms of education for disabled people, the WAG (2006c) *Review of Special Educational Needs* concluded that 'we recommend that the term 'special educational needs' should no longer be used and that consideration by the Welsh Assembly Government is given to using the term "additional learning needs" in future' (*Review of Special Educational Needs*, WAG 2006c: 14). Those students with family or social circumstances which impact upon learning, such as young parents, are now included in the category of additional learning needs. However Estyn, the Welsh educational Inspectorate, incorporated Special Educational Needs (SEN) as a sub-category of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) (Estyn 2011: 3), and the majority of professionals and students participating in the study continued to use the term. Thus a student may have a disability and therefore have ALN, but no special educational needs, or may have a particular disability which results in special educational needs. A number of disability scholars such as Benjamin (2002) and Runswick-Cole (2011) have argued that the generalisation of need in this way may have increasingly negative implications for the status of the disability agenda in educational policy priorities. In this thesis, the group of students defined as the focus of investigation are generally referred to as 'visually impaired students'. However the term 'students with special educational needs' is used when referring to policy, or when groups of students are defined as such by the participants. Additional Learning Needs is employed when referring to the group defined in policy as when 'learning needs are additional to the majority of their peers'(Estyn 2011: 3).

The terminology related to visual impairment has also undergone a series of changes. An examination of the documentation of some key organisations involved with visual impairment, both at a global, national and local level, revealed the complexity of the debates around the appropriate selection of terminology for visually impaired people. In the *International Classification of*

*Diseases – 10 (update and revision 2006)*, the World Health Organisation defined four levels of visual function – normal vision, moderate visual impairment, severe visual impairment, and blindness (WHO 2012). In the UK there does not appear to be a consensus on terminology. The UK legal definition of 'severe sight impairment' (blindness) is 'when a person is so blind that they cannot do any work for which eyesight is essential'. This subjective definition contrasts with the legal definition of 'sight impairment' (partial sight), which is threefold and based on clinical measurement (DWP 2012). The SEN Code of Practice for Wales (WAG 2004) maintains use of the term 'visual impairment' throughout the document, but does not define the term. Many of the charities in the visual impairment sector employ shifting terminology throughout their documents. For example the RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) uses a range of terminology, including blind, partially sighted, sight loss, visual impairment and sight problem (RNIB 2012a).

In this brief review of global and national terminology, it is evident that there is little consensus on the labelling of those who have an impairment of vision. In his detailed analysis of the changing terminology in relation to visual impairment, Bolt (2005a) suggested that as social conceptualisations of disability and visual impairment changed under pressure from the disability activist movement, so did terminology and definitions. He stated that the term 'impairment' has now been widely recognised and adopted by the disabled movement, disability scholars and global organisations, and is accepted by the visually impaired population themselves. When redefined as a functional limitation of vision within an individual, rather than as deviance or inferiority from the norm, the term 'visual impairment' thus corresponds with the social model of disability. However he acknowledged that the meta-narrative of defining a group continues to restrict understandings of the 'multiplicity of narratives' of the individuals ascribed to it (Bolt 2005b: 550). Terms such as 'people with a sight loss' were challenged by a number of organisations such as the National Foundation of the Blind (a large organisation of visually impaired people in the USA) who argued against such phrasing as 'strained and ludicrous political correctness' which simply highlights visually impaired

people's sense of inferiority (Jernigan 1993: 1). The terms 'blind' and 'partially sighted' may have become imbued with social and moral implications, yet they continue to be used by organisations and professionals, and are supported by some visually impaired people themselves (Omvig 2009).

It is essential to acknowledge fully the shortcomings, limitations and socially constructed implications of choices in terminology. However the priority in this thesis was to recognise the terminology used by visually impaired people themselves. Although these terms may be contested by some, the participants in the study, and national and local organisations of people with a functional impairment of vision, use the term 'visually impaired people', and this has been adopted as an umbrella term to refer to all those with a functional impairment of vision. The terms 'blind' and 'partially sighted' were also used by the participants in the study and by groups representing visually impaired people, and were thus employed when differentiation between levels of sight was required.

During fieldwork it was also apparent that there were shifting conceptualisations of the labelling of professional teaching staff in further education. In the professional standards for the lifelong learning sector, Lifelong Learning UK adopted the term 'teacher', 'as a generic term for teachers, tutors, trainers, lecturers and instructors in the Learning and Skills Sector.' (LLUK 2007a: 3). The replacement organisation, The Education and Training Foundation, similarly adopts 'teacher' (ETF 2014). In Wales to date, the standards devised by LLUK continue to be applied, and the term 'teacher' is used (LLUK 2007b). Participants in this study used a range of terms, sometimes interchangeably, such as teacher, tutor or lecturer. This may be due to the varied roles, which may include teacher, coach, mentor or assessor. However in the main, participants differentiated between a teacher, in compulsory education, and tutors or lecturers in further education, although the majority perceived lecturer to refer to those teaching in higher education. Therefore in this study the term 'tutor' will be used to refer to those teaching in further education.

## **1.5 Structure of Thesis**

This introductory chapter has located the focus of the research. In Chapter Two the theoretical framework of disability, and perspectives on the senses and visual impairment are explored, to provide a broad background to the research. In Chapter Three, the historical background and theoretical perspectives on inclusive education are explored, followed by an in-depth account of the education of visually impaired people. A detailed description of the methodology and methods used in the study is given in Chapter Four. This is followed by presentation of empirical material in Chapters Five to Eight. Chapter Five provides a detailed, thick description of the colleges involved in the study. Chapter Six explores the contexts of the colleges within the broader further education sector, while Chapter Seven provides an account of the narratives of the individual students and their educational histories and experiences. Chapter Eight locates the students within the classroom contexts, and explores the thematic affordances of distinct pedagogical moments. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the findings in relation to the research aim and questions, and a summary of pedagogical and policy recommendations, in Chapter Nine.

## **Chapter Two: Disability, the Senses and Visual Impairment**

In this chapter I focus on conceptualisations of disability, the senses, and visual impairment. This enables what follows in subsequent empirical chapters to be considered in the context of historical and current theoretical, political, medical, psychological and sociological understandings of the terms. Conceptualisations of disability, in particular, have changed rapidly in recent decades (Reiser 2012a). The chapter is in three sections. In the first section, the range of perspectives towards disability will be explored in some depth. The second section explores Western hegemonic approaches to the senses, challenges the 'five senses' perspective, and discusses psychological, medical and sociological conceptualisations of perception and sensation. Attention to sensory perception is key to understanding visually impaired students' experiences of teaching, learning and support in the further education classroom. In section three I explore 'visual impairment' and 'eye conditions' as medical, psychological, and sociological phenomena. This is done reflexively, with an awareness of the socially created nature of medical classifications, and recognition of professional interpretations of sensorial experience. The discussion thus recognises that self-identification and self-classification by visually impaired people, and the perspectives of those around them, draws on cultural conventions of medical diagnosis and description (Guerette et al. 2011). Current perspectives on visual impairment, disability and the senses are thus explored, as they would be understood by participants in the study.

### **2.1 Disability**

Riddell (1996) suggests a typology with five categories of disability theory; essentialist, social constructionist, materialist, post-modernist and disability activist perspectives. This typology has been adopted by a number of

disability scholars (see for example Slee 1998; Thomas 2002). However social constructionist, materialist and disability activist approaches can be seen to be closely related when applied to the study of disability and special educational needs, and are, in many respects, over-lapping in their conceptualisation of disability. For example Oliver (1990) drew upon Manning's (1985) constructionism along with Marx's historical materialism to argue that disability is a socially constructed concept, which has its roots in oppression that is founded on capitalist notions of an 'economically productive' society. He uses these notions to argue for the 'politics of disability as a pressure group activity' (Oliver 1990: 105).

Although differing in their epistemological framework, social constructionist, materialist and disability activist approaches all take as their basis a rejection of the essentialist belief in disability as an individual, tragic problem, instead locating the issues firmly within social structures (Riddell 1996). Thus, in this section, an exploration of the essentialist perceptions of disability will be followed by a discussion section outlining theories which base their explanations in the social realm. The theories of those who have challenged these explanations will then be discussed, such as those of post-structuralist and feminist writers, who frame their explanations around 'the subject'. Finally an exploration of the more 'synthesised' theories, which aim to encapsulate both the structural and the subject dimensions, will follow.

The essentialist approach to disability is one which locates impairment within the individual. An essentialist perspective thus identifies impairment as a deviation from a fixed and accepted norm of the body and/or bodily function. When reading recent inclusion or disability studies literature, it would be possible to believe that this 'medical model' approach (Reiser 2012a: p161) is a historical standpoint which has now been replaced by 'Social Model' understandings of disability as a social construct. Nevertheless the essentialist perspective has persisted across time; in medical and therapeutic approaches which emphasise diagnosis, remedy and cure; in social understandings of disability as 'deviation from the norm'; and in special

education services which function through the identification of 'needs' which deviate from those of the 'standard' pupil.

Essentialist approaches to disability can be seen to have developed concurrently with the growth of science in general, and with the rise of the medical profession and the associated therapeutic services in particular. During the industrial and post-industrial eras, medicine as a discipline can be seen to have been afforded increasing weight and significance (Conrad 2005). The human body, in its idealised form, is free from defect or deviation in function. The medical version of this norm creates a standard against which an individual is judged. The diagnosis is a process of categorisation; the ascription of a label based on a range of symptoms which represent deviation from this idealised norm (Weitzkin 1991). The symptoms are precisely defined, and a 'correct' collection of these symptoms together enable allocation of an individual to a diagnostic category. In this context essentialist constructions of disability have been described as a 'paradigm case of medicalisation' (Vehmas et al. 2009: 2). Shakespeare (2005) and Rieser (2012a:161-2) define the medical model of disability as being a perception of the *disabled person* as the source of the problem, through their 'differentness'. This viewpoint is validated by medical discourses of cure, normalisation and professional control, and supported by stereotypes of disability. These discourses are evident in cultural media such as books, films and art, and are frequently internalised by disabled people themselves (Thomas 1999: 56).

Davis (2006: 3) argued that it is this 'construction of normalcy' that informs medical and social understandings of disability, and that social constructions of the 'normal body' inform understandings of the concept of 'abnormal'. He suggested that the concept of 'normal' only entered social consciousness in the late nineteenth century, as an outcome of statistical readings of society. Thus the statistical concept of the bell-curve created the 'tyranny of the norm' (Davis 2006: 7) with associated concepts of deviation. Davis stated that these conceptualisations informed eugenicist descriptions of disability as associated with social threat, deviance and criminal behaviour in the 1920s



and 1930s, and continue to inform social understandings of disability, within culture and literature, to the present day. Writing over half a century ago, Goffman's (1963) theoretical work contradicted this temporal explanation; he asserted that the categorisation of members of a social group is fundamental to its function. He believed that members ascribe attributes and values to categories of people, and then identify a hierarchy of members through these ascribed characteristics.

The history of the development of the social model of disability in Britain has been well-rehearsed in Disability Studies literature (Abberley 1987; Ainscow 1991; Albrecht 2002; Armstrong and Barton 1999; Barnes 1991; Barnes et al 1999; Barton 1998; Bury 1991; Christensen 1996; Corker and French 1999; Finkelstein 1980; Hughes and Patterson 1998; Norwich 2007; Oliver 1990, 1996; Oliver and Barnes 2010; Reiser 2012a; Shakespeare and Corker 2002; Thomas 1999, 2002), and thus will only be briefly touched on here. This history evidences both the social and political changes in relation to disability in the last decades of the twentieth century, and the changing ontological and epistemological debates in academic social science literature (see Chapter Four).

The frequently cited landmark in the development of disability theory in the UK was the publication of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) document *Fundamental Principles of Disability* in 1976. In this document, for the first time, disability was identified as being separate from impairment, with disability defined as 'the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by contemporary social organisation' (UPIAS 1976: 3-4). Finkelstein (1980), a strong supporter of the UPIAS position, argued that disability should be conceived of as a purely political and cultural concept, and that impairment was thus not the topic of debate. Debates around disability expanded, with writers such as Barnes (1991) elaborating on the UPIAS definition to suggest that disability was the result of discrimination, rather than as a result of individual impairment. One of the key scholars in this field, Michael Oliver, engaged with materialist and social constructionist epistemologies in his seminal work, 'The Politics of Disablement' (1990). He

grounded his explanation of the oppression of disabled people in Marxist theory, and drew on the UPIAS definition to propose a new perspective which could inform and support a disability activist perspective. Oliver argued that disability is 'culturally produced and socially structured' (1990: 22), and expanded on Finkelstein's earlier position (1980) to suggest that as industrialisation progressed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, disabled people were increasingly dismissed as economically unproductive. Institutionalisation, medicalisation and philanthropy re-framed disabled people as dependent upon the state, and in need of 'care', resulting in a 'less than human' disabled identity (Oliver 1990: 61). He further contended that professional and academic approaches such as the 'emotional adjustment' model and the 'stigma' theory formulated by Goffman (1963), while presenting some useful analyses, continued to interpret disability on an individualistic level, and failed to address the social dimension.

The writings of Barnes (1991), Oliver (1990) and Finkelstein (1980) developed the concept of the 'Social Model of Disability'. The social constructionist epistemology of the model explained disability in terms of social arrangements, and culturally produced norms of the body (Vehmas and Makela 2009). Indeed a number of scholars have argued that Disability Studies itself pre-supposes a social constructionist perspective (Albrecht 2002; Barnes et al. 1999). Although this view has been challenged by more recent disability theorists who engage with a range of epistemological perspectives including feminist and post-structuralist positions (see discussions in the following section), in the 1980s and 1990s social constructionism was the fundamental epistemological framework for the interpretation of disability in Britain. For example, in the conceptualisation of labels ascribed to disabled people, Disability Studies scholars such as Barton and Tomlinson (1981) used a social constructionist perspective to argue that categorisations of disabled people are laden with socially constructed value-judgements. They suggested that terms such as 'special educational needs' or 'disruptive child' were value-laden and filled with inferred meaning.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Social Model formed the basis of campaigns by disability organisations to remove the physical, social and organisational barriers to equality they perceived to be evident in society. It was thus seen as a radical 'call-to-arms' and the foundation of political campaigns by disability activists. Those supporting this new form of identity politics made comparisons with civil rights movements in the US, and with feminist and post-colonialist agendas in the UK (Riddell and Watson 2003). The campaigns ultimately resulted in sufficient political pressure to compel the Conservative administration to pass the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995. Disability theorists, drawing on social justice perspectives, also frequently framed the debate purely in terms of social structures. Smith (2009), for example, drew upon Barnes (1991), Oliver (1990) and Swain et al. (2003), to argue from a social justice standpoint, asserting that essentialism identifies disability as having fixed and essential characteristics and in addition is perceived to lead automatically to a life of personal loss and tragedy (Smith 2009:16). Smith believed that this legitimises the intervention of medical and therapeutic professionals and the imposition of policy directives in areas such as special educational needs, which 'function as mechanisms of social control' (Smith 2009: 18).

A number of scholars have noted that the Social Model appeared to become a 'sacred cow' (Shakespeare and Watson 2002: 5; see also Thomas 1999; Vehmas and Makela 2009) in that any debate about its veracity was seen by activists to reflect discriminatory attitudes and to support medicalised, essentialist notions of disability. Finkelstein (1996) for example, rejected the 'post-modern turn' in Disability Studies, believing that any move towards the subjective experience of impairment in academic or political literature would divert attention from oppressive social practices which marginalise disabled people. There were a few exceptions to this dichotomy. Paul Abberley (1987;1993), for example, framed his position within Disability Studies and drew on materialist and social constructionist perspectives, but challenged the removal of the body/impairment from the debate on disability. Thus he argued that 'the disabled state is poverty' (Abberley 1993: 111) and

suggested that biological differences and impairments are socially created, as a result of socio-economic determinants, such as levels of exposure to disease and trauma, and standard of living effects. In the US writers such as Albrecht (1992), Davis (1995) and Wendell (1996) considered disability from a 'minority group' perspective, rather than from a social constructionist viewpoint, and the scholarly tradition in disability theory in the US has tended to continue on this basis. For example, US writers such as Gartner and Lipsky (1999) challenged the privileging of social constructionist approaches to the global situation, asserting that scholars must be cautious of applying Western academic disciplines cross-culturally.

Smith (2009) created a helpful typology of medical and social models (see Table 2.1, below). She asserted, however, that each model had its limitations in providing useful explanations of the interaction between impairment, disability, and society. Scholars began to argue that while essentialist epistemologies denied impact of the social on the self, social constructionist epistemologies (often described as 'strong social model theories') led to an unrealistic emphasis on the social dimension, which ignored the role of impairment and the significance of the body in social arrangements. Thus disability scholars began to explore the role of the 'subject' in conceptualisations of disability and impairment (Thomas 1999, Shakespeare and Corker 2002, Vehmas and Makela 2009).

**Table 2.1: Interpretations of the Medical and Social Models**

<i>Medical Models</i>	1. Full-essentialist individual deficiency interpretation (FEID)	Disability is caused by fixed medical characteristics that inevitably preclude a life of deficiency and 'abnormality'
	2. Part – essentialist individual deficiency interpretation (PIED)	Whilst disability is caused by the above medical characteristics, these can be partially alleviated by changes in the social environment, so as to enable some degree of 'normal living'.
<i>Social Models</i>	3. Politics of disablement interpretation (POD)	Disability is caused by social practices that systematically exclude impaired people from the activities of 'normal citizenship'.
	4. Social construction of disablement interpretation (SCOD)	Disability is caused by the way impairments are defined and associated with characteristics that are necessarily assumed to have a negative impact on personal identity, development and fulfilment

Source: Smith 2009: 22

The 'post-modern turn' in the social sciences is recognised as having a basis in Lyotard's pivotal statement in the debate on knowledge in 'The Postmodern Condition' (1984). In the text Lyotard challenged some sociological fundamentals, such as meta-narratives of knowledge and social progress, arguing that general theories did not have explanatory power in modern society. Lyotard's challenges were taken up by a range of scholars who were interested in his questioning of the ontological assumptions of truth and reality. For example, Derrida (1978) used post-modernist deconstructions of grand theory to argue that local meanings are culturally created through the assertion of the difference between things, thereby creating Cartesian binaries and definitions based on difference and deferment (Shakespeare and Corker 2002: 7). Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1991), also took issue with the theoretical assumptions of a fixed reality, and revisited the place of the body in social theory. He is thus also viewed as a significant post-structuralist writer (although he denied his

categorisation as such). He argued that the body is fundamental in social relations as an object of knowledge, and is vulnerable to disciplinary control and is thus both an economic and a political body (Hughes and Patterson 1997). Furthermore he suggested that an individual's social identity develops as a result of the organisation of knowledge and power. Some strands of feminism also drew upon the ideas of Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault, to apply a post-structuralist framework to the debate on the nature of the body (Butler 1993; Young 1990). Thus feminist theorists such as Butler question the 'truth' of the lived body, proposing an 'embodied subjectivity' framed through gender, sexuality and identity.

In the brief outline above it is evident that many of these theoretical conceptualisations were significant to epistemological debates between disability theorists. Thus in the late 1990s disability scholars began to draw on post-structuralist theory to question the 'grand narratives' of the Social Model of Disability, and to privilege instead the significance of the subject. Post-modernist scholars (such as Shakespeare 1996; Shildrick and Price 1996; Price and Shildrick 1998; Corker and French 1999) argued that the Social Model ignored the role of cultural power in oppression, presenting instead simplistic structural explanations. Further, they stated that structuralist theories ignored actual impairment, and therefore failed to acknowledge issues of embodiment, rendering all aspects of the body invisible to the sociological gaze. Thus they suggested that proponents of the social model were in fact guilty of supporting the essentialist medicalised view of the body as discrete from social interactions, from power/ knowledge and from social control of the human form (Thomas 1999). Hughes and Patterson (1997) suggested that a Foucauldian post-structuralist analysis of disability identifies sensations and impairments of the body as 'discursively constructed' through language, as a result of social processes. They cite Foucault's description of the relationship between power and the body: 'Power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (Foucault 1980: 39). Thus a Foucauldian perspective would assert that in the case of impairment, conditions are

constructed through the assertion of medical power in the naming and classification of bodily dysfunction. Authors such as Shakespeare and Watson (2002) have queried some aspects of this argument, suggesting that there is a danger that such post-structuralist approaches will replace biological essentialism with a form of discursive essentialism, wherein the body is once again denied agency and a fundamental organic basis.

Feminist writers such as Corker and French (1999), Morris (1991; 1992) and Thomas (1999; 2002) drew upon post-structuralist theory in order to challenge essentialist and structuralist conceptualisations. They demanded a 'rethinking of the process by which a bodily norm is assumed' (Butler 1993: 3). Morris (1992) argued that it was necessary to 'make the personal political' (1992: 5). She advocated the use of post-structuralist perspectives in the theorisation of disability, in order to highlight oppressive practices on the micro-level of individual experience and argued that 'space must be created for the absent subject' (Morris 1992: 165). Corker and French (1999) also critiqued the social model for its rejection of the personal experience of living with an impairment. Focussing on the experience of pain, Crow (1996) was able to challenge the explanatory power of the social model, by addressing the lived realities of individuals in social settings. Thomas also drew on a range of structuralist and post-structuralist epistemologies in the creation of her model of disability. Her perspectives will be examined in more detail below, however in her seminal text, 'Female Forms' (Thomas 1999: 75), she recognised the significance of the post-structuralist feminist perspective, and used it to advocate for the 'epistemological importance of experience', which, she argued 'offer[s] a route into understanding the socio-structural' (1999:78). More recent feminist scholars in this tradition challenged the 'Northern' bias of disability research and theory, and called for a more globalised, transnational approach. They argued that the experience of disabled women needs to be explored in relation to the discourses of human rights (Conejo 2011; Meekosha 2011). Of course, not all feminists take a post-structuralist viewpoint; Wendell (1996), for example, criticised the deconstruction of the body, claiming that there is a danger that such deconstruction assumes an 'ideal' form. Feminists were also heavily

criticised, in the main by social model protagonists such as Oliver (1996) and Finkelstein (1996) as they believed that any attention to lived experience would divert arguments from a concentration on oppressive social barriers and cultural oppression.

In addition to the post-structuralist perspectives, symbolic interactionist epistemologies have been employed in theorising the individual subject's experience of disability. Goffman, a leading proponent of this perspective, undertook micro-social investigations of interactions between the 'stigmatised' and the 'normal' in his seminal text 'Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity' (Goffman 1963). Goffman's interpretation of disability as a 'stigmatised identity' is acknowledged by more recent scholars such as Coleman (2006) to be 'of its era'. However his exploration of 'undesired differentness' (Stafford and Scott 1986) as heavily dependent on social context is acknowledged to be one of the foundations of the study of disability by social psychologists and others. Goffman's use of the symbolic interactionist epistemology was taken up frequently by medical sociologists and those investigating the sociology of chronic illness and disability, such as Bury (1991), and Kelly and Field (1996). Stigma is a slippery concept, according to Coleman (2006:141), as it is 'a property, a process, a form of social categorisation and an affective state' resulting in downward social mobility and devalued attributes. Goffman's analysis of the 'lived experience' of the stigmatised individual focussed on the absorption of a devalued status, the impact of 'stigma signals' on 'normals' (Goffman 1963: 58) and the significance of group alignment and social exile. Some Disability Studies scholars however have challenged these interpretations as again failing to acknowledge broader social structures (Barnes and Mercer 1996; Abberley 1993). Oliver, for example, argues that 'Goffman fails to move beyond the individual... [and] takes as given the imposed segregation, passivity and inferior status of stigmatised individuals and groups - including disabled people ingrained in capitalist social relations' (1996:22).

Disability Studies thus developed as a challenge to the essentialist, medical model of disability. However these challenges to essentialism have become



increasingly diverse and polarised, resulting in progressively more complex debates on the nature of disability and illness. Social theories, which approach disability as a form of socially produced oppression, contrast with theoretical stances from authors drawing on post-structuralism, feminism, and phenomenology, which focus on the individual subject's experience of disability. In outlining these debates, Thomas (1999) suggested that each has validity in understanding the realities of disability in modern society, and in challenging the oppressive essentialist medical position. Despite proponents of each position arguing that the other undermines an accurate understanding of the realities of disability, Thomas (1999: 143) has argued that it is possible to combine the structural and the personal, to create a social relational model of disability, which affords a fuller synthesis.

Debates continued throughout the 1990s and into the twenty first century between those advocating the social model of disability and those conducting theoretical interpretations on a 'subject' level. However, simultaneously a number of scholars began to acknowledge that a synthesised approach was necessary in order to embrace and encapsulate issues of both society and subject. In her highly-cited seminal text, 'Female Forms: Experiencing and Understanding Disability', Thomas (1999) stated that any discussions around developments in disability theory illuminated 'old' sociological debates on structure and agency. She argued for a theoretical analysis of disability which acknowledges the 'location of experience in its broader socio-structural context' (Thomas 1999: 155). In her synthesised account of disability, it is the interaction between impairment and disability in a social setting which creates oppression. She conceptualised impairment as having both a physical dysfunction dimension and a socially constructed dimension. She conceived disability to be the restrictions to daily living caused by both the impairment and the social arrangements which result in the oppression of disabled people, and drew on feminist theorists such as Morris (1991) and Young (1990) to extend the definition to include the psycho-emotional dimensions of disability. To a certain extent Thomas' definition moved the concept of disability back to the original UPIAS definition (1976), but significantly she extended the definition to encapsulate the interactions

between the inner and outer self and the impact of social structures and processes. She thus argued that it was possible for the synthesised model to continue to act as the theoretical basis for the political disability activist movement, whilst simultaneously enabling an acknowledgement of the psycho-emotional nature of the disabled self and its interaction with society.

A number of scholars have drawn on Thomas' perspective as an heuristic to suggest an integrated model of disability which encapsulates both the physical and social dimensions of disability and impairment, and which acknowledges both structure and agency. Vehmas and Makela (2009) argued that 'there is nothing oppressive in admitting that disability and impairment include both physical and social dimensions' (53). They maintain that although social model critiques of the medical view of disability and impairment have had political validity, there is a need to acknowledge the biological and social basis of both embodied impairment and disability. Similarly, Schillmeier (2008) argued that whatever the perspectives from which disability has been viewed, whether sociocultural (the social model) or medical/techno-scientific (the medical model), disability has been defined typically within the binaries of 'matters of society' and 'matters of nature', which 'sets clear and distinctive hermetic limits of understanding how disability issues are enacted and practised' (Schillmeier 2008: 612). Similarly Hughes and Paterson (1997) and Williams and Bendelow (1995) challenged the impairment/disability divide to argue for a reconstituted theorisation of the embodied and socially constituted nature of disability and impairment. More recently Boyd (2012) has argued that 'over-homogenisation of the lived experience' prevalent in social model explanations of disability had failed to explore its liminal nature, for example for those with fluctuating medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis. Beauchamp-Pryor also drew upon Thomas's exploration of the psycho-emotional dimensions of disablism to argue that perceptions of 'cure' for disabled people have a physical, social and emotional dimension with significant implications for both individual identity and 'the shared experience of oppression' (Beauchamp-Pryor 2011:15).

Thomas's exploration of the psycho-emotional dimension of disability has been extended by a number of scholars who draw on 'social psychoanalytic disability studies'. Theorists such as Marks (2002) argued for a definition of disability as being as a result of the complex relations between cultural, familial and embodied elements, underpinned by unconscious processes that affect behaviours and interactions. Goodley (2011) continued this form of analysis, and suggested that 'at the heart of this is the internalised experience of disablism: oppression is felt psychically, subjectively and emotionally but is always socially, culturally, politically and economically produced' (Goodley 2011: 716). He suggested that disablism may be direct, in the form of discriminatory interactions, invalidation or hate crimes, or indirect, in the form of social exclusion due to structural disablism, but in each case the result is an interaction between the social realm and the inner psyche. Goodley acknowledged the misgivings of disability scholars, who are reluctant to engage with psychological theory due to its contribution to the historical pathologisation and institutionalisation of disabled people. However he argued that a social psychoanalytic approach could enable an investigation of the impact of social, political and cultural practices on the individual psyche.

Just as sociology was 'rediscovering the body' in its exploration of the embodied self (Williams and Bendelow 1995; Shilling 2010) the disability movement appeared to cast out the body, with the social model's insistence on the structural nature of disability (Hughes and Paterson 1997: 326). Phenomenologists have recently attempted to 'bring the body back in' to the study of disability, drawing on Merleau-Ponty (1962) to explore the intersection between self and society, and to extend the synthesised models of disability. Thus, a number of scholars began to explore the embodied experience of disability and impairment from a phenomenological perspective, as they argued that it enables a synthesised interrogation of the relationship between the body, the self and society (Hughes 2004; Hughes and Paterson 1997). Leach Scully (2009), for example, has argued that a phenomenological approach enabled an examination of 'how the subject experiences his or her presence in the world'. She acknowledged that such a

position would be criticised by social model protagonists as resulting in an exploration of the 'pathologised individual', however she maintained that phenomenology enables an important approach which privileges understanding of 'being-in-the-body-in-the-world' (Leach Scully 2009: 60). More recent developments have drawn on traditions in queer and post-colonial literature (Goodley 2014), and discuss the concept of the disabled 'post-human' in disability theory (Graham 2002; Shakespeare 2014), exploring the intersection of the self with twenty first century technology, 'digital, cybernetic and bio-medical' (Graham 2002).

However, for this study, Thomas' synthesised perspective was selected as a theoretical framework for the research. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four, her approach reflects educational theories by authors such as Ball (1990; 1997), in its exploration of the intersection between the 'micro' worlds of individual participants and the 'macro' world of the educational context and policy landscape (Ozga 1990; Ball 1997; Braun et al. 2011).

While a number of studies thus explored the embodiment of disability and the connections between the 'micro' experiences of disability and contextual factors, there is another significant dimension for the participants in this study; the significance of sensory perception and sensory impairment. Thus, in the following section, theoretical, psychological, medical and sociological understandings of the senses will be discussed in more depth.

## **2.2 The Senses**

From an early age, children are taught about the five senses; sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste (DfEE 1999). This 'common sense' and rather basic understanding of the mechanisms of sensory perception informs the cultural conceptualisations of our embodied interactions with the social and physical world. In this section notions of sensory perception will be explored, in order to address the challenges raised by scholars in a number of disciplines to what Millar (1994:18) terms 'empiricist understandings' of the senses. This

discussion will enable subsequent consideration of the impact of such approaches upon conceptualisations of visual impairment, and upon the interactions of visually impaired people with the social and physical environment.

In the field of psychology, empiricists initially suggested that the five senses are separate modalities from which we draw information about the world, and that we learn over time through the association of sensory stimuli with physical objects (Millar 1994: 18). Piaget (1953) proposed a theory of child development in which there was staged advancement of the logical schema of sensory input. He believed that in the initial 'sensori-motor' stage of development, the sensory modalities function independently. Combined schemas only develop later in the 'representational' and formal operational stages, supported by enhanced abstract logical thinking. The 'separate sense organ' approach, however, has been challenged by a number of studies evidencing sensory integration from birth. For example Speke and von Hofsten (1986) describe evidence of the integration of the senses in very young children. Some psychologists suggested that it is the application of language, the 'naming' of objects and phenomena, that causes the integration of sensory input (Ettlinger 1967), however others evidence sensory discrimination in pre-verbal children (Streri 1987). Other psychologists who challenged Piaget's biological approach to sensory development drew on phenomenological psychology. J.J. and E.J. Gibson (E.J. Gibson 1969, J.J. Gibson 1966), two of the most influential scholars in the tradition of the phenomenology of psychology, argued that the perceptual framework is present from birth, as 'organised perceptual systems', which are not reliant on memory, logical thinking or past experience. J.J. Gibson claimed that sensory inputs were complementary, and inter-connected (1979). Thus he believed that the inputs for seeing and moving, for example, needed to be viewed as a *single* system, rather than as a higher level brain activity which connects two separate sources.

Neuropsychological investigations have supported this argument, suggesting that sensory information is integral to all of the higher order neural pathways of the brain (Berthoz 1991), with a number of reciprocal networks and inter-

relationships (Crick 1989). Millar, in her 1994 investigation of understandings and representations of space, drew on psychological studies undertaken with two groups of children, one group blind from birth and one group sighted. She compared psychological coding strategies in spatial tasks for each group, and found that a congenital lack of sight results in more body-centred and movement coding than that measured for sighted children. Most importantly, Millar discovered that whilst the overlap of information from available sensory sources was differently formulated, it resulted in a comprehensive alternative schema of sensory information absorption. This psychological approach, while limited by the experimental conditions which of course cannot reflect real-life interactions, supports the phenomenological perspective of scholars from other disciplines. Merleau-Ponty is a well-known example, arguing powerfully some fifty years ago that 'we encounter the world through the whole body at once' (1962: 225). This approach was expanded some years later by a visually impaired researcher, Saerberg (2010), who asserted that each individual, whether sighted or visually impaired, has a 'particular style of perception' (2010: 370).

Sociological and anthropological approaches have taken a similar trajectory to the psychological developments outlined above, in terms of the elaboration of more complex theories of sensory perception. Indeed the subject of sensory perception crosses disciplinary divides, and instances of cross-disciplinary work can be seen to have deepened and enriched debate. For example, Ingold (2000) formulated his epistemological stance in relation to the study of the senses by drawing on both phenomenological traditions in philosophy and social science, and upon developments in psychology, such as Gibson's ecological theories of perception and the significance of the 'affordances' of the environment (a phrase first coined by Gibson in 1979: 127).

In 1991 Howes, working in the field of the anthropology of the senses, was the first to propose anthropological comparison of the varying hierarchies of the senses in a range of different cultures (Howes and Classen 1991). Both Howes (2003) and Classen (1997) have challenged the 'common sense' notion of visual primacy and the modern Western state of 'hypervisualism'

and occularcentrism. They both suggest that the visual focus of society is a result of cultural conditioning rather than a biological fact of visual dominance. Howes (2003) asserts that in cultures across the world, other senses are more significant. Howes' and Classen's approaches have been expanded upon, and challenged, by a range of social scientists and anthropologists keen to explore the role of the senses in society. A number of studies have examined the social, cultural and identity roles of the individual senses. Drobnick, for example, argued that smell is related to 'every aspect of culture, from the construction of personal identity and the defining of social status to the confirming of group affiliation and the transmission of tradition' (Drobnick 2006: 1). Similarly Classen proposed that tactile interactions are integral to social life, and that touch and movement are closely integrated, as 'touch in motion' (2005: 1). She suggested that tactile exchange is affected by social rituals and taboos, for example between genders or between children and adults. Ball and Back (2003) made a comparable argument in 'The Auditory Culture Reader' suggesting that hearing and sound have been neglected in the social sciences, and that it is essential to interrogate the role of sound in the everyday.

Ede (2009), in her theoretical discussion on the nature of sensory ethnography, has supported these viewpoints and presented a critique of occularcentrism through an exploration of the visually orientated Western consumer culture, with its 'hegemony of the eye' (62). She maintained that since the Age of Enlightenment, science has privileged the visual, as measurement of 'the seen' is believed by scientists to reduce subjectivity. This positivistic approach has informed modern culture in areas as diverse as city planning, biological investigation, and the visually-orientated designs of schools and hospitals. Ede states that this 'European intellectual sensory model' (2009:64) has a distinct hierarchy of the senses with vision at its pinnacle, which creates and reinforces social hierarchy. She also suggested that visual hegemony came to inform the growing culture of consumerism, with its focus on visual aesthetics.

Ingold (2000), however challenged these cross-cultural approaches to the separate senses, suggesting that the separation of sensory modalities, as proposed by Howes and his followers, did not sufficiently acknowledge the fully integrated and embodied experiences and knowledges of individuals in the social world. His exploration of 'The Perception of the Environment' (Ingold 2000) examined the significance of individual perceptual schema in a range of social spaces. Pink (2009; 2011a) has expanded on Ingold's theories to propose a sensory anthropology which informs ethnographic practice, in order to explore 'how people make place or experience inequalities in their everyday lives' (Pink and Howes 2010: 332). However it could be argued that while Pink has elaborated on her commitment to an integrated perceptual approach to the study of the senses in the social sciences (Pink 2009; 2011a), much of her primary research work privileges visual methods (Pink 2007; 2011b; 2011c; Pink and Mackley 2012).

In sociology, the burgeoning literature on issues of embodiment since the 1980s can be seen to support arguments for the place of the sensory in social investigations. In his summary of the developments in embodiment in the social sciences, Shilling (2007), for example, suggested that the study of the body in society has been fuelled by a range of social changes such as the rise of consumer cultures, feminist interpretations of body politics, and Foucauldian analyses of the increased engagement of 'governmental disciplinary regimes' with the body of its subjects. Shilling stated that conceptualisations of the body are keenly contested and frequently fragmented, and argued that 'social norms and social actions inhere within the deepest fibres of our bodily being' (Shilling 2007: 13). He suggested a form of 'body pedagogics' which interrogates:

The central pedagogic *means* through which a culture seeks to transmit its main corporeal techniques, skills and dispositions, the embodied *experiences* associated with acquiring or failing to acquire these attributes, and the actual embodied *changes* resulting from this process.

Shilling 2007: 13



Many of the debates on the place of the senses in social investigation have led to bouts of 'academic jousting' (Pink and Howes 2010: 336). However it is evident that although viewpoints may vary, social scientific conceptualisations of perception and its role in social life have significance for a study of visual impairment, particularly when contentions of visual primacy in modern culture are explored. As Ede argued eloquently:

Foucault speaks of the *gaze* (1975) that created distance, guarded hierarchies, and turned subjects into objects of observation. Dubord (1995) describes the emergence of the world as a spectacle in which experiencing was substituted by watching. Seeing was the only way the world could and should be known. And so it had to be adjusted to this one and only, 'pure' and 'valid' sense.

Ede 2009: 61

Although the issue of impaired vision is not addressed directly by Ede, the cultural predominance of vision thus has significant implications for visually impaired people, in terms of hierarchical placement, social understanding and power. In the following section, visual impairment and its conceptualisations will be explored in greater depth, with particular reference to the social understandings of impaired vision.

### **2.3 Visual Impairment**

In designing this study, the particular subgroup, of 'visually impaired people' was identified as a focus of study. It has been argued that this categorisation is a socially constructed one. Writers such as Bolt (2003; 2005a; 2005b) have claimed that conceptualisations of visual impairment as deviant from normalcy should be replaced with understandings of vision as a spectrum of visual functioning, and that the binary of 'sighted' and 'visually impaired' people should be challenged. However it was necessary to identify the sample range of the study, and thus to classify a group with similar characteristics. The study thus draws on Parsons et al. (2009) in that it examines a group with particular needs and provisions in educational settings.

The very nature of the classification and definition of those labelled 'visually impaired' necessitated examination of terminology and of medical and

ophthalmological explanations of visual impairment. Parsons et al. suggested that such a framework is not 'an anachronistic adherence to the medical model...but rather a more nuanced, transactional position that recognises and accepts the everyday experiences of impairment as identified by individuals and their families' (Parsons et al 2009: 43).

Therefore this element of the literature review is framed within the social relational and post-structural interpretations of disability, which acknowledge the significance of both social *and* individual factors when discussing needs, opportunities and provision (Shakespeare 2006; Thomas 1999). However, a full exploration of the terminology in relation to visual impairment and the classifications of eye conditions and their functional implications, as would be understood by the participants in the study, was essential for a depth analysis of interactions and experiences.

Thus in this section, medical and professional explanations of the causes and classifications of eye conditions will be explored. Then the 'functional' impact of the range of eye conditions on day-to-day living will be discussed. This will illuminate the implications of these conceptualisations for individuals and professionals, and for the educational contexts under study. Following this, the literature on the psychological and social aspects of visual impairment will be explored, with particular emphasis on the implications for education.

The philosophical, physiological, and psychological implications and functions of the eye and vision have been discussed since Euclid (circa 300 BC) first proposed a theory of light (Wade 1998). In 'The Natural History of Vision' (1998) Wade outlined historical developments in the explanations of the process of seeing, and the distinction formed by ancient science between the psychological and the material phenomena of vision. In this section modern-day scientific/medical explanations of the functions of the eye will be presented, drawing on sources accessed by medical and therapeutic professions to formulate understandings of vision. Although these medical-biological explanations can be challenged in their categorisations, in terms of the separation of the perceptual, social and psychological aspects of

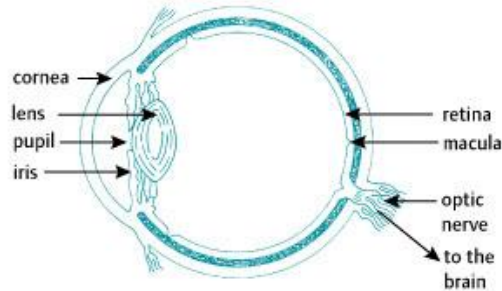
perception from the mechanical processes of seeing, it is necessary to outline the processes of vision and the impact of 'variations in seeing', as understood by people with a visual impairment and the professionals involved in the provision of services. As an example, in Figure 2.1, overleaf, the RNIB explanation of 'How the Eye Works' (RNIB 2011) illustrates how biological descriptions of the eye as a camera fail to take account of the integration of sensory perception, movement, higher order neural pathways and psychological interpretations. This 'no-nonsense guide' is issued to patients attending ophthalmology clinics and parents with visually impaired children.

Globally, the WHO estimates that there are 285 million people who are visually impaired (WHO 2012). RNIB research (RNIB 2014) suggests that there are just over 147,000 people registered blind in England, and 7,900 in Wales. In addition, 151,000 are registered partially sighted in England, and over 8,500 in Wales. The vast majority in Wales (73%) are over 65 years old, but nearly two thousand people are of working age and 541 are children aged 0-17 (RNIB 2014). In addition, the RNIB estimates that there are 748 young people aged 17 -25 who are blind or partially sighted in Wales in 2014 (RNIB 2014: Cell CY215). Blindness is frequently understood by the general public as a complete lack of sight, although the legal definition, of 'when a person is so blind that they cannot do any work for which eyesight is essential' (NHS Direct 2014) allows for some vision to be present. Some suggest that as little as 10% of those registered severely sight impaired have no visual perception (Kleege 1999:14; AFB 2012). The majority of those assessed as having a severe sight impairment will have some perception of light, movement or colour. Variations in levels of vision, in terms of what is perceived, and how this may be experienced and utilised by students, creates some of the greatest challenges to the education profession. Understanding of the range of eye conditions, and their impact on perception, is slight amongst the general population (Saaddine et al. 2003).

Figure 2.1 RNIB Explanation of the Eye

## How the Eye Works

We need light to see what is around us and to see colour. Light bounces off the objects we look at. These reflect different amounts of light which we see as different colours.



### Front of the eye

**Light rays** enter the front of our eye through the clear cornea and lens. It is very important that both the cornea and lens are clear as this allows the light to pass directly through the front of the eye to the retina.

The **cornea** and **lens** bends light so that it can focus on the retina at the back of our eye. This gives us a clear, precise image. The **cornea** focuses the light towards our retina. The lens fine tunes the focussing of this light

Our **tears** form a protective layer at the front of the eye and also help to direct the light coming into our eye.

The **iris**, the coloured circle at the front of our eye, changes the size of the **pupil** which allows different amounts of light into our eye.

The **pupil** is the dark hole in the middle of the coloured part of our eye. The pupil gets smaller in bright conditions to let less light in. The pupil gets bigger in dark conditions to let more light in.

### Middle eye

The middle of our eye is filled with a **jelly-like** substance called the **vitreous**.

The **vitreous** is clear and allows light to pass directly from the front to the back of our eye.

### Back of the eye

The **retina** at the back of the eye is a light-sensitive layer which consists of rod and cone cells. These cells collect the light signals directed onto them and send them as electrical signals to the **optic nerve** at the back of our eye.

**Rod cells** are concentrated around the edge of the retina. They help us to see things that aren't directly in front of us, giving us a rough idea of what is around us. They help us with our mobility and getting around by stopping us from bumping into a things. They also enable us to see things in dim light and to see movement.

**Cone cells** are concentrated in the centre of our retina where the light is focused by the cornea and lens. This area is called the **macula**. Cone cells give us our detailed vision which we use when reading, watching TV, sewing and looking at people's faces. They are also responsible for most of our colour vision.

The **optic nerve** is made up of thousands of nerve fibres. These fibres pass the electrical signals along to our brain where they are processed into the image we are looking at.

### How we see

Seeing can be likened to the process of taking pictures on a film with a **camera** which you then get developed. The retina is like a camera film which stores an image of what we are looking at. The image directed onto the retina is then sent along to the brain where it is processed, like developing a camera film. Therefore we actually "see" in our brain with the light information sent to it from our eyes. This whole process happens very quickly so that everything we see is in focus.

Source: RNIB 2011

In her auto-ethnographic account of visual impairment, Kleege (1999: 96) stated, 'The sighted can be so touchingly naive about vision. They apparently believe the brain stays out of it.' She describes in great detail the complexity of her perceptual schema and the implications for functioning on a daily basis. However even in this ethnographic account, it is evident that she draws on ophthalmological understandings of her eye condition to explain her perceptual processes:

Picture the world as I see it. My world has a hole in its centre. The central region of my retina, the macular, no longer functions. So when light entering my eyes hits the retinas, only the cells on the periphery, and a few good cells scattered around the centre, send messages to the brain... My blind spot always occupies the central region of my visual field. The wider the field, the larger the blind spot. When I look at my hand from arm's-length, it vanishes. When I bring it close to my face, only the fingertips are gone... I cannot perceive a straight line, because wherever I aim my eye, the line appears severed. The line that designates the edge of an object bows, wobbles, or oscillates from side to side. The more straight lines in the object, the more distortion.

(Kleege 1999: 98-101)

The following description by Coakes and Sellori (1995: 12) gives a biological explanation of visual perception and function, and will be drawn on as a framework for exploring how the range of eye conditions may interrupt the process of visual perception described:

The function of the eye is to produce a clear image of the external world and to transmit this to the visual cortex of the brain. In order to produce a clear image the eye must have constant dimensions, a clear optical pathway and the ability to focus light on the retina. The retinal image so formed must then be converted into electrical energy to be transmitted along the visual pathway and there must also be controlled and coordinated movements of the two eyes so that the brain can receive and fuse similar images and achieve binocular single vision.

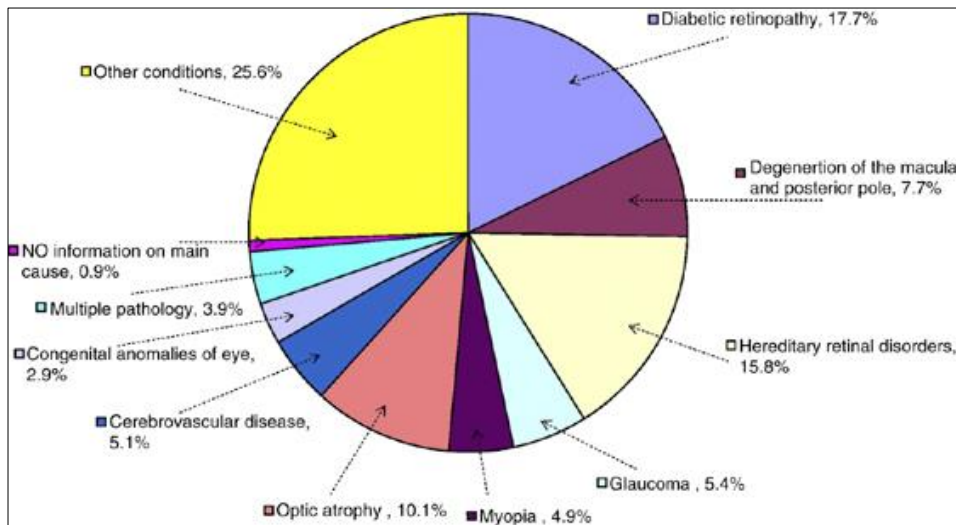
The interruption of the clear optical pathway can take place as a result of cataracts or trauma to the cornea (the clear covering at the front of the eye). Cataracts, formed through increasing opacity of the lens, result in a drop in visual acuity (the ability to discern fine detail), 'foggy' vision and light sensitivity (Jackson and Wolffsohn 2007:88). Thus people with cataracts or corneal problems may require magnification or large print, may prefer lower environmental lighting conditions, and may struggle to view people or objects

against a window or highly lit background. They may also be unable to discern some forms of colour distinction such as blue/yellow (Jackson and Wolffsohn 2007:159). Accurate focussing of light on to the retina may also be compromised with high myopia (short-sightedness) or hypermetropia, although in most cases these 'refractive errors', caused by the shape of the eyeball, cornea or lens, can be corrected with glasses or contact lenses.

Damage or congenital abnormality of the retina will impact on the image received and transmitted along the visual pathway. 'Central vision' is the detail perceived by the macula, a small central area of the retina with a high density of cells which perceives fine detail and colour vision. Conditions affecting the macula, such as Staargart's disease and optic atrophy, result in reduced near vision, distortion of vision including 'jumbling of words and letters' when reading, and an inability to recognise faces (Jackson and Wolffsohn 2007:80). Magnification of near tasks may improve access to print, alongside good task lighting (Ryan et al. 2010). A number of conditions may affect the peripheral retina, the area which discerns vision in low lighting conditions and gives us our wide 'field of view'. Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is a hereditary degenerative condition which often presents in adolescence, resulting in night blindness and 'tunnel vision' initially, but which progresses to involve the central retina. People with RP require small print, good environmental and task lighting, and may have difficulty perceiving objects or obstacles (such as stairs) which are outside the field of view (Jackson and Wolffsohn 2007:47). Glaucoma may have a similar effect and is as a result of increased intraocular pressure creating damage to the retina. Glaucoma can be stabilised through the use of medication, however uncontrolled glaucoma can result in permanent visual impairment (Tovee 1996).

Diabetes is one of the largest causes of visual impairment for the working age population in the UK (see Figure 2.2, overleaf: Bunce and Wormald 2007; Ryan et al. 2010). It can affect a number of the structures of the visual system and may cause cataracts and/or retinal damage as a result of diabetic retinopathy. Diabetes may result in 'patches' of lost vision anywhere in the visual field, at the centre or in the periphery.

**Figure 2.2: Causes of Blindness in England and Wales ages 16-64 years; certifications 1999-2000. (Bunce and Wormald 2007:907)**



Transmission along the visual pathway may also be interrupted by damage to the brain through stroke, haemorrhage or injury. Resultant visual effects may include visual field loss in specific areas, such as loss of right side, upper, or lower 'fields of view' in both eyes. People with these forms of impairment may need to locate themselves appropriately within a classroom environment, and the restricted field of view can cause difficulty when scanning text or diagrams, or when identifying obstacles when walking. Loss of vision or motility in one or both eyes, through trauma, or any of the above conditions, may result in a loss of depth perception, with consequent impact on location of objects and obstacles.

The above serves not as a definitive guide to eye conditions, but is merely intended to summarise biological explanations of some of the common causes of visual impairment in the working age population, in order to illustrate the differences which may be presented in terms of functional ability and need. As stated previously, these explanations frequently draw on medicalised and therapeutic discourses of impaired vision. In their small-scale study of 51 visually impaired students, Guerette et al. (2011) suggested that young people are unable to give medical details of their own visual impairment, preferring to describe the functional effects on their daily life. Although the authors use this finding to suggest that professionals should work to alter this situation, it may be that the functional issues are

paramount to visually impaired students. Further, these medicalised discourses fail to pay attention to the conceptual, social and linguistic aspects of visual impairment.

There is a body of literature however which does not fit neatly into the clinical/medical/educational typology suggested above, which may have a bearing on educational experiences. Issues in relation to language and concept development, social interaction, and psycho-emotional adjustment and identity, are significant to this study, and have been addressed by a number of researchers (Dunlea 1989; Halder and Datta 2012; Huurre and Aro 1998; Perez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden 1999; Warren 1994; Webster and Roe 1998).

Webster and Roe (1998) suggested that 'The inter-relationship of social, linguistic and cognitive development is a complex one'. Research suggests that from birth the linguistic and social development of visually impaired children and young people may be affected by their alternative sensory schema. In their in-depth literature review of research into social interaction, language and learning in visually impaired children, Webster and Roe (1998) found that visually impaired children develop alternative processes for conceptual understanding and social interaction, due to differences in linguistic development and opportunities for learning. Young children with a visual impairment may be unable to use vision to locate near and far objects simultaneously through sight, which results in differences to sighted peers in methods of identifying spatial relationships between objects, and in using shared visual attention with adults to reinforce language development (Webster and Roe 1998). Developmental psychologists have suggested that there may be delays in understandings of object permanence (that objects continue to exist outside immediate sensory evidence), causality (that actions have effects on objects) and spatial awareness (Warren 1994).

In addition, linguistic and cognitive categorisation may vary from sighted peers, who organise concepts according to shape, movement and size (Dunlea 1989). Studies have suggested that the rate of language acquisition in visually impaired children is similar to their sighted peers, but that the



content varies, with increased focus on self-reference, social questioning and individual objects, rather than on categories of objects or descriptors (Bigelow 1987). In addition, Clark (1974) and Dunlea (1989) suggested that children and young people with a severe visual impairment use a unique form of stereotypic speech, where phrases from caregivers are reproduced in new contexts in a non-interactive way, using repetition of key phrases, in similar situations, for example 'watch that it's hot' each time a meal is served. They suggest that these chunks of language act as elements of the available sensory information in a situation for visually impaired children, and are therefore integrated in the child's sensory schema. Such findings in developmental psychology can be viewed as questionable in their interpretation of the variations in language and social development in sighted and visually impaired children, as the emphasis on 'normal' phases of development signifies a view of visually impaired people as deficient (Perez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden 1999). Alternative approaches acknowledge that visually impaired children may use descriptions of objects, external events and the social perceptions of others less than their sighted peers. However researchers have argued that visually impaired young people have alternative strategies which pay special attention to language, and use verbal memory and play more fully than their sighted peers, adopting a holistic strategy of language processing and acquisition (Perez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden 1999: 133).

While these issues in conceptual development and linguistic variation are significant in themselves, they may also impact directly on social interaction and integration. Issues in concept development and linguistics create variations in the manner of interactions at home and in school, with both staff and peers. In the following discussion, issues of social interaction with parents, teachers and friends will be illuminated.

Some psychological studies have indicated that visually impaired children initiate dialogue with their parents to a lesser extent than sighted children (Kekelis and Anderson 1984), and are unable to sustain prolonged conversation on one topic. However these findings have been challenged by more recent extensive investigations (Perez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden

1999) which found that initiation and maintenance of conversation are not significantly different to that of the children's sighted peers. Perez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden further suggested that differences in parental interaction involve extended directive and descriptive language, which, although viewed by some researchers as indicative of over- control (Kekelis and Anderson 1984) are particularly important for the language acquisition and learning of the visually impaired child. Webster and Roe (1998) drew on these approaches to argue that in an educational setting, the low number of adult – child interactions, in comparison to the home environment, may be detrimental to learning for the visually impaired student, due to the reduced number and quality of descriptive interactions. Learning through language for concept development is crucial, and precise and elaborate appropriate explanations, devoid of visual reference, may be necessary in explaining concepts. This may be harder to achieve in group learning situations. As Webster and Roe pointed out:

Language acts as a substitute for missing visual input. What this means for teachers and classroom assistants is the provision of detailed descriptions and explanations about what is happening and what other people are doing.

Webster and Roe (1998:163)

The development of concepts and the elaboration of interactions have been found to be crucial to the success of visually impaired young people in acquiring relationships and friendships. The social interactions of visually impaired children and young adults have been investigated by a number of researchers, keen to explore the impact of visual impairment on peer relationships and interactions. Tobin (2008), for example, drew on research in relation to development, psychology and social interaction to suggest that it is the inadequacy or inaccessibility of information in visual forms that causes limitations in learning opportunities, acquisition of language and concepts and social interaction. He suggested that lack of visual information impedes understanding of how others behave, and what may be intended in play or adolescent interactions. He recommended enhanced but targeted support in social environments, in particular through accessing peer support, and small group work. Research has found that children with a visual impairment are at significant disadvantage in developing social skills, as a

result of difficulties interpreting social behaviours and social cognition (Pring, Dowart and Brockbank 1998). Findings also suggested that there may be a lack of initiation of social interactions, and lower social assertion by visually impaired children when compared to sighted children, and that in adolescence this results in more passive or solitary activity, particularly in out-of-school activities (Wolffe and Sacks 1997). A number of studies have also discovered that over-protection by family members (McBroom 1997) and proximity of learning support assistants (Ferrell 2007) actually impedes independent social interactions with peers. Huurre and Aro (1998) suggested that adolescents with a visual impairment have fewer friends and dating experiences than their sighted peers. Similarly Pfeiffer and Pinguart (2011) suggested that visually impaired young people are less likely to be active in their pursuit of peer and romantic relationships. This supported earlier studies, which found that visually impaired adolescents have lower expectations of romantic success (Fichten et al.1991). However the experiences of visually impaired young people vary from those with other disabilities. In their 2011 study compared visually impaired children with those from other disability groups, and concluded that they have significantly higher social outcome measures than those with 'learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disturbances, other health impairments, and autism, as well as traumatic brain injuries', although still measuring as having only 'moderate' levels of social skills on the 'Social Skills Rating System' (Zebehazy and Smith 2011: 90).

The studies discussed above primarily employed psychological measurement scales to assess social inclusion and function. However a small number of research projects employed qualitative methods to gather the opinions of visually impaired young people. Small-scale studies have found that visually impaired children and students may experience social challenges in their ability to locate friends in social areas of the school, to take part in activities which are visual (for example computer games) or to compete in activities with sighted peers (Roe 2008). In their relatively large scale-study using focus groups with 81 sighted and visually impaired young

people, Khadka et al. (2012) found that young people identify similar interests and activities to their sighted peers, but are more restricted in some activities. The young people reported that where they experienced difficulties in feeling included, this was frequently as a result of restrictions imposed by the presence of support workers and the over-protection of parents.

It is evident in this review of the literature on the social interactions of visually impaired young people that within research studies there appears to be continued emphasis on individual differences, and 'comparisons with sighted peers'. This standpoint can be challenged if a social-relational model of disability (Thomas 1999) is applied. The 'deficit' model (Shakespeare and Watson 2002) of research can be seen to fail to address the socially imposed nature of the problems experienced, and the psycho-emotional impact of disability. However some studies have addressed this continued emphasis on deficit found to be prevalent in much of the visual impairment literature. In the following section, studies which challenge the deficit model, and explore the psycho-emotional dimensions of visual impairment will be discussed.

In psychology, Perez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden (1999) challenged this model in the studies they reviewed, and argued that the Piagetian assumptions of deficit in visually impaired people, (explained as a result of a disruption between language acquisition and cognitive development) is a flawed interpretation. Instead they suggested that language acquisition and social interaction 'is not delayed, or aberrant, but follows a different route, by exploiting other resources to a greater extent than sighted children' (Perez-Pereira and Conti-Ramsden 1999: 67). In the social sciences, there has also been a growth in literature which challenges the deficit model, and examines the interplay between social interaction and psycho-emotional well-being, drawing on feminist, post-structural and social relational models of disability.

In an early study of the socialisation of visually impaired people, Scott (1969) suggested that as a result of the intervention of agencies for the blind: 'the impaired person is thus under strong pressure to think of himself as blind and to redefine his visual impairment from a medical problem of attenuated vision to a kind of welfare problem...[with] a strong emphasis on psychological

adjustment to blindness and a personal acceptance of this condition' (74). Scott's study predates the emergence of disability politics and some of his approaches can be viewed as dated and prescriptive, however studies on the psycho-emotional dimensions of disability have continued to address the socialisation and 'internalised oppression' of visually impaired people. Watermeyer and Swartz (2008) drew on the psycho-emotional literature in disability studies (Morris 1992; Reeve 2002; Thomas 1999, 2001) to argue that disability constitutes an 'evocative anxiety-provoking phenomenon' resulting in disability denial (French 1993) to protect the feelings of others, and a constant awareness of others' judgements of 'inability, loss, shame, a poor sense of personal adequacy' (605).

This seems particularly evident in some of the literature on the psycho-emotional dimensions of visual impairment, in which a number of studies have found differences in the self-esteem and emotional well-being of visually impaired adolescents when compared with their sighted peers. Beaty (1992), for example, found that feelings of inadequacy and inferiority resulted in low self-concept scores. Similarly, in India, Datta and Holder (2012) found a significant difference between sighted and severely visually impaired adolescents, in scales of self-concept including behaviour, intellectual and school status, physical attributes, anxiety and popularity. They concluded that in India individuals with disabilities are still considered a burden to society (Datta and Halder 2012: 5) and that self-concept and self-esteem suffer as a result of the internalisation of social judgements, social isolation and the perceptions of peers. However some evidence contradicts these findings (Fok & Fung, 2004; Garaigordobil & Bernarás, 2009), and it may be that in such small scale studies the detail of individual experiences and notions of self-concept and well-being create the discrepancy. For example, in a large-scale psychological study in Germany, low body image has been found to be more prevalent among young women with visual impairment at secondary school level (Pinquart and Pfeiffer 2012). Low self-esteem was significantly higher than for female sighted peers, but the association between low body image and visual impairment was not significant for young men, and thus gender appeared to be a significant factor in levels of self-

esteem. Conversely Bowen (2010) found that seventy per cent of children with a visual impairment achieve scores of either 'normal' or 'high' levels of self-esteem, and the girls score higher than boys, especially at secondary level, therefore indicating no significant gender factor. However Bowen did find that degree of visual impairment was a factor; those with severe visual impairment scoring significantly lower in self-esteem measures than those with 'mild or moderate' visual impairments (Bowen 2010:53). Schillmeier (2008) argued that disability can only be understood in the specificities of 'local practices' within the global, dominant world view (of visual culture) and that the heterogeneity of experiences must be acknowledged. He suggested that individual experiences in education, for example, shape practices and create a psycho-emotional response which can only be understood in its local context. For example he found that for blind individuals in one particular school, independence was interpreted as lack of reliance on 'others' including equipment, and as a result pupils from this school frequently exhibited a lifelong aversion to the use of mobility aids such as white canes or guide dogs.

It appears that there are some mixed and contradictory findings in the literature on the interaction between visual impairment and the self and social exchange, which posed many questions for the current research study. In terms of language and concept development, psychological studies suggested a delay in learning and a deficit in social development. However these findings have been challenged by those who propose that visually impaired people use alternative models of language and have sensory specific methods of communication. In terms of social interaction some researchers present findings of social inhibitions and exclusion based on comparisons with sighted peers. However when researchers listened to the visually impaired young people themselves, it appears that they believe that mediation of the home and school environment by 'watchful adults' was one of the primary causes of isolation and exclusion. Studies drawing on the psycho-emotional disability literature suggested that isolation and feelings of inadequacy are as a result of the internalisation of social judgements, and that it is in the specific nature of the individual actor in their unique social

context that social and emotional responses are created. In the later empirical chapters of this thesis, the specificities of the interplay between language, social inclusion and the psycho-emotional responses of the participants in the study will be analysed. The discussion will address the significance and relevance of this body of literature to the experiences of visually impaired participants in the specific further education contexts.

## **Conclusion**

Having explored the range of definitions and understandings of disability, it is evident that while theoretical academic perspectives have shifted over time, there is still a long way to go. Prompted, in part, and in tandem with, the rise of the disability activist movement, these theories of disability compete with entrenched medicalised perspectives that pervade in the media, popular culture and other social constructions of normality and difference. In addition, socially constructed conceptualisations of the senses and vision are particularly relevant to this study. It will be seen in later chapters that the opinions and actions of the participants are informed by cultural conventions and social understandings of perception. These understandings have particular relevance for pedagogy and education. The changing perspectives and policies on disability discussed in Section 2.1 are mirrored in changes in the educational context. Medicalised definitions of the senses and visual impairment have a significant impact on pedagogy, policy and practice for visually impaired students. The following chapter will hone in on literature in relation to education, inclusion and pedagogy for disabled and visually impaired students, in order to explore the impact of theoretical and political approaches to disability and visual impairment in the educational setting.

## Chapter Three: Education and Inclusion

Shifts in attitudes and ideological values towards the education of disabled people, are depicted frequently as demonstrating a linear progression from exclusion to inclusion and equality (Ainscow 1991; Oliver and Barnes 2010). However detailed analysis of the literature on developments in legislation, policy and practice exposes a far more complex picture, typified by competing theoretical and political agendas and issues in implementation. Egalitarian respect for diversity and an acknowledgement of rights has been set against the imperative of 'high standards' in education with aspirations of an economically productive workforce (Gorard 2010).

In this chapter, policies and perspectives on inclusion and disability in education will be explored, in order to contextualise the findings on teaching, learning and support for visually impaired students discussed later in the thesis. These discussions inform research question one: How do the policies of inclusive education and special educational needs impact on the policies and practices of specific institutions in the provision of teaching, learning and support for visually impaired students? They also place the educational provisions and processes observed during fieldwork within the broader UK and Welsh context. In the first section, the 'messy' trajectory (Ball 1990; Ball 2008) of the history of policies and theories of education and disability will be explored, in order to place the experiences of visually impaired students within the broader educational landscape. Developments in further education (FE) are also pertinent to the contextualisation of national and local policies and practices. Thus section two will discuss the education of visually impaired students, including a brief history of provision, contemporary policies, pedagogical practices, and student needs and outcomes. Then, in the final section, issues in relation to further education in the UK will be discussed, honing in on policies for disabled students in FE. To provide specific context, the FE policy framework in Wales generally, and then specifically for disabled students, will then be addressed.



### **3.1 Education and Disabled People**

The historical experiences of disabled people in education have shaped many of the current practices, and have informed the drive for social change by disability activists and scholars. In the nineteenth century, during the pre-industrialised era, disabled people were seen as outcasts. This 'othering process' helped the non-disabled deal with fear and the perceived risks to social well-being (Reiser 2012a: 161). During the Victorian period, disabled people were increasingly viewed as posing a threat to social and educational systems, and were depicted as a troublesome and disruptive group likely to place a burden on non-disabled tax payers, and to undermine the smooth running of the mainstream educational system (Tomlinson 1982). These attitudes were informed by the more general social developments such as industrialisation, and as Oliver (1990) points out, influenced by society's inherent need for a productive labour force, resulting in increasing segregation of disabled people from mainstream society (Oliver 1990).

The 1870 Forster Education Act introduced elementary education for all. No specific provision for disabled children was made within the Act. They were initially provided for within mainstream schools, in specialist units, or more frequently did not attend school at all (Reiser 2012b). In the following twenty years a number of attempts were made to provide specialist education for sensory impaired children (following the 1893 Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act) and for 'mentally defective children', and by the end of the nineteenth century a rapid expansion of specialist educational provision was evident.

Interest in eugenics in the 1920s and 1930s led to increasing social vilification (Hughes 2002). Eugenics, seemingly based on a 'scientific' understanding of genetics, suggested that the gene pool would be weakened by disabled people, and that disability was linked with crime, unemployment and prostitution (Thomas et al., 1998). The growth in intellectual and political support for eugenics led to the incarceration of disabled people in hospitals and asylums, and the segregation of disabled children into large numbers of specialist schools (Chitty 2007). Further scientific advances in

understandings of IQ in the early years of the twentieth century lead to a separation of the 'educable' from the 'ineducable', and in 1921 the government designated five specific categories for the labelling of disabled pupils; blind, deaf, mentally defective, physically defective and epileptic (Reiser 2012a).

Tomlinson (1982: 29) argued that the specialisation of disability education in the late nineteenth century benefitted medical, psychological and educational practitioners, by creating new forms of valued professionalism. According to Thomas et al. (1998) this emphasis on categorisation and the prominence of professional decision-making in the education process remained a recurrent theme in accounts of disability education. Despite claims for an increasingly equal, inclusive and participatory education system, many of the arguments put forward in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, based on the discrediting and 'othering' of the disabled student and the perceived threat to the achievements of non-disabled students, remain cogent today.

The 1944 Education Act established secondary education for all, and segregated children by ability following the 11-plus test, which was based in part on IQ tests (Trowler 2003). In addition to selection by ability, and its concurrent segregation by disability, eleven categories of children based on impairment were introduced (Tomlinson 1982). The power of decision-making remained with medical and educational professionals. Reiser (2012b) argued that despite political intention for increased presence in mainstream education, the 1944 Act increased segregation and exclusion of pupils with disabilities, with pressures for performance and prejudice informing the selection process. A large number of children classified as 'educationally subnormal (severe)' were designated ineducable, and did not gain the right to education until the 1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act. The 1970 Act, while including those designated 'ineducable' in the education system for the first time, prompted the creation of vast numbers of special schools to cater for this new category of pupils (Tomlinson 1982).

In their analysis of ideologies and trends in special education across the decades, Clough and Corbett (2000) suggested that during the 1950s and

1960s power gradually transferred from medical to psychological professionals, as clinic-based assessment was replaced by in-school testing, based on normative assessment and deficit reduction. Thus educational provision for children with disabilities became increasingly linked to *intervention* strategies; with removal from classrooms for remedial work aimed at improving cognitive or perceptual difficulties. Clough and Corbett discussed how prevailing discourses were of 'conformity through normality' (2000:12), and terminology moved from descriptions of defect, to descriptions of 'handicap'.

During the 1960s growing disquiet with the general educational system, with its emphasis on segregation and 'different kinds of education for different kinds of children' (Frederickson and Cline 2002: 68) resulted in a movement towards universal schooling and a comprehensive education system (Trowler 2003). Re-conceptualisations of handicap were proposed. The theoretical principles of *normalisation* informed this integration movement as an alternative to the deficit segregative model. Integration became 'the central contemporary issue in special education' (DES 1978), and led to the significant reforms suggested in the Warnock Report and realised in the 1981 Education Act.

The Warnock Report (DES 1978) and the 1981 Education Act are now viewed as significant landmarks in the history of the education of disabled people in the UK. Interpretations of the ideologies proposed in the Act are embedded in most of the subsequent policies and practices at all stages of compulsory and post-compulsory education (Weddell 2008). The theoretical debates, policy initiatives, dilemmas and discourses considered in this and subsequent empirical chapters are all formulated with conformity to or critique of the frameworks established by the Warnock Report and the subsequent Act.

Weddell (2008) asserted that the language used in the report indicates the significant leaps made by the Warnock Committee in moving from the medically-defined, to the functionally-based concept of special educational needs. Rather than allocate children to pre-defined categories of handicap

with formulaic responses and interventions, individual needs were to be identified to ensure 'appropriate help can be provided'. Christensen (1996: 74) agreed, arguing that this stance moved the locus of the problem from the individual with a deficit to the inflexible schooling system. However she stated that the mechanisms of implementation simply shifted the terminology from 'student with a handicap' to 'student with special needs'.

The Warnock Committee report and subsequent Act were seen by contemporary commentators as heralding a new era of integration into the mainstream. For example a newspaper report in the Guardian described how the new system would ensure parity in the classroom (Bosley 1985). The Act stated that it would be the duty of the local education authority to arrange special educational provision 'in an ordinary school'. However it also stated that account must be taken of parental views, and gave a number of other significant caveats for integration, including 'the effective use of resources' (HMSO 1981: 2).

Within this context, it has been argued that the mechanisms of special educational needs remained technical and resource-based, and focussed on the deployment of specialised personnel and equipment to ordinary schools (Vlachou 1997: 27). The Act established 'Statements of Special Educational Needs'; legal contracts between parents and the local authority. They were designed to secure resources and ensure appropriate individual allocation of provision. However some believed that the resultant system of multi-agency assessment and service delivery, involving a wide range of professionals with competing agendas, resulted in a bureaucratic, resource-focused system, with the 'fixing' of individual deficit as the key objective (Armstrong and Barton 1999: 223). Medical diagnoses remained the basis of assessment, subsumed beneath the SEN label (Kenworthy and Whittaker 2000; Hall 1997). Bines (2000: 22) argued that in giving Local Education Authorities (LEAs) responsibility for SEN, the Act encouraged schools to seek support and resources from the LEA, thus continuing perceptions of SEN as separate from the schooling of the 'ordinary child'.

Even as the implications of the Act were being considered by Local Education Authorities, schools and teachers, and mechanisms for its implementation were being put into place, debates on the very nature and purpose of education were underway. According to Tomlinson (2001), and Evans and Lunt (2004) these debates gave rise to further reforms, such as the 1988 Education Reform Act. Introduced by the Conservative administration, the 1988 Act was acknowledged to be a significant break from the ideologies of the 1944 Education Act (Chitty 2004). It heralded a new political ethos of central control of educational policies. Commentators such as Ball (2008) believed that the government had the objective of shaping individuals to be able to make a valid contribution to the economic well-being of the nation. Bowe et al. (1992) argued that the Act also represented a significant shift in terms of knowledge and discourse control, as it also introduced a compulsory National Curriculum, with considerable power afforded to the government in relation to curriculum subject content.

The 1988 Act was to have significant implications for special educational needs provision and the progress of the educational system towards inclusive practices. Vlachou (1997:5) argued that the market-driven competitive system resulted in significant changes to the 'value-base of educational practice'. Individualistic, competitive ideologies based on principles of commercialism and governmental control ensured that issues of equality became secondary to the impetus for hierarchical status. In England, the promotion of comparisons between schools via league tables saw increasing numbers of SEN pupils being excluded or marginalised, in order to ensure the schools' position in the hierarchy (Parsons 2005; Slee and Weiner 1998; Slee 2010). The changing responsibilities of the Local Education Authority forced SEN professionals and parents to become involved in complex negotiations for resources. Thus while the 1981 Act may have purported to support mainstreaming and equality of opportunity (albeit with significant caveats), the 1988 Act created radical pressures on schools to support the achievement of more able pupils, to the detriment of those with more significant needs (Rouse and Florian 1997: see also Evans and Lunt 2005; Lunt and Norwich 1999).

Whilst these educational changes were taking place, the 1980s and early 1990s also saw theoretical and political understandings of disability beginning to shift. The development of the Disability Movement resulted in theories of equality being elaborated by academic commentators, and disability activism began to raise awareness of the social injustices experienced by disabled people (Oliver 1990; Swain et al. 1993; Barnes 1991; Barton 1989: see Chapter Two for a detailed analysis of these developments). These changes had a significant impact on perceptions of disability, and led in 1995 to the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). However the impetus for inclusive education did not begin in the UK in earnest until the Green Paper, *Excellence for All Children: meeting special educational needs* (DfEE 1997) was released by the new Labour Government in 1997.

In 2001 the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act introduced the right for disabled students not to be discriminated against in all forms of education, including further and higher education institutions and sixth form colleges. Codes of Practice for LEAs followed for England (DES 2001) and Wales (WAG 2004). The Act and Codes purported to fully support the principles of inclusive education. Some believed that New Labour's commitment to inclusive policies demonstrated significant progress on the 'long road' of linear progress towards equality (Ainscow 2000: 24). Yet there is considerable debate around the commitment of the Labour administration to full inclusion (Armstrong 2005; Runswick-Cole 2011), with problems in implementation, and the ongoing conflict between the standards agenda and the principles of inclusive educational practice proving difficult to resolve.

For Hodkinson (2010), the system still operated a 'twin-track' of special educational needs and mainstream provision, with the inclusion agenda being subject to severe limitations, the special education system still intact, judged as not 'fit for purpose' (Hodkinson 2010: 62). Oliver and Barnes (2010) maintain that whilst the government's policies appeared to support inclusion, the realities of physical access in schools and colleges continued

to isolate pupils, segregation within the mainstream into special units remained, and the changes had not resulted in a significant reduction in the number of special schools. Weddell (2008) argued that it was the educational system itself which made inclusive education difficult to implement, as a greater degree of flexibility was required if all pupils were to be educated effectively (Weddell 2008: 128).

Baroness Warnock, author of the original SEN report, issued what many saw as a retraction of the key messages in the 1978 report in which she stated that 'the idea of inclusion should be rethought insofar at least as it applies to education at school' (Warnock 2005: 2). She recommended further attention to the link between social disadvantage and special educational needs labels, and a re-think of the categorisation of pupils as 'SEN'. The continued machinery of special educational needs, with specialist professionals, individual assessments and separate provisions, was argued by some to be operating on the 'humanitarian' premise that mere placement within mainstream would result in full inclusion, and that this premise was flawed in practice (Hodkinson 2007: 57). Some research studies evidenced the compulsory placement of students with special educational needs in specialist provision against parental wishes. Others illustrated disputes between parents and local education authority education departments about provision. These thus support the argument that the system continued to uphold exclusionary practices (Kenworthy and Whittaker 2000; Duncan 2003).

In relation to the standards and school improvement agenda, proponents such as Ainscow (1991) argued that the school improvement agenda would prove positive for SEN students, as raising standards would be of benefit for all. However Dockrell et al. (2002) assert that 'there has been little evidence that improving schools for the majority of pupils also improves schools for the small minority with SEN' (Dockrell et al. 2002: 37). Using data from a detailed research study exploring the experiences of disabled children and their families since the election of the New Labour government in 1997, Katherine Runswick-Cole argued convincingly that:

The standards agenda and the inclusion agenda make uneasy bedfellows... Indeed, students who demand high levels of teacher support and other resources, along with students who fail to meet behavioural and cultural norms in the classroom, become unattractive clientele for schools struggling to improve standards.

Runswick-Cole 2011: 116

For Runswick-Cole, New Labour had thus continued the neo-liberal approaches to education established in the 1988 Education Act by the Conservative administration. Whilst framed by managerialist beliefs in the enhancement of performance through measurement against targets, New Labour education policies had the additional aim of improving social justice, and ensuring equality of opportunity. However many argued that technicist, managerial processes prevented inclusion, and promoted minimal compliance and mistrust (Benjamin 2002; Slee and Weiner 1998). There was also considerable confusion amongst practitioners about the implementation of inclusive policies in an increasingly specialist educational system, which included, for example, specialist academies (Benjamin 2002).

Arguments about the *scale* of commitment of the New Labour administration to promoting the inclusion of disabled students soon proved to be irrelevant. The 2010 election saw a Conservative Party manifesto which promised to 'end the bias towards inclusion' (Conservative Party 2010: 53). This was followed very early on in the Coalition administration by a Green Paper, *Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability* (DfE 2011b: 5), which echoed the sentiment. The resultant Children and Families Act was enshrined in law in March 2014. The Act introduced the Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, a co-ordinated multi-disciplinary assessment and implementation plan for children and young people with 'complex needs' (DfE 2014a Code of practice) up to the age of twenty five. In addition it introduced the option of personal budgets, allowing for choice in the selection of services. The subsequent Code of Practice for children and young people with SEN (DfE 2014a) gives schools and further education colleges the responsibility to use their 'best endeavours' to provide appropriate support, unless 'following consultation with the institution, the local authority determines that it is unsuitable for the young person's age,



ability, aptitude or SEN, or that to place the young person there would be incompatible with the efficient use of resources or the efficient education of others' (DfE 2014a: 101). This is a significant opt-out, and one which reflects the intention to 'end the bias towards inclusion'

Policy formulations of disability, special educational needs and inclusion can thus be seen to have been subject to shifting conceptualisations over time. So too have academic perspectives on the issues. Special educational needs and disability have remained key debating points in the literature since the formulation of the Warnock Report (DES 1978) in the 1970s. Early commentators, such as Ivan Illich, took issue with the essentialist concept of special needs, and argued that the concept of 'needs' locates difficulties in *individual* rather than *structural* deficiencies. He critiqued SEN mechanisms which were, in principle, designed to define, assess and meet these needs, claiming that they were 'the fodder on which professionals were fattened into dominance' (Illich 1977 in Swain et al 2003: 123). He further argued that the qualifying word 'special' illuminates oppressive understandings of disabled people's needs as being separate from the more universal needs of all human beings. Christensen argued in a more positive vein that the Warnock Report's (DES 1978) definition of SEN was attempting to locate the problem within the structure of schooling, in order to recognise the oppressive social and political aspects of education, but asserted that the concept was 'transformed by the system' to identify children who were 'inadequate' (1996: 74). For example the SEN Codes of Practice (DfEE 1994 and DES 2001) identified distinct medically-based categories of students with special educational needs, thus re-establishing the medicalised assessment which had been so carefully rejected in the Warnock Report (Runswick-Cole and Hodge 2009). In addition, Slee (2001) suggested that the physical re-location of disabled pupils was perceived as fundamental to integration and that the necessity of 'capacity-building' in the mainstream thus defined the issues as resource-based. Social constructionists such as Oliver and Barnes (2010) argued that the structural mechanisms of education, such as government policies, constructions of the curriculum, and the assessment and support machinery of Special Educational Needs services discussed above are

responsible for the low attainment rates of disabled people, their social exclusion from education, and their subsequent high levels of unemployment and social isolation.

With the rise of more complex understandings of models of disability during the 1990s, discussed in the previous chapter, richer theories of education for disabled students also developed. Post-structuralist critiques of the 'single dimensional' Social Model of disability re-ignited educational debates about the necessity of acknowledging the impairment dimensions of disability. These understandings served to 'bring the individual back in' to the debates on special educational needs, and to inform the development of concepts of *inclusive* education. Theorists such as Lui (1995) also argued for models of inclusive practice which acknowledged 'cultural pluralism'. These theorisations of disability informed academic debates on the intersection between education and human rights. They proposed a fully *inclusive* education system, based on Rawlsian theories of social justice and cultural and social recognition (Rizvi and Christensen 1996: 3). For example in 1999 Mel Ainscow, a key academic in the development of concepts of inclusive education, suggested that within a just society, schools and other educational institutions have a duty to provide 'education for all'. Remodelling of the system was seen to have the potential to bring benefits to the educational system, and to society as a whole. Advocates such as Booth et al. (2006) believed that any segregation creates injustice and that society would benefit from an education system which recognises the diversity of *all* its pupils. Similarly, Slee and Allan (2005: 15), examining the exclusion of disadvantaged groups in education, argued that inclusion 'represents a fundamental paradigm shift...a social movement against educational exclusion'.

Clearly one of the challenges has been the changing definitions and applications of inclusion. As Ball (1990) recognised, interpretation of theoretical constructs and policy initiatives at a practice level can result in processes far removed from those imagined during policy formulation. Some believe that practices deemed inclusive are simply renamed SEN processes;

‘a “recalibration” of the inclusive ideal’ (Dyson 2001: 27). In Chapter Six, similar findings in this study will be discussed. In addition, government policies and interpretations of the term have widened its use to address issues of global *social* inclusion. New Labour discourses varied from referring to inclusion as the education of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, to using the term to incorporate far broader concepts of socially excluded groups (Dyson 2001). ‘Third Way’ inclusion policies thus focussed on the re-engagement of marginalised groups in education and employment, rather than on the provision of appropriate education for students with special needs. However Runswick-Cole (2011) challenged this discourse of social inclusion, arguing that the New Labour political rhetoric on inclusion for students with disabilities remained, in practice, within the traditional framework of special education. She argued further that the more recent ‘new’ Coalition policy to ‘end the bias towards inclusion’ (Conservative Party 2010) belies the failure of the previous government to successfully implement truly coherent inclusive practices.

The theoretical debates around inclusive education have become increasingly polarised, with tensions between those who argue that special educational needs institutions, sub-systems and professionals, are a necessary component of the education system if it is to truly recognise the distinctive characteristics and needs of the individual, and those others who advocate a fully inclusive system believing that any form of specialism or assessment and diagnosis should be abolished (Norwich 2002). Pro-inclusionists such as Weddell (2005) suggest that rigidities at all levels of the education system are responsible for the lack of progress in inclusive practice, being ‘predicated on misconceived assumptions about the homogeneity of pupils’ learning needs’ (Weddell 2005: 3). He argues that a wide range of factors have contributed to the exclusion of students with special educational needs from the mainstream system; the lack of joined up working between children’s services; transitions through school phases; statementing processes; and school structures such as timetabling, classroom design, class sizes, curriculum design and assessment procedures. Weddell proposes that inclusion can only be achieved if it is the

fundamental determinant of educational policy and wide-spread system change.

Rather than presenting his support for any of these positions, Norwich, writing across the decades (1994; 2002; 2007), has argued consistently that both inclusion advocates and special needs supporters should acknowledge the fundamental contradiction inherent in the education system. The very nature of education requires that, in order to provide a learning environment for a wide range of individuals, the system must *both* treat all learners the same, *and* treat all learners differently; what Dyson terms the 'twin realities of difference and commonality' (Dyson 2001: 26). Students with a difficulty in learning present a 'dilemma of difference', in that there is a need for schools to address the practical tasks of differentiation for learning (such as slower progression for students with a cognitive impairment, or large print and tactile information for visually impaired students), whilst simultaneously attempting to provide an equitable educational experience. Norwich maintains that education professionals are called upon to balance a range of contradictory values which may have a significant impact upon practice:

Recognising difference can lead to different provision which might be stigmatised and devalued; but not recognising difference can lead to not providing adequately for individuality.

Norwich 2002: 496

Writers such as Florian (2008) acknowledged that in reality schools are 'utilitarian in structure' and organised around principles of normative distribution and the concept of 'the greatest good for the greatest number'. She suggested that students with additional needs present a 'dilemma of difference' and there is a need to 'articulate a process of inclusion as practice' for teachers (Florian 2008: 203). Florian proposes pragmatic solutions on a pedagogical level, by attention to the ways teachers support individual differences during whole class teaching, whether through their own range of practices, *or* by drawing on the support of specialist SEN advisors, teachers or equipment.

Research findings in relation to education and disability have been discussed in great depth by a number of distinguished scholars, such as Hegarty (1987), Ainscow (1991), Dyson (2001), Slee (2001), Norwich (2002), Weddell (2005), Oliver and Barnes (2010) and Runswick-Cole (2011), and are incorporated into their arguments, as outlined above. While findings in research in relation to the education of visually impaired pupils and students will be discussed in more depth below, a number of literature reviews serve to outline the key issues arising from the generic field of education and disability. In an extensive review of the literature in 1990, McLeskey and Waldron (2011) stated that there was no significant research evidence to suggest that any particular model of educational provision for disabled students was more or less successful. They argued that this should not undermine support for the *values* of inclusion themselves, but that the lack of educational advantage to either system must be openly acknowledged. A number of reviewers attempted to identify the characteristics of successful inclusion in schools by drawing on traditions of school effectiveness research (SER) in order to identify templates for successful inclusive practice (see Scruggs and Mastropieri 1994; Ainscow 1995; McLaughlin 1995; Lipsky and Gartner 1996). However, schools effectiveness research was challenged by scholars such as Wrigley (2004), who suggested that SER 'took off as a consequence of the marketisation of education in the 1980s' (Wrigley 2004: 237). Further, Hegarty (1987) argued that many SER research projects failed to put *learning* at the centre of evaluation, favouring evidence of *social* inclusion as the key evaluation criteria. Hegarty argued that the imperative is for pupils to receive *an education*, even if the type of education received conflicts with the 'ideal' right to full social inclusion (Hegarty 1987). Dockrell, Peacey and Lunt (2002) completed a wide-ranging literature review which aimed to chart the progress of education and disability theories and policies. These authors found a dearth of literature in relation to teenagers with special educational needs, particularly for those in further education. They also identified a lack of available data for those pupils without statements of special education needs, and a wide variety in the definitions of needs and inclusion. In general their findings demonstrated that children with SEN were still routinely excluded from the mainstream, both academically and socially,

and that inequalities in outcomes in terms of academic qualifications and employment prospects remained. A more recent detailed review of the literature from eight key journals in the field of inclusive education conducted by Lindsay (2007) contends that there is no overall evidence that *either* inclusive *or* specialist education is more effective for disabled people. He draws the distinction between the proposition by inclusion advocates that disabled children have the *right* to be educated in the mainstream, and the presumption that mainstream education is more *effective*. Furthermore Lindsay argues that the value-driven moral imperative must be considered separately from a belief in improved outcomes for people with special educational needs. There have been repeated calls for the greater participation of students with SEN in research (Stenhouse 1983; Mertens and McLaughlin 2004; Porter and Lacey 2005), and although there have been some positive developments in alternative methodologies, such studies remain limited.

### **3.2 Education and Visually Impaired People**

In Chapter Two, literature on the specific affordances of visual impairment was examined in order to contextualise the 'individual experience' dimension of the disability. Drawing on Fuller et al. (2009) the Chapter thus explored the biological, functional, linguistic, psychological and social dimensions in relation to an individual's visual impairment. However as Thomas (1999) suggested, disability is the intersection between these aspects of impairment, other individual characteristics, and the social context. Thus in this section the social context will be explored with reference to the education of visually impaired people. A brief history of the education of visually impaired people will be followed by an outline of contemporary educational policies and service provision. Following this, literature on pedagogy and teacher practices will be reviewed, before the final section explores the needs and outcomes of visually impaired people engaged in education.

The history of education for visually impaired people is recognised by scholars to have 'started' in the mid-18th century (Hatlen 2000; Phillips 2004). Prior to this date visually impaired people were seen to be 'part of the indigent poor at large' (Phillips 2004:1). In 1749 Diderot, a philosopher of the Enlightenment wrote a tract which proposed that people who were blind could be intellectually competent (Hatlen 2000), and following this, in 1784 the first specialist facility, the 'Institute of Blind Youths' was opened in Paris, France. Over the next forty years a number of similar residential school institutions were established in Northern Europe and North America. There was varied engagement in these institutions by the state, depending on the national imperatives of each country, with the British government having little involvement in such specialist facilities until 1920. Cross-nationally, institutions for the 'blind' were mainly supported by a range of charitable organisations which were created with the philanthropic agenda of educating and moralising the blind, and preparing them for labour (Phillips 2004: 2-3). Educational establishments addressed the reading and writing needs of visually impaired students through tactile methods, such as those devised by Louis Braille in the early 19th century (Hatlen 2000). They also prepared students for employment in the community or in specialist workshops for the blind.

In 1920, following thirty years of campaigning by charitable institutions and the TUC, the Blind Person's Act was passed in the UK, and placed a duty on local authorities to provide segregated employment for visually impaired people (Borsay 2005:128). The National Institute for the Blind supplemented these with employment bureaux for blind and partially sighted piano tuners and organists. Borsay (2005) suggested that support via this legislation and the 1929 Local Government Act (providing domiciliary assistance for the blind) was superior to that provided for any other impairment category. This was possibly due to the number of soldiers returning from World War One with a visual impairment as a result of injury or mustard gas (Blind Veterans UK 2012). With the establishment of the welfare state after World War Two, policies related to visually impaired people were subsumed under Education Acts which addressed the full range of impairments, and provision of

services, support and allocation to institutions of education became dependent on the severity and category of 'handicap'. However, in her history of the education of partially sighted children, Sally French (2005) indicated that a number of children with partial sight continued to be segregated, despite the allowances of the 1944 Education Act to provide mainstream education for partially sighted children. Many were denied access to print and sent to special 'sight saving schools' where restrictive practices to prevent posture changes and fatigue were in place until the early 1960s.

Charitable involvement continues to be a factor in educational social policy and organisational responsibilities to the present day. A number of large national charities such as the RNIB (founded in 1868) and Guide Dogs for the Blind (established in 1931), and a number of smaller local charities supplement the State's social welfare and educational provision with specialist community employment schemes and educational services targeted at the specific needs of visually impaired people. Since the late nineteenth century, a number of schools and further education colleges for visually impaired people have continued to run as independent charitable institutions, providing specialist teaching and independence training, to the current day.

There are ten specialist schools for pupils with a visual impairment currently in the UK, three local authority-maintained, three with charitable status and four non-maintained. Of these, four are specifically for children with profound and additional complex needs. In further education, there are six specialist colleges for visually impaired students, five of which have charitable status, and one which has independent status. Three of these provide only for those with profound and additional needs (RNIB 2012b). All of these specialist schools and colleges offer a range of services in their prospectuses, such as teaching via preferred format using tactile or audio forms. All also offer additional life skills teaching such as orientation and mobility, daily living skills, specialist communication training in IT and alternative formats, and specialist careers advice (RNIB 2012b). There are no specialist colleges



currently in Wales, although a proposal has recently been submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government by one college (Truman 2011).

A recent survey of visual impairment education service providers in Wales completed by RNIB (Keil 2012a: See Table 3.1, below) estimated that the total number of visually impaired children up to 18 years old supported by visual impairment services (that is, supported by the local authority) was 1,637; twice as many as was returned on the School Census (National Statistics for Wales 2012). Seventy four per cent of primary and sixty four per cent of secondary pupils with a visual impairment attended mainstream schools in Wales (compared to sixty eight per cent and fifty nine per cent in England) (Keil 2012a; 2012b). In further education (FE), data are much harder to ascertain due to the incorporated nature of the further education sector, and the variable funding streams (Keil 2012a; 2012b). At the end of year 11 pupils may decide to leave school to attend a mainstream FE college, however with a move to FE, local authority responsibility under the SEN statement ends, and input from local authority specialist professionals and any other services are withdrawn (Keil 2004). FE colleges have a duty under the SENDA 2001 and the Equalities Act 2010 to assess the student and provide appropriate support. However if two local colleges are unable to provide the support identified by the initial assessment, the student may apply to the local authority for funding to attend a specialist residential college for the visually impaired.

**Table 3.1: Educational Location of Year 12/13 children in Wales 2010/11 (n:119).**

<b>Mainstream school</b>	<b>Specialist School for Visually impaired pupils</b>	<b>Special School (for pupils with learning disabilities)</b>	<b>Mainstream FE College</b>	<b>Specialist FE college</b>
29.7%	2.4%	59.5%	1.2%	4.7%

Source: Keil (2012a)

If the figures are representative of the population, they give a dramatic indication of the number of post-compulsory age visually impaired FE students from Wales whose needs cannot be met in local colleges, and who

therefore attend specialist residential facilities away from their home area. Keil's (2012a) findings on provision for post-compulsory age students with a visual impairment are difficult to generalise, as data were only received for eleven local authority areas, of a total of twenty two, and data were provided only for those students receiving specialist support from Visual Impairment departments. Furthermore the research does not address those students over eighteen who may access further education. Therefore, as Keil acknowledges, 'the method used to calculate these estimates is statistically quite crude' (Keil 2012a:11). However no other figures are available through local or national government agencies, research studies or specific government departments.

The prevalence of visually impaired students in the range of institutions available provides little qualitative detail as to the nature and outcomes of the education provided. In the following two sections literature on pedagogy and visually impaired students and on student experiences and outcomes will be explored, in order to explore the finer-grained detail of the educational experience.

The medicalised categorisation of eye conditions and resultant functional implications are evident throughout the literature for teachers on visual impairment in education (Arter et al. 1999; Best 1992; Owen-Hutchinson et al. 1998). In many of these 'handbook'-style guides for teachers, functional issues in teaching and learning are addressed using this form of categorisation, based on medical diagnosis and assessment. Thus issues addressed include visual acuity (ability to discern fine detail) both near (for reading) and far (for board work), depth perception, colour and contrast perception, and sensitivity to light. For example, Arter et al. (1999: 10) presented a prescriptive table summarising the functional implications of individual eye conditions for teachers (see Table 3.2, overleaf).

Further, the practitioner guides generally present a typology of considerations for teachers of visually impaired students: assessment; alterations to print material (through magnification and enlargement) or substitution of print (with Braille, audio or through the use of ICT or low vision

aids); environmental modifications to lighting, colour contrast and décor; and consideration of seating position (Arter et al. 1999; Best 1992; Owen-Hutchinson et al.1998). Other issues in pedagogy, such as use of appropriate language, concept development, and planning and design of demonstrations, practical sessions and off-site visits, are not addressed in any detail in any of these texts.

**Table 3.2 Educational implications of common visual eye conditions**

Condition	Increased lighting	Decreased lighting	Intolerance to glare	Good contrast needed	Enlarged print	Benefits from Low Vision Aids
Albinism	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anirididia	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Astigmatism	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Buphthalmus	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cataract-central	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Cataract-peripheral	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coloboma	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cone dystrophy	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Glaucoma	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hypermetropia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keratoconus	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Macular problems	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Myopia	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nystagmus	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Optic atrophy/hypoplasia	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Photophobia	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Retinitis pigmentosa	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	CCTV
Squint	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Source: Arter et al. 1999:10

Academic literature on visual impairment and pedagogy has a similar focus, on assessment, access to print or its alternatives, spatial perception, and environmental concerns. In the majority of studies, clinical measurement of visual function and diagnosis of eye condition is highlighted in the

introductory paragraphs or in the methodology. For example Tobin (1994:10) suggested that 'it is the eye specialists' diagnosis of visual impairment and their measure of visual functioning that constitute the starting point' for educational assessments. Few studies emphasise the significance of the students' own description of their perceptual schema, as discussed in Chapter Two.

In collaboration with St Patrick's College, Dublin, the VICTAR team (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research) at the University of Birmingham, conducted a large-scale detailed review of literature on best practice models and outcomes for visually impaired children (Douglas et al. 2009). A number of the published studies examined by the research team must be questioned in terms of their status as 'grey' literature, in that they were not peer-reviewed, or were commissioned by campaigning organisations such as the RNIB or AFB (in the case of Keil and Clunies-Ross 2002, Dawkins 1989; Corn et al. 1995 for example). Clearly this can be seen to reflect the nature of the research available on visually impaired pupils and students. There were no similar review studies identified through literature searches which specifically address the needs of visually impaired students in further education, and although it must be acknowledged that some of the issues may be specific to the location of educational provision, many of the concerns addressed in this review do remain pertinent to a further education setting. The literature review examined studies on pedagogical provision for children in some depth, categorising findings into assessment and examinations, access to print and Braille literacy, the role of technology, and additional curriculum needs.

In terms of assessment, Douglas et al.'s (2009) review suggested that appropriate tools must be chosen which are accessible or adaptable to visually impaired students, and that specialist assessment procedures should be utilised when standard assessment instruments are not appropriate for visually impaired pupils (Hannan 2007). The same review study's examination of literature on pedagogy resulted in a proposed model for approaches to be taken by teachers which draw on two pedagogical

strategies; the first being 'alternative' modalities, that is the replacement of print by large print or tactile formats, and the second being 'enhanced' modalities, that is, the use of low vision aids and adaptive techniques (Douglas et al. 2009: 92). This study also highlighted previous research (such as Lieberman's 2002 study of physical education) which suggested that the preparedness of teachers is a key factor in educational achievement. These suggestions supported the findings of an earlier research study by Douglas and McLinden (2005) that proposed a similar model, and in addition found that application of either of these modalities will necessarily take more time than for sighted children. In addition Douglas and McLinden (2005) argued that the enhanced modalities were more effective for independence in the long term, as the use of low vision aids and adaptive techniques provided portable skills that could be used in a range of settings, such as the work-place or in leisure activities, where access to enlarged text or Braille transcription may not always be available.

Access to print has been studied in some depth. In their 2011 literature review, Douglas et al. (2011) drew on the recommendations of the 2009 study to highlight the need for a 'dual modalities' approach to pedagogy, and to emphasise the significance of the *method* of access to print in future long-term achievement. Their review suggested that when provision of the preferred medium is contrasted with the teaching of 'access skills' using enhanced modalities, the majority of research findings indicate that the teaching of access skills had longer term benefits in terms of independent learning ability, but that this approach to teaching is often neglected (Douglas et al. 2011:25).

Braille was also considered in the analysis of research literature. Douglas et al (2009) found that studies indicated that Braille readers are significantly disadvantaged in terms of reading age, speed and phonological awareness as a result of the alternative sensory mode of access (Gillon and Young 2002). Tobin and Hill (2012) presented similar findings of a delayed ability in reading in visually impaired pupils, especially in speed of reading, following their study of 60 visually impaired children. This applied whether reading was through large print or Braille, and they suggested that the delay increases

with age. A number of studies have examined access to print through the use of low vision aids (such as magnifiers, distance viewers and CCTV) amongst young people, and present similar findings to those of Douglas et al. 2009. For example, Lennon et al. (2007) studied 64 children attending Manchester Royal Eye Hospital, and concluded that a comprehensive multi-disciplinary assessment of visual function enables appropriate provision of low vision aids (LVAs) and results in improved access to education. This finding is further supported by Theodorou and Shipman's (2013) evaluation of service provision at Sheffield NHS trust sites. However in a small-scale longitudinal study of further education in Wales, Keil (2004; 2006) found that such equipment can be difficult to procure in a timely fashion, and that failure to obtain appropriate equipment can seriously undermine educational progression.

Douglas et al. (2009) also drew attention to a number of studies which found that access to appropriate specialist staff and funding of equipment was essential to educational access (Amato 2002; Kiel and Clunies-Ross 2002). In terms of the 'additional curriculum', the authors drew on literature to make recommendations for the inclusion of non-curriculum sessions for visually impaired pupils in their weekly timetable. Additional sessions might include mobility and independence training, promotion of social inclusion, ICT training, or low vision assessment and training, and may involve clinicians, specialist professionals, teachers and parents. Further studies were highlighted which addressed the need for an accessible environment. For example, Webster and Roe (1998:6) suggested that there should be 'appropriate décor and physical layouts, [and] lighting conditions'.

A detailed quantitative study of the 'National Longitudinal Transition Study 2' revealed similar findings in the US (Wolffe and Kelly 2011). Numerous significant relationships were found between instruction in the 'expanded core curriculum' for visually impaired students, (including orientation and mobility, specialist careers advice, assistive technology, and independent living skills) and positive educational and employment outcomes. The data, collected in five waves between 2000 and 2009, sampling from over 3000

Local Education Agencies across the US, was limited in that it was based on parent and youth self-reporting. However the authors did find a significant relationship between teaching in orientation and mobility, Braille, careers, and volunteering, and the likelihood of engagement in post-secondary employment or education. Most notably there was a significant relationship between accessible technology, social integration and post-secondary employment or education. This suggests that training in orientation and mobility, Braille, careers and accessible technology is significant to the achievement of visually impaired students after compulsory education.

Only one set of studies was identified which addressed the experiences of visually impaired students in further education (Kiel 2004; 2006; Kiel and Crewes (2008). This small-scale longitudinal study focussed on transition planning and services, rather than on issues of pedagogy, and was funded by the RNIB. The study followed six visually impaired students in Wales as they moved into post-compulsory education, and highlighted issues in transition and access to support during this time. Although the 'campaigning nature' of the authors' commissioning organisation is evident in the document, the findings nevertheless suggest that students believe that there is considerable inequity of provision between those who choose to stay in mainstream schools, and those who move into further education. The authors assert that without the specialist advice, teaching and mentoring from the Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired (QTVI) and other specialist educational professionals, students in further education are not adequately supported.

In an in-depth qualitative study of 83 visually impaired people in the UK (SSMR 2009), visually impaired children and adults reported that attendance at mainstream education is preferable, but only if individual support within the classroom is available, being essential to ensure individualised adjustment to learning activities. Participants reported issues with obtaining materials in appropriate formats in a timely fashion, and requiring additional time to read materials. Children (and their parents) reported problems with the sheer size of Braille or large print materials, and in the readability of photocopied,

enlarged materials. Pupils also demonstrated reluctance to access support, either in the form of adult assistance, or in the use of assistive technologies, as they did not want to feel 'different'. They described how some technologies in the classroom, such as whiteboards, were difficult to access, and some specialist equipment was not suitable for their individual's needs, but was provided as it was assumed to be appropriate based on their medical diagnosis. These difficulties were also evident in studies on the engagement of visually impaired students. For example, Bardin and Lewis (2008) conducted a survey with mainstream teachers in the US. They found that visually impaired students may require additional time to access alternative formats and to learn concepts, particularly those subtle 'untaught' concepts available through visual interpretation of teacher behaviour or demonstration. The findings revealed that students with a visual impairment were not engaged in class-wide teaching when responses from multiple students were sought by teachers. Bardin and Lewis also found that visually impaired students were rated as having lower than average engagement, and had lower attainment levels than their sighted peers.

A number of these classroom-based difficulties may help to explain the differential educational attainment found for students with a visual impairment in the UK. Drawing on the National Pupil Databases for England and Wales, the Northern Ireland School Leavers' Survey and the Scottish Annual Pupil Census, Chanfreau and Cebulla (2009) conducted a wide-ranging in-depth analysis of attainment rates of pupils with a recorded special educational need (SEN) due to visual impairment. They compared pupils with visual impairment (VI) only, those with VI and additional SEN, pupils with other SEN, and pupils without SEN. In Wales, of the small population with VI only (0.1% of the population) and VI with additional SEN (again 0.1%), they found that pupils with a visual impairment performed less well than those without an SEN, but were markedly higher achieving than those with VI and additional SEN, and those categorised with other SEN only. They concluded that a visual impairment did make a difference to educational attainment, but that the strongest effect was as a result of an additional or other SEN (see Table 3.3 overleaf). These findings applied



even when socio-demographic factors were taken into account. Although the statistics apply only to those with an identified special educational need as a result of visual impairment, and did not address age or severity of onset, or variations in levels of provision, the findings do clearly indicate the relatively narrow margin of achievement variation between those with and without a visual impairment.

**Table 3.3 KS4 results in Wales by SEN status (cell %: Base: All pupils in KS4)**

	Mean Total point score	Threshold 2: 5 or more A*-C GCSEs	Threshold 1: 5 or more A*-G GCSEs	Base
No SEN	46	62	93	94,633
VI only	37	46	89	136
VI & additional SEN	16	14	47	94
Other SEN	18	14	54	18,995
All	41	54	86	113,858

Source: NPD Wales (2006-2008) (Chanfreau and Cebulla 2009)

Unfortunately, however these achievements do not seem to be reflected in the transition to employment after education is completed. In the UK, Pavey et al. (2008) found that of children and young people who acquired a visual impairment congenitally or during childhood (by the age of 18), only 41% were employed by the age of 25. In their qualitative interviews, visually impaired participants cited employer attitudes, transport, and lack of employment suitable for their visual impairment as reasons for difficulties in gaining employment, all unrelated to educational attainment. However Clements et al. (2011) found that educational attainment, housing tenure, severity of visual impairment and the presence of additional impairments were key factors in the likelihood of employment, which they suggested stood at 33% of working-age visually impaired people, compared to 75% in the general population in 2011. Clements et al. found that having post-

compulsory qualifications was significant in the likelihood of having future employment (see Table 3.4 below), which is pertinent to this study. Nevertheless they state: 'it is likely that employers' negative and inaccurate perceptions of what individuals with a visual impairment can do serves as a barrier to many seeking work' (Clements et al 2011: 28). Similar findings in relation to employment status are apparent globally. Goertz et al. (2010) presented research which demonstrated that the employment rates stood at 42% in the US (in 1995), 39.3% in New Zealand in 2003, and 33% in South Korea in 2008. In each case the unemployment rate of those visually impaired people actively seeking work was three to five times higher than for the country as a whole.

**Table 3.4 Registered blind and partially sighted people's labour market status by key analysis variable, working age only**

Category	Degree or above (%)	A-level and below degree level(%)	GCSE level and other(%)	No Qualification
Employed	59	40	27	16
Unemployed	15	14	25	27
Student	6	6	2	2
Looking after family home	3	6	7	9
Long-term sick or disabled	6	24	23	31
Retired	9	8	13	16
Something else	3	2	3	0
Unweighted base	110	158	174	115

Source: Network 1000 survey 1. (Clements et al. 2011)

### 3.3 Further Education

Before examining policies and outcomes for disabled students in further education, it is useful to consider the past and recent history of the sector, which has served to shape policies and practices for this discrete group. Sir Andrew Foster famously described further education as ‘the neglected middle child’ of education (DfES 2005), subject to piecemeal policies and funding restrictions. Since the nineteenth century further education has been the focus of a range of government policies which aim to encourage economic development and social cohesion (Hyland and Merrill 2003). In recent times the sector has been the focus of sweeping changes to governance, qualification frameworks, funding and inspection, which have all impacted upon policies and provision for disabled students in further education. In the following sections the history of the further education (FE) sector in the UK will be examined in terms of policies and research findings. Then specific policies and findings in relation to inclusion, special and additional educational needs, and disability in FE are explored. Due to the increasingly divergent education systems of England and Wales as a result of devolution (Chitty 2009: 142; Rees 2007; Navarro 2012), this will be followed by an examination of the Welsh context of further education, with specific reference to students with disabilities.

With its roots in the ‘working class’ self-help clubs and societies of the nineteenth century, UK further education (although not named as such) came into being with the 1889 Technical Instruction Act, and developed following the foundation of the City and Guilds of London Institute in 1879, when the organisation founded a number of technical education colleges (Hyland and Merrill 2003). Green and Lucas argued that, from this stage onwards, UK technical education ‘never acquired a status comparable with that achieved in certain other continental states’ (Green and Lucas 1999: 14). Despite a massive increase in colleges in the sector during the early part of the twentieth century (partly as a result of the industrial needs of the wars), and the legal obligation of local authorities to provide further education as laid

down in the 1944 Education Act, a number of commentators have argued that Britain failed to develop a strong work-based learning route (Hyland and Merrill 2003; Richardson and Gumbley 1995). Increasing numbers attended technical colleges during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, through day release and apprenticeship schemes, with government support expressed in *The White Paper on Technical Education* (1956) and the Crowther Report in 1959 (Hyland and Merrill 2003). However a national policy on vocational and technical education was never fully established. This history can be seen to indicate the low status of a sector plagued by 'highly uneven provision' (Green and Lucas 1999: 20), due to legislation which enabled a large degree of local interpretation.

During the 1970s and 1980s a number of initiatives were introduced, for example the Youth Training Scheme, the TVEI (Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative) and the Employment Training scheme. Overseen by the government through agencies such as the Manpower Services Commission, these had the professed aim of reducing youth unemployment and advancing vocational preparation. However Hayes et al. (2007:15) argued that they were simply a 'metaphor for youth containment' in an era of mass youth disaffection. These decades also saw a number of colleges broadening their remit from purely technical education, to providing academic mainstream courses such as O- and A-levels to 'second-chance' students (Smithers and Robinson 2000). Despite the government's policy emphasis on national vocationalism, and increased centralised control, responsibility for implementation remained at the local level, within further education colleges. In 1992 the political will for increased financial autonomy for the sector led to the Further and Higher Education Act, which granted full independence to further education colleges. Further education colleges became independent corporate institutions outside of Local Education Authority (LEA) responsibility and control, governed predominantly by representatives from business and industry. Jephcote and Salisbury (2007) stated that the 'piecemeal' policy-making of the 1980s, the result of local-level management by LEAs, was replaced through 1992 Act with autonomous further education colleges, with increased central government

control and oversight through regulation, auditing and inspection regimes. Similarly Bryan and Hayes (2007: 49) suggested that the 'McDonaldization of FE' through the 1992 Act was a fundamental shift to a marketised sector, driven more by neo-liberal managerialism than by educational concerns. However while the independent status of FE colleges was established through the 1992 Act, the majority of funding still came from the state (78% in 2005: DfES 2005).

Central government policy initiatives and reports, which linked the teaching of skills in further education to economic success and social cohesion, had a large influence on the development of the sector. For example in 1991 the White Paper *Education and Training for the Twenty-first Century* established a new framework for vocational qualifications, linked to Britain's economic needs, and this emphasis remained constant with the election of the New Labour administration in 1997. The link between global economic competitiveness and the FE sector was strengthened with the Green Paper *The Learning Age: A renaissance for new Britain* (DfEE 1998), which drew on a series of reports such as the Kennedy Report 1997, the Dearing report 1997 and the Fryer Report 1997 (all commissioned by the previous Conservative administration). The New Labour 'vision' for further education was further consolidated in *Colleges for Excellence and Innovation* (DfEE 2000), which had a focus on widening participation, improving standards, providing skills for the economy and social inclusion (Hyland and Merrill 2003: 20).

Research and commentary suggests that the aims of all the governmental initiatives have met varying degrees of success. In their impassioned assessment of the FE sector, Hayes et al. (2007) argued that FE has taken on a 'policing' role for young unemployed people, with the agenda of creating an 'uncritical, malleable and subservient workforce (Hayes et al. 2007: 16). Jephcote and Salisbury (2007) found that managers focussed on the funding-linked imperatives of recruitment, retention and attainment, rather than on educational content. However they also found that tutors felt increasingly under pressure from neo-managerialist bureaucracy and

systems, which affected their ability to provide a thorough education for young people. In their wide-ranging and thorough report of the Nuffield Review, Pring et al. (2009) suggested that while governments had encouraged a wider participation, and expanded opportunities for access to higher education, 14-19 years education remained troubled by piecemeal initiatives, continued low achievement, lack of social mobility and perceptions of poor skills development. The Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), the largest educational research initiative undertaken in the UK, conducted a series of investigations into the further education sector. One of the most significant findings of its multiple research projects was that the tutor-student relationship is paramount in providing successful learning opportunities. However they found that this is undermined by the implementation of managerialist policies from central government (TLRP 2008). Gorard and Smith (2007) argued that life-long patterns of inequality and an individual's early social context are the key determinants of successful post-compulsory participation and achievement, rather than the barriers presented by the institutions and structures themselves. Similarly, Jephcote and Raby (2012) suggested that while 'open access' further education policies enable recruitment of all, budgetary constraints and the level of the individual's social, cultural and financial capital still determine the retention and achievement of students, particularly those from vulnerable groups such as the disabled. Despite the wide-ranging policy initiatives, Baird et al. (2012) found continued disparity between the aspirations of FE students and non-FE students, with FE students aspiring to more non-professional, non-academic futures.

From 2010 the newly elected Coalition government continued to emphasise the economic benefits of the further education sector to the 'skills base' of the UK, placing increased demands on colleges to 'get Britain working', while enabling increased freedom of colleges from state and quango control (Cabinet Office 2010). However they also announced a 25% reduction in FE funding in the November 2010 Spending Review. Despite these cuts, in *Skills for Sustainable Growth* (BIS 2010), the government promised seventy five thousand additional apprenticeship places, in a strategy which Jonathan

Payne has suggested was based on the 'unfounded' assumption that employers would be willing to invest in such as system (Payne 2011). Interestingly in its mid-term review, the government placed universities and further education in the 'Fixing the Economy' section, and placed an emphasis on 'meeting the needs of British business' (Cabinet Office 2013). Fisher and Simmons (2012) argue that Coalition government further education policies are 'relatively under-developed' when compared to both their higher education policies, and to the policies of international competitors (Fisher and Simmons 2012: 41). They suggest that while the government may espouse the benefits of vocational education to the skills base of the economy, the rhetoric of traditional academic values still prevails. They believe that controversial moves, such as scrapping the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which significantly affected further education students (Waugh 2010: 14), fail to recognise the needs of the student population in further education. Additional policies comply with the broader national policy framework, and have seen the Coalition government giving increased autonomy to further education colleges, encouraging private sector involvement and promoting the expansion of the higher education sector in further education institutions (DfE 2014c). Following the recommendations of the Wolf Report (2011), vocational qualifications with 'little or no market value' (Wolf 2011: 7) have been scrapped, and the vast number of apprenticeship places have been funded. These changes have been fiercely criticised by those who argue that the government has failed to take into account the lack of demand for a skilled workforce in the employment landscape, where the demand for low- or no-skill jobs is rising (Atkinson and Elliott 2007: 37).

It appears that while manifestos and policy publications promote further education as the key to global economic competitiveness, the low-status, 'Cinderella' further education sector has continued to suffer from piecemeal policy initiatives, restricted funding and government intervention. The history of the sector has resulted in locally-managed colleges with distinct policies and practices, weighted under the bureaucratic regimes of the central government's audit culture. While research suggests that the tutor-student

relationship is key (Hodkinson et al. 2007), findings illustrate the level of frustration experienced by tutors coping with the burdens of new managerialist demands. It is within this framework that policies and practices for disabled students are formulated and enacted, as the competing priorities of achievement and participation are actualised in each individually-managed college setting. In the following section, policies and findings in relation to inclusion and special educational needs in further education in Britain will be explored, before attention is turned to the specific history of further education in Wales.

Until the 1970s there was little provision for disabled students within further education, with the assumption that provision would be segregated, with a distinct curriculum (Hayes et al. 2007). With the Warnock Report (DES 1978) recommendations for special units within colleges were acted upon, and a slow move to integration of disabled students began (Hayes et al. 2007: 39). However it was not until as late as the 1990s that any major consideration of disabled students took place in further education. The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act gave colleges the responsibility of providing 'sufficient and adequate facilities' and 'to have regard for the needs' of disabled students, with the introduction of the IEP (Individual Education Plan). The IEP remains standard practice to date. Within it the 'needs' of the student in terms of adjustment are listed, alongside details of the provision of support to meet these needs, such as support workers and adaptive equipment. This can be seen to follow the SEN model of individual provision outlined in Chapter Two, far removed from the inclusive model proposed by the disability movement during the same era.

In the following decade Further Education Institutions (FEIs) were given obligations to students with disabilities under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001, (DDA Part 4 – Education), and under the DDA (2005) as a 'public authority' with a responsibility to promote equality and to implement strategic policies to advance inclusion. The Learning and Skills Act (2000) also placed an obligation on LEAs to provide boarding accommodation for students up to the age of 25, where education services



which are 'sufficient in quantity and adequate in quality' cannot be provided locally. A small number of national guidance documents were produced. One by the Disability Rights Commission (2005) provided non-statutory advice for FE and HE institutions in England, Wales and Scotland on their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. In addition Ofsted (in England) and Estyn (in Wales) were given responsibility to inspect provision for disabled students, and the achievement of goals set out in each individual's IEP (Ofsted 2010; Estyn 2013).

A significant change in English policy was evident in terms of the alignment of compulsory and further education in the Green Paper *Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability* (DfE 2011b: 5), which became the Children and Families Act in 2014. It gives children and young people with SEND (the newly accepted term for people with 'special educational needs or disabilities') in further education 'similar rights and protections to those for children with SEND under 16'. In addition students with SEND will have the opportunity for 'Supported Internships' (DfE 2014b: 1) in the workplace via further education colleges, with the aim of reducing the numbers of people with SEND becoming unemployed.

However the enactment of previous similar policies has been found to have been of limited success. Despite numerous initiatives, the destinations of disabled students remain unequal. A wide-ranging study completed by Haines (2006) found that disabled people have poorer outcomes in the post-compulsory phase: 27% of people with a disability aged 16-25 are NEET (not in employment, education or training), compared with 9% of non-disabled people, and 21% have no qualifications. Similarly a later Ofsted report (2011) found that 22% of young people with a declared disability do not progress to post-compulsory education, employment or training, and were twice as likely as their non-disabled counterparts to be NEET.

In a detailed study of disabled students' experiences in further education in the UK for the NUS, Grehan (2008) found that inadequate funding and college control of 'Additional Learning Support' monies from central

government reduced student autonomy, and resulted in lower attainment levels, furthering the call for personalised learning funding. Grehan also found that there continued to be significant barriers to learning in further education, such as the lack of appropriate transport, funding and specialised advice and guidance. In keeping with the TLRP findings discussed above on the significance of tutor-student relationships, Grehan (2008) also suggested that positive staff-student relationships had a significant impact on students' well-being and attainment. However research examining the attitudes of tutors presents a more negative picture of the potential for this. For example Spenceley (2012) suggests that the 'benevolent cloak' of support services operates as a form of surveillance and control, and that those disabled students likely to become 'economically active citizens' receive more targeted support than others (Spenceley 2012: 318). Research has also suggested that post-compulsory tutors may struggle with the concept and practicalities of inclusive teaching practice. For example in a small-scale study, Partington (2003) found that student tutors in the post-compulsory phase received little formal teaching on providing inclusive learning for disabled students. They were conscious of 'differences' which they discussed within the 'abnormality' and 'tragedy' frameworks, and believed that the presence of disabled students disadvantaged their non-disabled peers. In addition, Partington argued that 'the emphasis placed on *expertise* such as that found in Learning Support Departments have resulted in tutors abdicating their responsibilities to individual students in their classrooms' (2003: 418).

Problems with adequate funding arrangements, continued reliance on the support provisions of a special educational needs framework, appropriate advice and guidance, and the attitudes of tutors in further education thus appear to hinder the full inclusion of disabled students in the sector. The findings above suggest that, across the UK, provision of inclusive learning is yet to be achieved. In the following section, Welsh policies in relation to further education will be examined in light the of research findings above, in order to contextualise the current study in the specific location of Wales, before the chapter hones in on Welsh disabled students in further education.

In his history of Welsh education, Elwyn Jones (1997) argued that educational ideologies in Wales have been distinct from those of England for hundreds of years. He suggested that since the nineteenth century the Welsh have demonstrated a heightened sense of the place of education in securing economic and social security and mobility for the individual. He argued that 'if we are Welsh, we must have a Welsh education' (7), and in his conclusion put his case for a Welsh-controlled education policy to enable the Welsh 'the right to determine the education system' (Elwyn Jones 1997: 219). This came to fruition in 1999 through devolution, and was further strengthened in 2011, when the National Assembly was granted law-making powers in education (Navarro 2012). However Rees (2007) suggested that although Welsh powers have increased, those with a significant influence over policy at a UK level still continue to exert considerable influence and restrict the independence of the Welsh education policy system. Shortly after devolution, the Welsh Assembly Government announced its agenda for education in Wales, with the paving document *The Learning Country* (WAG 2001). This signalled divergence from English plans for increased specialisation for schools and colleges, with a renewed commitment to community based education. The principle of 'social democratic values' in education has driven many of the Welsh Assembly government's policy initiatives (Pring et al. 2009).

In terms of further education, the history of the sector and the nature of the Welsh context have led to a unique place for further education in the educational landscape, which nevertheless reflects the UK government's priorities of economic renewal and social cohesion. As Pring et al. (2009:16) argued: 'Welsh distinctiveness is not so much over the goals of education policy, but rather over the means of achieving them'. Where *The Learning Country* (2001) expressed a commitment to integrated 14-19 pathways, the successor document *The Learning Country: Vision into action* (WAG 2006a) elaborated on the strategic mission of FE to advance economically useful skills through collaboration, partnership and merger. In the "Beyond Compulsory Education" section (WAG 2006a: 20-24) objectives were set to

review the strategic mission of the FE sector in order to progress economically useful skills, to improve the quality of post-16 learning through self-regulated benchmarking against a range of indicators, and to encourage collaboration, partnership and merger between institutions.

These objectives were further elaborated in the more recent *Skills that Work for Wales* (WAG 2008a) document, and the sister documents for post-compulsory education and training providers, *Transforming Education and Training Provision in Wales* (WAG 2008b), and *Transformation – Y Siwrnai* (WAG 2009a). The documents drew on the Leitch Review (2006), which suggested that improvements in the skills base of the population would improve economic competitiveness. The policies also outlined the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to the recommendations of the Webb review (WAG 2007), which proposed reform of the post-compulsory sector in order to encourage more collaborative working, more choice and personalisation for learners, and greater efficiencies in the learning network (WAG 2008a: 3). However recent changes to the regulation of Further Education institutions may undermine some of the intentions of these documents. With the Further and Higher Education (Governance and Information) (Wales) Act (2014), Wales has followed England in allowing substantial autonomy for FE colleges, removing their classification as central government bodies (unlike in Scotland, or Northern Ireland, where central government status was retained). This may enable FEIs to dissolve, privatise, or substantially alter their remit or educational focus, without oversight by the Government (Welsh Government 2014d).

There are currently fourteen colleges in Wales, a number greatly reduced by a series of mergers between 2009 and 2013 (Colleges Wales 2013). In the 2012/13 academic year, colleges served just under 175,000 learners, with 103,045 enrolled on FE courses, 10,470 on work-based learning, and 2,065 on higher education programmes. Of the total number, 110,080 were enrolled on part-time courses (Welsh Government 2014c). There was a 27% decrease in further education learner numbers between 2005 and 2011, although full-time enrolments increased by 6% in the same period,

significantly within the 16-19 age group (Welsh Government 2012). The decrease in part-time learners can be partly explained by the emphasis on 'economically useful' qualifications and therefore a reduction in adult education classes for leisure.

The changes in priority suggested by the Welsh governmental policy framework, the effects of frequent mergers, and the 2002 Education Act, which saw the introduction of new curricula and qualifications such as the Welsh Baccalaureate (Rees 2007), have resulted in a time of intense and continual change for further education institutions and practitioners in Wales. In their study of colleges in Wales, Jephcote and Salisbury found that this had resulted in confusion, resentment and a sense of 'de-professionalisation' and exhaustion at the 'chalkface' (Jephcote and Salisbury 2007: 112). It is essential to note that policies for disabled students are formulated and enacted within this complex, shifting landscape.

Disabled students in further education in Wales have the same rights as those in the rest of Britain under UK legislation such as SENDA (2001) and the Disability Equality Duty of 2006. Equality has also been enshrined in the Government of Wales Act of 2006. The Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Division of WAG reviews each new policy through the systematic use of equality impact assessments. In addition to these generic equality responsibilities, the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales* (WAG 2004) and the National Assembly for Wales *Circular 47/2006: Inclusion and Pupil Support* (WAG 2006b) provides detailed guidance for Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and schools on the rights, responsibilities, and processes involved in the support of pupils with special educational needs. Fundamental principles are that 'a child with special educational needs should have their needs met' (WAG 2004: 2) and that 'inclusion is a process by which schools, LEAs and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include all children and young people' (WAG 2006b: 2). However, incorporated further education institutions are not covered by the codes or guidance. In Circular 47/2006, the WAG review of Special Educational Needs recommended adoption of the term 'additional

educational needs' (WAG 2006c: Chaney 2009: 27), which were defined as follows:

The term 'additional learning needs' is used to identify learners whose learning needs are additional to the majority of their peers. The term 'special educational needs' is a sub-category of additional learning needs, used to identify those learners who have severe, complex and / or specific learning difficulties as set out within the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice for Wales.

WAG 2006c: 2

Welsh Government statistics (2014c) suggest that in 2012/13 there were 13,260 students with a disability enrolled at mainstream further education institutions in Wales. There were 5,230 disabled students aged under 18, and 8,030 in the over-18 age group. Of the total, 4,520 had specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, and just under three thousand had learning disabilities. Only 105 students aged under-18 and 325 students aged over 18 disclosed a visual impairment as their primary disability in 2011/12, with an additional 25 students disclosing a multi-sensory impairment (Welsh Government 2014: 24). The under representation of younger visually impaired students in the sector is of great interest to the current study. During recent times, issues in funding, responsibility and accountability, and provision for students with a disability has been the subject of investigation and debate.

In 2010 a Task and Finish group was established by the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, to examine funding and transition arrangements for pupils and students with additional learning needs in the post-compulsory sector. Reports from the group (WAG 2010a) proposed improvements to transition planning and revised funding arrangements. In particular suggestions related to the differences between funding arrangements for students in schools, and those in colleges. Feedback suggested that the separate funding streams resulted in completely different entitlements and provisions. The recommendations of the group have been embedded in the Education in Wales Bill (2013) currently moving through the Assembly. The Bill committed Local Authorities to providing an assessment of needs for all students regardless of destination, at the end of the

compulsory phase. In addition a new Code of Practice was proposed for the post-compulsory sector. Currently the Statement of Special Educational Needs drawn up by the Local Authority does not follow the student to the further education setting. The new Act was intended to provide more legal security for students with additional learning needs (ALN) in further education settings, in terms of their access to appropriate support and services. At present colleges apply for supplementary or exceptional funding from the Welsh government on an individual student basis, and each college makes its own arrangements for disability assessment and support. The new system aimed to give responsibility for the assessment and funding of students with additional learning needs in further education to the local authority, although it remained unclear how responsibilities and any difficulties in provision will be monitored. Concerns raised during the consultation process for the Bill included the suggestion that funding may not be ring-fenced for further education ALN provision, and that assessments may be made on the basis of resources, rather than being based on needs. However all these changes were removed from the Bill at the last minute, in an unusual move by the Government, to allow for further consultation (Welsh Government 2014a). Upon the writing of this thesis the future direction of such policies was unknown. Further discussion on professionals' understandings of ALN services in Wales can be found in Chapter Six, where interview data are analysed to explore the issues in this area.

Academic research into the experiences of students with a visual impairment in Wales in further education settings is limited. While one study explores the experiences of visually impaired students in transition to a range of post-compulsory settings, (Keil and Crewes 2008), its scope is limited to six students. While statistics and policy initiatives, as outlined above, give an overview of the picture in Wales, there has been no detailed qualitative research into the experiences of this discrete group, nor any quantitative analysis of statistics in relation to recruitment, retention, attainment and destinations. The paucity of research, along with the specific challenges faced by visually impaired students and their tutors, is one of the areas addressed by this study.

## Conclusion

The concept of the 'dilemma' of special needs can be seen to articulate, from an educational perspective, Davies' (2006) exploration of the 'dis-modernist' perception of disability. Special educational needs policies can be viewed as oppressive in terms of the location of disabled individuals as 'special', with disability conceived of as an essentialist individual characteristic. Policies thus fail to acknowledge that 'difference is what all of us have in common' (Davis 2006: 239). Diversity agendas aim to adjust the balance to ensure that all individuals are respected for their individual characteristics. However, when examining a discrete educational sector, such as further education, it is evident that a wide range of competing agendas can be significant in the development of organisational structures and processes, some of which undermine the diversity agenda.

It was evident from the review of the literature on educational provision and transitions for visually impaired students that although there has been some detailed research on education for visually impaired people, there is very little literature on the experiences, reflections and viewpoints of the students themselves. With the exception of a few studies (Khadka et al. 2012; SSMR 2009), the voices of the students are largely absent from the literature, supporting Duckett and Pratt's (2001) argument that visually impaired people feel excluded by the very processes of research that aim to investigate the experience of visual impairment. This study thus aimed to engage with the opinions and experiences of the students themselves, in order to uncover how students understand barriers to learning and good practice in relation to the agenda of inclusive education. The social and psycho-emotional dimensions of visual impairment within the college environment were also worthy of further investigation, as it was evident from Tobin's (2008) study that educational achievement and life chances may be affected as a result. In addition Keil's (2012a) study indicated that a significant proportion of visually impaired students are choosing to attend specialist further education colleges, rather than mainstream provision, and further investigation of the motivations behind this decision by students appeared to be required. In terms of pedagogy, the application of the alternative or enhanced modalities,



the inclusion of 'additional curriculum' subjects such as orientation and mobility, and the impact of support and access technology appeared to be worthy of further investigation. Finally the lack of research into the experiences of visually impaired students in *further* education can be seen as significant, and it was this paucity of research, combined with my professional experiences in specialist and mainstream further education settings, which prompted my interest in this study.

## Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods

At sixteen pupils with a visual impairment have three educational options in Wales, depending upon funding; remaining in mainstream school, attending a mainstream further education college, or attending a specialist further education college. For the purposes of this study, the further education options, both specialist and mainstream, were selected for further interrogation, as further education is a distinctly under-research area in relation to special educational needs, and the reduction enabled a degree of comparison in terms of institutional characteristics and fine-grained ethnographic data. However, research aimed at establishing the comparative successes of mainstream and specialist provision has often produced conflicting evidence (Hegarty 1987), and it has been argued that directly comparative studies of specialist and mainstream educational institutions are methodologically unsound, due to the wide range of factors influencing the outcomes (Madden and Slavin 1983; Salend and Garrick Duhaney 1999). Influencing factors may be individual, in terms of gender, race, social status, or additional disabilities; or institutional, in terms of size, location or type (for example, whether residential or day placement). Thus during analysis comparisons were made on a thematic, rather than institutional level.

Detailed ethnographic fieldwork using sensory ethnography (Pink 2009; 2011) was completed as six student case studies in three further education institutions. Thus a significant level of attention was paid to the multi-sensorial nature of the environment and interactions. Each case study explored perceptions of the implementation of inclusive policies, identified barriers to learning and examples of good practice, and investigated views of the impact of individual characteristics and educational and social processes on the learning journeys of visually impaired students. A range of methods were utilised during ethnographic fieldwork, including individual interviews with students, professionals and peers; observations; and the collection of institutional and individual documentation. Thematic analysis and

interpretation of the various datasets generated through fieldwork enabled an exploration of the individual, policy and institutional factors which appeared to impact upon the learning journeys of visually impaired students.

Thus, the development of the thesis progressed through a series of stages, following the process described by Mason (2002), and this chapter will follow this process. Firstly I will outline the methodological positioning of the research, in terms of both the biographical influences, and philosophical and theoretical perspectives. The following section will then detail the exploratory phase, including the literature review, policy interviews and focus groups. Section 4.3, 'Getting In', will detail the sampling framework, and considerations of ethics and access. The following section will give a rationale for the use of an ethnographic methodology, and outline the design of the methods used, including interview and fieldwork design. Attention will then turn to my experiences 'In the Field', in terms of the research conducted and the significance of reflexivity, before the analytical process is described in the final section.

## **4.1 Positioning the Research**

My interest in the research was a result of my professional interest and academic study in this area. My professional experience while working with visually impaired students in a range of educational settings was underpinned by academic study of the topic. This raised my awareness of political and theoretical perspectives on the educational, social and psycho-emotional dimensions of disability, and the under-researched aspects of student experience. In this section I will make explicit my biographical and philosophical position, to locate myself within the text, as a form of 'audible authorship' (Charmaz and Mitchell 1997:197). As Hertz suggested, 'by presenting the author's voice in the account, the audience can situate the author in order to assess the author's perspective' (1997: xiii), leading to increased validity and reliability, through transparency and a form of 'validity-as-reflexive-accounting' (Altheide and Johnson 2013: 340).

To make sense of what we observe or what people tell us, we may draw on the richness of our own experience, particularly if what we are studying we have also experienced.

Hertz 1997 xiii

As a professional with eighteen years' experience working with visually impaired people in a range of social care and educational settings, it was essential from the outset that I reflexively designed the research in 'a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness' (Callaway 1992: 33). My professional experiences in post-compulsory settings provided 'sensitising concepts' (Blumer 1954), alerting me to significant issues in very particular contexts. Prior to commencing the thesis, I had worked in a special educational needs department of a Local Authority, in a specialist college for visually impaired students, and in mainstream further education colleges. I had also provided rehabilitation training and support for visually impaired (VI) people seeking employment, and for pre-school and older VI people in social care settings. Through this professional practice, and subsequent study, I became aware that very little attention had been paid to the discrete group of 'visually impaired people in post-compulsory education settings', in terms of pedagogical practices and research focus, and hence I sought to develop the project. The influence of my historical background whilst present in the colleges is discussed in the 'In the Field' section, later in the chapter.

In addition to consideration of biographical influences, Holloway and Todres suggested that researchers must make 'explicit an epistemological position that coherently underpins its empirical claims' (2003: 355). Debates about epistemological paradigms distinguish between positivistic, scientific notions of fact and reality, and hermeneutic, interpretivistic analysis of multiple realities (Grenfell and James 1998, p8).

The aim and research questions delineated the paradigmatic approach taken. By asking how students *experienced* the educational environment, assumptions about the nature of knowing were made. It was not the intention of the study to 'get to the truth' about practices in further education, but rather to explore participants' understandings of events from their own

perspective. The study thus set out to explore the 'meaning-making' of students, staff and peers in further education settings, supporting an interpretive paradigm. Analysis of the observed interactions and narrative accounts of social actors, through an ethnographic methodology, (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Lofland et al, 2006) illuminated and informed analysis and interpretation of these multiple realities. This enabled a rich appreciation of the complex psychological, social and interpersonal worlds of each individual, from their own perspective. Thus the methodological objectives of the study were, firstly, to produce an ethnographic 'thick description' of the life worlds of visually impaired students in further education settings, examining the 'multiplicity of complex conceptual structures' in order to render them visible (Geertz 1973:10). Secondly the study aimed to critically analyse the practices, performances and opinions of actors in each setting. Thick description located the individual within social and educational contexts, and policies and practices in educational organisations provided the backdrop to this lived experience.

Developments in disability theory, detailed in Chapter Two, also underpinned the design of the study, within the interpretive perspective. Although located in a range of philosophical disciplines, disability theorists have challenged the scientific 'normative' perspective on disability. Oliver (1990) was one of the first writers to propose a challenge to the medical understanding of disability as 'deficit'. Academics and activists have continued to suggest that it is social practices and organisation that cause disabled people to be oppressed and discriminated against (Albrecht 2002; Barnes 1991; Barnes et al. 1999; Finkelstein 1996). As philosophical debates about the nature of the self expanded, post-structuralists argued that the social model of disability actually ignored issues of impairment, and suggested that the meta-narrative of 'disabled people' 'does not recognise diversity within the category of disability, and the significance of the intersection of disability with other axes of inequality, such as gender or race' (Shakespeare and Corker 2002:15). However Thomas (1999) argued that both these models of disability simplified the complex interactions between the self and society. Disability,

she maintained, can be understood as the interface between the self, and the structures and processes of the social world. She suggested the 'Social Relational' model of disability, which defined disability as 'a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being' (Thomas 1999: 60). Thomas rejected the dualisms of the social/ biological divide, which she believed results in 'a hopeless quest' (1999: 44) to prove which features of impairment can be seen as socially constructed and which biologically determined. Her Social Relational Model enables a perspective which acknowledges the bio-social nature of disability, in which impairment effects are holistically 'shaped by the interaction of biological and social factors, and are bound up with the processes of socio-cultural naming' (Thomas 1999: 43). More recently, Thomas has argued for a Sociology of Disability, which:

would be a variant of equality and diversity studies – located alongside the now familiar engagements with gender, 'race', sexuality, age and social class. The sociology of disability would encompass studies of disablism and impairment effects, with the former taking centre stage.

Thomas 2012: 224

Thus, employing Thomas' sociological interpretation of disability, this study investigated visually impaired students' experiences in educational settings, *and* their social context and policy enactments. A recent large-scale study of disability in higher education settings by Fuller et al. (2009) used a similar approach, drawing on the theoretical framework of Thomas (1999) in order to explore the impact of the interactions between the student and the higher education environment upon the learning experience. As detailed below, due to the particular nature of the issues relating to pedagogy and social interactions, visually impaired students' experiences were explored utilising sensory ethnography.

Consideration of the experiences of people labelled as having a 'sensory impairment' (WAG 2004; Estyn 2011) necessitated an epistemological position which interrogated perceptual interactions. Stoller (1997) suggested that consideration of the senses is required when examining any cultural

practices. Pink (2009) developed this interpretation to suggest that perception is a multi-sensory experience, and that it is meaningless to isolate one, or several of the senses for individual consideration. Thus to explore the perceptual understandings and ways of knowing of visually impaired people, I felt it was necessary to attempt to put sighted, culturally-derived meanings aside. As phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued, critique of taken-for-granted meanings affords the researcher an opportunity to re-evaluate phenomena from an alternative perceptual framework, informed by the meaning-making of visually impaired participants and cultures. Merleau-Ponty stated that a blind man (sic) does not simply experience a lack of sensory stimulation, but has a differentially *structured* experience, 'a new type of synthesis' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 224). More recently Saerberg, drawing on this phenomenological standpoint, has argued that visually impaired people have a particular "blind style of perception" [which]...contains sensory based schemes of interpretation that become relevant in a spatial and embodied process of interpreting the material environment and social situations'. (Saerberg 2010:367). The use of sensory ethnography enabled a study of the impact of each individual's style of perception on learning, interactions, and embodied performance in educational and social contexts.

However, drawing on Thomas (1999), disability can be seen as the interaction between the sensory self, and the social context. Thus the situational context and broader policy enactments are also significant in an interpretive analysis of the experience of visually impaired students in post-compulsory education. Stephen Ball's exploration of meaning within educational organisations, examining 'how policies pose problems to their subjects' (Ball 1997) provides a conceptual frame for the analysis of these social contexts. The study 'bring[s] together the structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies, and micro level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perception and experiences' (Ozga 1990: 359). In Ball's later work, he has suggested that policy enactment 'involves [the] creative processes of interpretation and translation, that is, the re-contextualisation through reading, writing and

talking of the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices' (Braun et al. 2011: 586). An investigation into the contexts of learning, whether situated, professional, material or external, was thus seen as essential to this examination of the educational context of visually impaired students.

Having established the epistemological and theoretical framework of the study, the following section explores the 'exploratory phase' of the project. The concurrent literature review, initial fieldwork interviews and focus groups enabled me to 'funnel' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 160) findings in order to refine the research questions and design.

## **4.2 Exploratory Phase**

The ethnographic approach necessitates a cyclical process, whereby the researcher moves back and forth between the literature and data generation and analysis, refining the research questions and design throughout: 'it is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 160). This progressive focussing process enables the fine tuning of research questions, and ensures the design and methods are robust, valid, and 'fit-for-purpose'. During this study the literature review and initial data generation phases took place simultaneously. Interviews with policy professionals and discussion groups with further education professionals and visually impaired people were informed by theoretical perspectives and research findings in scholarship. The refinement of the research questions and design during this initial exploratory phase was a result of the analysis of the data generated. The process of literature review is outlined in Appendix One.

To gain an insight into the 'state of play' in Wales, in the first six months of the project, initial contact was made with a range of professionals identified through the disability and further education in Wales policy literature search as having an interest in, or knowledge of, issues for disabled students in



further education. Five policy advisors and other professionals from five distinct organisations agreed to take part in informal interviews.

Discussion groups developed as a result of these initial policy interviews, when participants suggested suitable meetings of professionals or visually impaired people which would extend the investigation of the topic. One took place as part of the bi-annual meeting of a professional network for those with a specific responsibility for 'Students with a learning difficulty and/or disability'. The second took place during a three day training course for sixteen visually impaired people who were looking for employment, run by a third sector organisation.

Thematic analysis of the data from these meetings informed the subsequent design of the ethnographic fieldwork. However the data generated from these fieldwork experiences were also treated as data in their own right, and were incorporated into the overall analysis and interpretation.

### **4.3 'Getting in'**

Once the exploratory phase was completed, through synthesis of the literature and analysis of the preliminary fieldwork, the design of the ethnographic fieldwork phase of the research began with consideration of the research settings and sample of participants to be selected.

Literature on the selection of participants in qualitative research documents a series of decisions to be taken. Stake (2005) argued that the conceptual structure of the project denotes the approach to be taken. He separated the intrinsic case study, which leads to greater understanding of the case, from the instrumental, which enables a researcher to 'redraw a generalisation' (Stake 2005: 445). Onwuegbuzie and Leech argued that:

If the goal is not to generalize to a population but to obtain insights into a phenomenon, individuals, or events, as is most often the case in interpretivist studies, then the qualitative researcher purposefully selects individuals, groups, and settings for this phase that increases understanding of phenomena.

Patton (2002) pragmatically suggested that the researcher seek 'information-rich' cases or participants that fit 'the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints being faced' (Patton 2002: 242). Reybold et al (2012) argue that researchers must be consciously aware of the subjective choices made in the selection process and the influence of powerful stakeholders. They must also be alert to the impact of these choices upon the truth claims of their interpretation of findings. In this light, it is the intention of the following sections to illustrate the choices made in the selection of colleges and students to participate in the study.

The case selection was at an intrinsic level, as the primary aim was an examination of the phenomenon of visually impaired students in further education, in order to enable a 'better understanding of this particular case' (Stake 2005: 445). However the intention of a multi-site, multi-participant selection process was to enable cross-case comparison on a *thematic* level, providing some instrumental value. As Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007: 249) argued, whilst the level of generalisability of this approach may be open to question, it was essential that the 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) was not sacrificed when comparing cases, but that the balance between detail and comparative description was achieved.

Whilst research design may necessitate a 'selection process', as outlined above, issues of access and ethics interact with this process, turning research design from a personal project into a social and political concern. As Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggested, 'getting in' to a research site involves a series of social interactions and negotiations. Feminist researchers such as Miller and Bell (2012) argue that these interactions should not take place without an awareness of the 'complex power dynamics that can operate around access and consent' (Miller and Bell 2012: 63).

The formal process of ethical approval began early on in the project, with the necessity of obtaining University consent for the ongoing research, submitted in January 2012. Central to this process was adherence to the professional body's ethical guidelines, in this case the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011). Considerations of informed consent, participation and risk of harm were central. However, as Miller and Bell (2012) argued, there is a danger that this process obscures the need for ongoing reflection throughout the research; the ethics of relationships and actions in the field must be subject to constant critical and reflexive evaluation.

Direct recruitment of participants via the web pages of relevant visual impairment organisations was considered. However the aim and the research questions of the study, and the necessity of fully approved access to all areas of the colleges, meant that recruitment following a college-level access agreement was a necessity. Therefore the selection took place on two levels, firstly on a college level, and then, from within the colleges, on a participant level. The concept of a 'gatekeeper' is one used frequently in the social sciences (Burgess 1982; Reeves 2010), and throughout the research project reflexive awareness of the power of formal and informal gatekeepers in the colleges was maintained. Reeves (2010) suggested that the formal gatekeepers have the power to both induce (or prevent) participation, and to control the research relationships and fieldwork interactions.

This was certainly evident during the initial access negotiations in each of the colleges. In each site, I was met formally by members of senior management teams, who appeared to be 'scoping me out' before making a decision on approving access.

Following this initial tour, I was introduced to the Principal, who took me for coffee and questioned me on my research. She showed a particular interest in my stance on specialist colleges, directly asking 'What is your view? Are you convinced that we should be shut down?' She provided what appeared to be a defensive explanation of the need for specialist provision, and criticised aspects of mainstream provision.

Fieldnotes Ospley 28/11/12

As Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggested, there are four elements to successful access negotiations; connections, accounts, knowledge and courtesy. Of particular note, given the specialist nature of the topic, was the impact of my knowledge. In each case, through my initial email contact and information leaflet, gatekeepers were aware of my significant experience of working with visually impaired people. This knowledge appeared to play a significant role in gaining access.

The exploratory phase of the study had indicated that there were a range of models for service delivery for disabled students in mainstream colleges across Wales. Some colleges had dedicated inclusion departments, some had staff members with additional responsibility for disability, and some bought in specialist services from other organisations such as third sector organisations or social services (FESN Focus Group 27/4/12). However there appeared to be three distinct options available for Welsh students with a visual impairment wishing to attend further education colleges: Attending a specialist college for the visually impaired (all of which were located in England); attending a local mainstream college; or attending a mainstream college with a 'special interest' in visual impairment.

The sample frame therefore indicated three colleges as a suitable model, within the resource and time constrictions of a PhD study. Contact emails were sent to the twenty-one mainstream colleges in operation at the time, and to the two specialist colleges for visually impaired students which had Welsh students enrolled in the year 2011/12. Four colleges responded: one specialist college, two mainstream colleges, and one mainstream college who advertised a special interest in visual impairment. The choice of Weatherwell, as the mainstream college, was made due to geographical location, as it was felt a wider geographical spread improved the validity of the study.

There are a number of weaknesses to this selection process: colleges who perceived a weakness in their delivery of support for students were less likely to come forward; the specialist college's offer was likely to have been, in part

at least, as a result of my previous professional connections; and whilst a geographical spread was attempted, rural and inner-city colleges were not represented. However the three colleges selected, Weatherwell, Ospley, and Brinton, did represent the three FE options for Welsh students. Brief descriptions of each college can be found in Table 4.1, in section 4.5, below while fuller portraits of colleges can be found in Chapter Five, and vignettes of student participants can be found at the beginning of Chapter Seven.

The boundaries for participant selection were delineated by a number of factors. The age range for the study was designated as aged 16 – 25 years, to incorporate those students in education who may have had a more complex learning journey interrupted by life events or later onset visual impairment. The upper age limit restricted the sample population to those who have attended school since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988.

Participant selection from within the three colleges was determined in some part by issues such as enrolment and the organisational processes of each college. It was impossible to follow a strategic participant selection process in Weatherwell, for example, as there was only one visually impaired student enrolled in 2012/13. However the focus group research had indicated that this was not unusual in a number of colleges across Wales, and therefore the selection of Weatherwell was, in this case, representative. In Brinton, the influence of gatekeepers or ‘powerful others’ (Reybold et al 2012: 713) was significant, and became more apparent when entering the field.

Professionals in the inclusion team selected and approached two of the potential six participants, Alex and Steven. Both agreed to participate, however it became apparent upon entering the field that selection had taken place, as I was told by managers that they had de-selected some students because they were ‘troublesome’ (Fieldnotes 6/3/13). This ‘cherry-picking’ of participants by gate-keepers is a significant issue in the study, and therefore interpretation and analysis of findings must pay attention to generalisability, and the ‘unheard voices’. In Ospley, the large number of potential participants (forty five) necessitated a different approach. All students in the

college were sent an invitation to participate via email, forwarded by a member of staff. Volunteers were invited to an initial meeting, and two students were recruited from a potential four. The two students selected, Keith and John, were chosen as representative due to their levels of vision, as Keith was registered sight impaired, and John was registered severely sight impaired.

However a further dimension of the difficulties in the selection process is evident in the discussion above. The low numbers of visually impaired students in Wales, when combined with the restrictions in time and resources of this study, meant that representation across a number of social dimensions, such as class, and ethnicity, was impossible to achieve. Gender was a further challenge, as genetic conditions are more prevalent in under 25 year old males (Schwarz et al 2002), and therefore all of the students who had been recruited at this stage were male. A conscious decision was made to recruit a female participant. The female students in Ospley were sent a repeat email welcoming participation, and Ffion came forward as a volunteer. Vignettes of each student can be found in Chapter Seven.

Particular attention was paid to considerations of informed consent and ethics in the design of the study, due to the vulnerable nature of the participants. Christians (2005: 144) suggested that there are two significant elements to informed consent: that participation is voluntary, and that full and open information on the details of the research is available. However scholars have questioned this simplistic approach. Feminists such as Miller (2013) and Reeves (2010) have suggested that ethical fieldwork practices involve continued on-going negotiations of consent, particularly within ethnographic, inductive research, where the research questions, methods and analysis may be constantly revised.

For this particular group of participants there were both practical and political dimensions to the ethical negotiation of consent. On the practical level, all information needed to be provided in an accessible format. As the students collectively used an array of information access techniques, initial contact needed to include a discussion of preferred format. In each case electronic

communication was deemed the most effective, as each student had their own appropriate access software. Information leaflets were also fully accessible in terms of design; no diagrams or images were used, despite criticism from 'critical friends' as to their 'drab' appearance. In addition, arrangements for meeting places and methods of contact needed to be established; for example it was agreed with each participant that I would verbally inform them when I was present and observing, and when I was leaving, as visual checking by participants was not possible

On a political level, the negotiation of consent and ethical fieldwork relations was informed in part by debates within the disability theory literature. Whilst some activists (for example, Barnes 1996) have suggested that non-disabled people cannot provide impartial disability research, Humphrey (2000) thoroughly rehearsed the arguments regarding the researching of disabled people by non-disabled academics. She came to the conclusion that the binary division of disabled and non-disabled people belies the plurality of human identity, and that positioning the research as participatory with an emancipatory agenda is a far more valid aspiration. This position was supported by Duckett and Pratt's (2001) project investigating visually impaired people's opinions on research. An emancipatory element was built into the research aim (in terms of the aim to understand and provide suggestions to improve successful educational experiences) and the participatory dimension built into the methods design (see below). However the complexities of explaining the potential implications of the research to young men and women were more challenging (see 'In the Field' section, below).

The issues of confidentiality and anonymity were further complicated by the 'visually impaired world', which was described by one participant as a 'small village, spread out across the country' (Fieldnotes 27/2/13). During my initial group meeting with Ospley students, they quizzed me on participants from other colleges. Although I mentioned neither gender nor location, they were able to guess the identity of a participant purely from his course. It was evident that whilst confidentiality could be perceived of as an aim, the tightly

interconnected networks of professionals, parents and visually impaired people could render colleges, staff members and visually impaired students recognisable to those who were part of 'the village'. Considerable changes were made to descriptive information within the empirical chapters of this thesis, however it is necessary to acknowledge that, as a number of authors have argued (Tannock 2012; Nesper 2000; Svalastog and Eriksson 2010), the situated, fine-grained nature of this ethnographic study is likely to provide a level of recognisable detail, from within the 'village' of the visually impaired world.

#### **4.4 Design of Fieldwork Methods**

An ethnographic approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) was selected as it enabled depth-exploration of the meaning-making and interactions of visually impaired people in the educational environment, and thus aimed to create 'a picture of the "way of life" of some identifiable group of people' (Wolcott 1994; 188). Though the rigor of ethnography has been questioned in terms of issues of objectivity, representation and generalisability (Silverman, 1993; Delamont and Atkinson, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), Coffey (1999) has argued that ethnography has been increasingly viewed as 'cross/interdisciplinary and "respectable"' (Coffey 1999: 2).

As has been noted, there is a paucity of research on the experiences of visually impaired people in general, and on their experiences in education in particular. However this study adds to the rich tradition of ethnographic research in education, which reaches back to Margaret Mead's seminal work, 'The School in American Culture' (Mead 1951). Her ethnographic approach was furthered by authors such as Wolcott (1973), and Lacey (1970) in the 1970s. The micro-analysis of the classroom setting, found in Chapter Eight, was influenced by, and adds to the educational work of sociological ethnographers such as Stubbs and Delamont (1976) and Willis



(1977). It also draws from, and compliments, 'policy ethnography', such as Ball's (1981) examination of the micro-culture of *Beachside Comprehensive*. Emerging developments in sensory ethnography informed the data generation methods (discussed below), and were influenced by scholars such as Pink (2009) and Curtis (2008). This study thus contributes to the tradition of ethnography that explores the lived experiences of students in educational settings, and their navigation of the intellectual, political, social and physical contexts of the colleges. It also furthers the work of the recent Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP: 2008), which was the largest educational research initiative undertaken in the UK. It conducted a series of investigations into the further education sector. One strand of the programme included an ethnographic investigation of the experiences of Welsh students and professionals (Jephcote and Salisbury 2007), and this study therefore adds a new dimension to this previous work. However, only four ethnographic studies of visually impaired people were identified in the literature search (Hyder 2012; Hyder and Tissot 2013; Andrew 2013; MacPherson 2011). Thus, in addition to the exploration of the impact of educational policies and practices, the study enriches academic understanding of visually impaired peoples' 'sociocultural knowledge' (Spindler and Spindler 1992: 73), illustrating locally embedded practices, routines and rituals.

The design of the ethnographic fieldwork needed to pay attention to the significance of 'sensory impairment' in the contexts of the colleges. Research question two asked 'How do visually impaired students *experience* the practices of teaching, learning and disability support?' and the design thus recognised that the sensory characteristics of each student impacted upon their experience of the setting and interactions in unique ways. Visually impaired people are socially defined as having a lack of a particular sensory mode, which differentiates them from the 'normal' (Parsons et al. 2009). Sociological and psychological definitions of the senses, 'normal' perception, and the perceived role and prominence of the different senses in society has been explored in Chapter Two. In terms of research design, sensory ethnography was utilised to enable a more thorough interrogation of the

particular sensory frame (or schema) of the students' experiences in the social settings of colleges. Pink (2009; 2011) proposed a sensory ethnography which explores 'how people make place or experience inequalities in their everyday lives' (Pink and Howes 2010: 332). This concept was developed further by Ede (2009), in her theoretical discussion on the nature of sensory ethnography. She presented a critique of occularcentrism, and discussed the visually orientated Western consumer culture, with its 'hegemony of the eye' (Ede 2009: 62). The attention to the senses in fieldwork observations and interviews thus necessitated a significant level of attention to the multi-sensorial nature of the environment and interactions, which this extract from my field notes demonstrates:

As I sat there, Edward, a partially sighted student I'd just met, passed by. As agreed with the students, I said 'hi' to let him know I was there, and he gave me a wink, with a grin, which I guessed was due to the enormous, multi-coloured, pump action water pistol he was carrying. He was accompanied by James. The two moved off to the orchard, lurking next to the slightly odorous guide dog toileting pen. Edward passed the gun to James, and some time was spent while Edward explained the mechanism while James felt all over it. At this moment Sarah approached the toileting pen, with her guide dog on harness, clinking. Edward dragged James off the path, and helped James to sight the oblivious Sarah with the water machine gun. Edward said: 'Listen...wait for it...listen...fire!' A large jet of water hit Sarah on the back of the head and Sarah jumped a metre in the air as her guide dog wheeled around barking. Laughing, she shouted 'who bloody did that? Who is there?' The two young men were laughing so much they couldn't speak.

Fieldnotes 23/4/13

The sensorial nature of the fieldnotes enabled a depth analysis of how students such as James, who has no vision, experienced the college environment and interactions with others. Pink (2009) put forward an argument that is worth quoting in full:

By attending to the sensoriality and materiality of other people's ways of being in the world, we cannot directly access or share their personal, individual, biographical, shared or "collective" memories, experiences or imaginations...However we can by aligning our bodies, rhythms, tastes, ways of seeing and more with theirs, thus feel that we are similarly emplaced.

Pink 2009: 40

The extent to which this is achievable is open to debate, and whether a sighted researcher can feel 'similarly emplaced' to a visually impaired person could be questioned. However the intensive observations, coupled with explorations of each individual's sensory constructs in interview and during daily practices, created a 'bricolage' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 3) of data from which aspects of sensory embodiment and practices could be explored. This level of depth also had an unexpected impact on my experience of research:

Day two, and I am utterly exhausted. I feel the need to lie in a darkened room with earplugs in. The concentration involved is immense - a constant attention to sounds, objects (and the students tactile interactions with them), smells, sights (both those perceived and not perceived by the students), how they use wind, and light, and sonic perception to negotiate the environment... it is sensory overload, and a new form of being in the world, Zen-like, paying attention to the minute wonders of everyday life.

Fieldnotes 17/4/13

Three primary methods were planned for data generation: observation, interview and documentary analysis. Design of the observation element of fieldwork was contingent on two dimensions: my role as a researcher in the field, and thematic awareness. The issue of the researcher role has been debated at some length; for example Lofland and Lofland (1995) outline a range of typologies which specify the possible levels of participation, interaction and observation (Junker 1960; Schatzman and Strauss 1973; Adler and Adler 1987 in Lofland and Lofland 1995). As I was a 'known' researcher, without a visual impairment, who was not a current further education professional or student, I was not an active participant. However my intention was not to become 'invisible', with its attendant ethical issues (Berg 1989). My presence in the closed (and CRB checked) environments of the colleges was such that a full introduction and explanation of my presence was necessary with each new contact. Thus I saw my position as one of 'observer participant', in that my primary, declared function was observation of daily practices and routines. The impact of this approach will be discussed in 'In the Field', below. Design of the observation was relatively 'unstructured', with data generation being the key to the development of categories for analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3). However

several key themes and categories emerging from the exploratory phase were placed in my fieldnotes as an 'aide memoir'.

In contrast, the planned interviews were subjected to a design process prior to entering the field. Semi-structured interviews, with accessible elicitation methods using tactile and auditory props, were designed. They enabled a flexible and interactive approach to data generation, which nonetheless provided a degree of standardisation to enable comparative analysis (Flick 2007:43). Following Bryman's recommendations for the construction of an interview guide (2002), the schedules enabled a 'logical flow' of questioning on the topics, but were flexible, in terms of prompts and extension questions. Using these approaches, three primary schedules were developed, for students, tutors and managerial staff across all the colleges (see Appendix Two for the student example), although unique interview schedules were also required for residential staff in Ospley College. As Charmaz (2002) suggested, the questions were open-ended, and reflected the interactionist emphasis on subjective meanings. For the student participants, the 'logical flow' was in the manner of an 'educational history'; an exploration of the students' accounts of their educational biography and their stories of transitions in and through education. Although the focus of the study was on the experiences of students in further education, pilot data (Ellerton 2011) revealed the significance of past experiences both to previous decision-making during transition to college, and to present actions and interactions in colleges. Thus the interview schedules followed a chronological structure. For, as Wengraf has argued:

In order to understand the present perspective and situation of an individual interviewee, we need to know as much as possible about his or her personal and interpersonal history, and to locate that personal and interpersonal history within the history of contexts.

Wengraf 2000: 143

In addition to the two primary methods of ethnographic fieldwork outlined above, a range of relevant documents were collected. Prior (2004) argued that documents act as 'agents' and 'situated products' illustrating the division of labour, and defining and specifying 'things in the world'(Prior 2004: 375). It was agreed as part of the access negotiations with each site that copies of

public documents, such as prospectuses, equality and diversity policies and inspection reports would be available. In addition confidential data relating to individual students was to be collected, including college reports and Individual Education Plans, with the permission of each student.

Unfortunately, Ospley College was not able to release this data. Other documents collected included images of notice boards, college areas, and teaching tools. The primary aim of the documentary element was to examine whether, or to what extent, the 'public face' and institutional aims of each institution was reflected in the daily practices in situ, and to what extent policies were 're-contextualised' (Braun et al. 2011) by agents 'on the ground'.

The following section will explore how this methodological design was enacted in practice in the field, and will further analyse the significance of reflexivity in the research design and fieldwork.

#### **4.5 'In the Field'**

The ethnographic research took place in three colleges in four sites (two sites in Brinton College) over a five month period in 2013, as Table 4.1 (overleaf) illustrates.

In each site, two interviews were conducted with each student participant, one prior to observation, and one on the last day of fieldwork. Interviews were also conducted with the students' primary tutors and with a representative of management with a responsibility for 'students with a learning difficulty and/or disability'. In Ospley, additional interviews were held with residential and pastoral support staff (as this was an additional dimension of college provision), and with the Principal, who requested an interview. Each interview took place in a private room, without bystanders, and followed the interview schedules, with prompts, clarifications and elaborations when dictated by the narrative flow. They were recorded using a standard digital Dictaphone, and fieldnotes were taken simultaneously to record non-verbal observations, such as gestures, posture and body-

language. Informal interviews and conversations were also conducted with peers, support staff and canteen staff.

Two issues emerged during the conduct of the interviews with the student participants. Firstly my political beliefs in an emancipatory agenda were challenged by the participants themselves. Hyder (2012) designed a small scale ethnographic PhD project with visually impaired library users. She found that a conflict developed between her beliefs in following an emancipatory, participatory agenda, as dictated by the literature and political dimensions of disability, and the opinions of the participants themselves. She states: 'this approach assumes that participants themselves have the desire to control the project' (Hyder 2012: 132). Whilst I had designed and planned initial meetings to pay attention to the 'agency, empowerment and voice' of young people (Holland et al. 2010), none of the participants wished to discuss the political agenda or ethical considerations. For example, all six of the participants wanted to use their own names. In this way, the agency of the participants could be said to have been undermined, as I was forced to insist on confidentiality (due to professional ethical guidelines and college-level agreements).

As Tannock (2012) suggests:

We [researchers] are not only entitled, but actually expected, to appropriate full authorial rights, by turning these living, breathing historical individuals into fictional characters, the names and identities over which we ourselves exercise full and final control.

Tannock 2012: 25

In addition, all of the students professed boredom when the implications and uses of the research were being explained, 'wasting their time' (in one participant's words), on what they viewed as long-winded explanations of the future uses of their data.

**Table 4.1: Ethnographic Fieldwork**

<b>College</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Student(s)</b>	<b>Timescales of fieldwork</b>
<b>Brinton</b>	A mainstream college in a small town, Brinton College has a number of campuses across two Welsh counties. It offers a wide range of over 75 courses, with some subjects available up to Foundation Degree level. The student population numbers over eight thousand. Brinton expresses a 'special interest' in visual impairment in its documentation.	<b>Steven</b> 17yrs Sport Registration status: Sight impaired <b>Alex</b> 18yrs Drama Severely sight impaired	8/2/13-15/3/13 4 days per week
<b>Ospley</b>	Ospley is an independent specialist residential college in England, for students aged over sixteen with a visual impairment. It consists of one campus, with halls of residence and large teaching areas. The college offers courses from Entry Level to Level Three, all of which are accessible to blind and partially sighted learners. The college had 45 full-time residential students in the academic year 2012/13.	<b>John</b> 18yrs Sport and Maths Severely sight impaired <b>Keith</b> 17 years Business Studies Sight impaired <b>Ffion</b> 21yrs Drama and Business Studies Severely sight impaired	8/4/13-5/5/13 Residential 4 days per week
<b>Weatherwell</b>	Weatherwell College is located in a large town. The college offers over 100 courses in a vast array of topics, from Entry Level One to Post-graduate Level Seven courses. There are over eight thousand full-time, and over twenty thousand part-time students enrolled. The majority of courses are available bilingually, in English and Welsh.	<b>Tom</b> 16yrs Catering Sight impaired	13/5/13-29/5/13 3 days per week

Secondly, the accessible elicitation methods, designed to enrich the semi-structured interview format, provided an unexpected challenge to research relationships. The methods included the use of a tactile or large print timeline, and the use of an audio-recording of a fifteen-year-old girl discussing the support she had experienced in school. However, as was

noted above, participants frequently have their own agendas and perspectives on the research process, and in each case the elicitation tools were greeted with disdain: 'Can't we just get on with it?' (Interview 9/2/13). In addition, as the field work progressed it was apparent that the selection of tactile, large print or audio media can be highly sensitive for visually impaired people, and was a significant theme in the data, particularly for those who have experienced recent sight loss:

I now use...ugh, disgusting. I now use 30 bold Arial... I am learning Braille. I don't really like it, if I'm honest though. I think, because me and my dad are the same, it's why we don't use speech. We can't stand it.

Ffion interview 23/4/13

In this case the use of a particular media (whether sound, large print or tactile object) as an elicitation tool represented much more than a 'useful research device' to stimulate thought and discussion; for these particular participants it represented a value-judgement on their sensory abilities, and at times created difficulties with establishing rapport: 'what, you think I can't read?' (Fieldnotes 8/2/13). Although abandoned as a research tool after two interviews, the experience generated much useful data and themes for further exploration in the field and in subsequent interviews.

Observations were completed over a minimum of five days for each student, covering each of their college attendance days and each module or topic area of their course. Scratch fieldnotes were recorded in a spiral bound A4 notepad, and expanded upon the same day to form the 'out-of-the-field' version (Delamont 1992: 60), the primary data record for each day. As Delamont (1992: 60) suggested, many scratch fieldnotes cannot be published due to unintelligibility, and the possibility of identifiers, however an anonymised example can be found in Appendix Three, along with the final fieldnote which was included in the analytical process. The scratch note also illustrates some initial thoughts on themes of masculinity emerging from the data. As an 'observer-participant', this 'obvious researcher' method of carrying a notepad, was appropriate in that it presented the 'researcher' image to those in the field who were able to see me. To ensure parity I informed visually impaired participants (including class members) that I



would be writing in a book each time I observed them. As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995: 27) maintained, this in-situ note-taking method produced a 'detailed, closer-to-the-moment record' although, as they suggested, at times I was drawn 'into the action' and recorded observations later in the day. The presence of a notebook may have resulted in distancing and reactivity, however the nature of my presence as an 'outsider', alongside personal dimensions such as my age, and my positioning within the classroom, were such that it was evident to all that I was neither a student, nor a member of staff. Students and staff expressed curiosity at what I was writing; each time I read a snippet from my fieldnote book and asked them to comment on whether they thought I'd captured the events accurately. Thus:

Rather than viewing reactivity as a defect to be carefully controlled or eliminated in entirety, the ethnographer needs to become sensitive to and perceptive of how she is seen and treated by others.

Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995: 27

In their exploration of issues of 'strangeness' and 'familiarity', Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003) outlined the debates that have raged in the fields of anthropology and ethnography for some years. 'Outsider' research has been celebrated by some for its ability to create a 'culture shock' enabling detailed perception of events and curiosity (Aguilar 1981 in Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont 2003: 38). However others argue that 'insider' researchers are less likely to disrupt social settings, and have a wealth of useful cultural knowledge. My position as a researcher belied the dichotomy of these 'essentialist' perspectives, supporting Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont's (2003) arguments for more complex understandings of the positionality of the researcher.

Reflexivity was essential during the fieldwork phase, and indeed during the whole study. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, prior to my commencement of the PhD, I had been a long-standing professional working with visually impaired people in education and social care departments. Despite my professional experiences, however, I could not be designated an 'insider' researcher. Although I have a great deal of 'insider information', I am

not visually impaired, nor am I a currently practicing further education tutor. However my professional experience had given me a range of knowledges and skills which could not truly enable me to claim outsider status. I had knowledge of accessibility issues, for example the range of formats available. I had taught mobility, 'long cane' (known by the 'public' as a white stick) and orientation techniques to over two hundred visually impaired people. I was comfortable with the social conventions of meeting visually impaired people, such as lightly touching a hand to prompt a handshake during introductions. I had depth knowledge of the medicalised notions of 'eye conditions', with the accompanying 'functional effects' in terms of levels and types of visual perception and the potential implications for performing the different tasks of daily life. These knowledges were a 'double-edged sword', in that they could be viewed as a construct of my training as a Rehabilitation Officer, and without continual reflexive awareness, could influence my focus in the field and my interpretation of data. However these knowledges and my professional experience were vital to both my success in accessing the sites, (particularly to those that professed a lack of knowledge: 'It'll be great, you can take a look and tell us where we're going wrong – we're struggling a bit' Fieldnotes 5/1/12), and in developing my ongoing rapport in the field.

Although I adopted the 'outsider-participant' persona (Lofland and Lofland 1985) in terms of the visible researcher identity, my roles within the field shifted with time, location, and activity (O'Reilly 2009). I ensured from the first encounters that I was friendly, open and helpful in all settings. I took lunch with staff and students and discussed my home life and work. I 'made myself useful' in classrooms and corridors when necessary, for example 'offering an arm' (providing sighted guide) or audio-describing visual events. In the early stages I was frequently tested by students and staff as to the extent of my knowledge: 'So, do you know \_\_\_\_? She was in that college down south and did that project on kids, what was it?' (Fieldnotes 28/11/12). These early stages seemed to enable me to be classified as 'one of us', part of the 'village of the VI'. However after this 'initiation' phase, my approach seemed to be valued by participants:

Thing is we get loads of researchers here, and it is like we are trained monkeys, sitting in the corner and staring at us like we are in a zoo or something, but this has been different, you know what we're about, and you get involved, and then it is like, I wanted to tell you what it is like for me, coz you even get what it is like with my sight.

Keith fieldnotes 2/5/13

Although Reeves has argued that some rapport can be disingenuous (2010: 320), for me power relationships in the field were much more complex than this, and shifted frequently. As such I have adopted Naples' interpretation of the position of the researcher:

As ethnographers we are never fully outside or inside the "community"; our relationship to the community is never expressed in general terms but is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in particular everyday interactions; and these interactions are themselves located in shifting relationships among community residents.

Naples 1997: 71

One challenging dimension was managing the different 'factions' in each site, and across sites; an experience similar to Todd's (1995) negotiations while completing an ethnography in a special school. The teaching staff, support staff, managers and students each presented views on the other groups, and on other colleges and organisations. Like Todd (1995: 11), it was essential I maintained my role as an 'outsider' to avoid being viewed as 'taking sides', and to ensure I did not 'go native' or lose objectivity (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

At times, my fieldnotes reflected the struggle I had in maintaining this sense of objectivity, when my biography, previous experiences and knowledges of the field played such a significant role. My emotional responses in some of the colleges were palpable, and caused some deep reflections on my motivations for the task itself. This highlighted the significant dimension of personal experience in the conceptualisation and construction of my research, and in embodied interactions in the fieldwork sites. As Coffey suggested, 'the relationship between the field and the self is complicated by the personal embeddedness of the ethnographic research task' (Coffey 1999: 20).

I had lived and worked in Ospley for a year, for example, an experience which had been highly affecting for me as a young woman. Returning after nearly twenty years, I was aware of the changes in the institution, but also of the changes in myself, and this provoked a reflective period heightened by my removal from my family for the duration of the fieldwork.

I have been in the college for just one day, and I am finding my history here completely overwhelming. Everywhere I walk, I'm seeing the ghosts of students past, how they looked, what they did, and how they affected me. I'm working hard to observe the interactions, processes and organisation of Ospley, yet I've become aware that I must guard against a natural instinct to compare 'now and then' as opposed to simply interrogating the 'now'.

Fieldnotes16/4/13

However the distance in time to some extent enabled my recasting as a researcher, and as a professional, and I was able to sustain a sense of the 'strange' in a setting that was at once familiar and entirely new.

It was also evident that my sense of 'belonging' varied not only as a result of familiarity with the sites, but also by course. My personal history had almost entirely excluded an experience of sport, for example; I was one of the classic 'last to be picked' in school. My alienation in the sports settings led me to feel far more of an 'outsider' than in some of the other venues:

I felt very much alien to the environment, both through my age and through my lack of experience in such a dedicated sports environment. Everyone on campus apart from me, including the tutors, wore sports gear throughout the day, and much of the conversation was related to sport. It was hard to be an observer without also being observed, due my attire, and my notepad and bag. Even at Steven's age I did not engage in this way with sport.

Fieldnotes 22/2/13

To counteract these emotional responses I used a fieldwork diary daily to note my responses, with the intention of scrutinizing my personal and affective reactions. As Hammersley and Atkinson argued, 'we can minimise reactivity and/or monitor it' (2007: 16). I found that in each site, my recourse to personal reflection diminished as the new experiences overwhelmed them.

Delamont suggested that 'once the fieldsite feels like home it is time to leave' (Delamont 2007: 214). Similar to Wulff (2000), the nature of my fieldwork was such that I had to make four 'exits' from fieldwork, from each site. In

each site the 'new experiences' feeling diminished and a sense of familiarity began. Field notes became less substantial, as contextual factors had been recorded previously. As I made preparations to leave, in each site I gave a few days notice to students and staff, and a number of participants 'buttonholed' me to give additional information they felt it was essential for me to know. As has been noted by a number of ethnographic researchers (Delamont 1992; Reeves 2010; Wulff 2000), I had a creeping sense that 'my intentions were mixed and that I had manipulated the relationships for the purpose of research' (Harrell-Bond 1981:119), or that I was acting as 'Researcher as Vampire' (Ward 2013). In order to establish and maintain the sense of co-construction of the research, I had agreed during access negotiations to continue contact following the fieldwork phase, and to discuss analysis and interpretation with students and staff during the writing up process, which in some ways mitigated the 'vampire' effect. Staff in the two mainstream colleges requested feedback on teaching and support practices, and in the spirit of 'mutual gain', with very clear provisos that these were my opinion, and with supervisor approval, these were provided (see Appendix Four). Email contact was also re-established with students after the analysis of data, with an invitation to comment on my analysis, and to provide an update of events in their lives since the fieldwork had ended. Delamont stated that 'the real analytic work cannot begin until the fieldwork ends, but it must not be left in its entirety till then' (2002:166). Whilst analysis, through the use of analytical memos, notes and thematic inquiries took place throughout the fieldwork, scholarly depth analysis of the data began in earnest when the fieldwork had been completed.

## **4.6 Analysis**

Despite the application of rigorous research design, methods and techniques, researchers are inevitably providing an *interpretation* of the data generated. It is thus recognised that data generation, analysis and interpretation were influenced by the knowledge frames and values of the researcher (Adkins 2002). With Altheide and Johnson (2013), I see the

research as positioned within a framework of 'analytical realism', informed by the basic assumption that 'the social world is an interpreted world, always under symbolic construction' (Altheide and Johnson 2013: 390). The validity of my analysis and interpretation is thus located within the reflexive accounting process. The processes of 'validity-as-reflexive-accounting' (Altheide and Johnson 2013: 390) whilst relevant throughout the research process, were particularly significant to the analytical phases described below.

Fieldwork included ongoing analysis; each evening scratch notes were expanded, and supplemented with theoretical notes and memos. As suggested by Schatzman and Strauss (1973: 99), fieldnotes were separated into observational notes, theoretical notes and methodological notes, although in the field all were recorded in the field notebook, to avoid the necessity of carrying multiple books. At the conclusion of fieldwork in each site, time was spent reading and re-reading data, and a series of in-depth analytical memos were recorded, which informed subsequent research phases, and acted as 'starting points' for the in-depth analysis following the completion of fieldwork.

Three potential frameworks for analysis were considered. Miles and Huberman's (1994) process of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing, and Tesch's de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation (1990) were useful approaches, however Wolcott's (1994) description, analysis and interpretation most closely reflected the imperatives of the research aim and questions. The literature had suggested that the individual characteristics and experiences are a factor in the experience of disability (Thomas 1999), and there was therefore a need to provide 'thick description' of the life-worlds of visually impaired people, in order to contextualise their experience of the educational environment. The largely descriptive analysis found in Chapters Five and Seven reflects this imperative, and contextualises the more critical analysis to be found in Chapters Six and Eight.

However, as Wolcott (1988: 16) suggested, 'data are tainted with an analytical or interpretive cast *in the very process of becoming data*'. An open acknowledgement of the analytical frame is essential. Although I took a progressive focussing approach, the themes that emerged from the 'exploratory phase' became the foundation of the ethnographic phase, and thus could be viewed as deterministic. However, many additional themes were identified during the fieldwork, and through the open coding process. Analytical notes also evidenced some contradictory findings, and issues that challenged the theoretical thoughts I had developed in the early stages. In addition, the process of analysis described below ensured the interpretation emerged directly from the data.

On completion of the fieldwork, I had one hundred and ninety five pages of typed field notes, and twenty eight interview transcriptions, in addition to fieldnotes of the policy interviews, and transcriptions of the focus group and five individual interviews with visually impaired attendees at the employment course. I typed all the fieldnotes, but paid for the transcription of interviews due to time constraints. However I listened to each interview and checked the transcriptions simultaneously, making adjustments as necessary.

The data were analysed following grounded theory approaches (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Coffey and Atkinson 1996), using the NVivo8 software package. As Charmaz (2008) suggested, there is a danger that this analytical method can become procedural, without paying attention to the epistemological underpinnings of the process. An inductive, constructivist, comparative grounded theory approach was adopted (Charmaz 2002: 678). The data were initially open-coded, generating 86 codes; some in-vivo, and some consistent with codes previously identified. The open coding ensured that analysis stayed close to the data, and that the themes identified were drawn from the data. It allowed me to identify themes not addressed in the literature, and to analyse the perspectives and narratives of the participants. The 86 codes from this process were then combined with the coding framework from the exploratory phase. The definitions and boundaries of these focussed codes were refined.

At this stage the research questions were also refined, to reflect the conceptual shifts suggested by the data (Flick 2007; Hammersley 2006). The full coding frame was then established (see Coding Scheme, Appendix Five) using 23 key codes, with 125 sub-categories. While some scholars, such as Miles et al. have suggested that 'coding *is* the analysis' (2014: 72), I favoured the proposition that this phase of analysis enables researchers 'to use our codings and categories to think with' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 49). The development of analytical memos during the coding process became the foundation of later, comparative analysis. Close coding of all data was then completed, in three phases, and exceptions and missing data were identified. Following this, comparative analysis between key codes was completed, across student, professional and institutional dimensions, and with a focus on codes which had suggested patterns, regularities or exceptions (Delamont 1992).

In terms of representation of the analysis, Spencer (2001: 450) stated that we must be 'open about...limitations and partiality' in our ethnographic representations. Any attempt to provide an account of another's 'life-world' must be honest in acknowledging its constructed nature. As Clifford and Marcus (1986:10) argued, 'the simplest cultural accounts are intentional creations'. Past critiques of authorial authority and the 'othering' of participants by feminist, post-modernist and feminist writers (Coffey 2004:139) suggest the need for a reflexive awareness of the power relationships involved in the analysis and representation of 'others'. Thus in Chapter Seven, for example, privilege was given to 'empowering by giving voice to the individual experience of oppression' (Chamberlayne et al 2000: 4). The aim was not to 'get to the truth', but to explore students' own understandings and descriptions of themselves and their experiences in educational environments.

Narrative analysis of interview data was used to enable an exploration of the student participants' constructions of their selves and identities, through interrogation of the devices used to explain experiences, feelings and actions; for 'stories present a narrator's inner reality to the outside world' (Gibbs 2007: 61). This form of analysis and representation, enabled



consideration of 'what substantive elements of the accounts tell us about the social world' (Elliot 2005: 39), from the viewpoints of the participants. Additionally, as processes of transition in contemporary education are argued to have become increasingly diverse and complex (Cieslik and Pollock 2002), and the experiences of young disabled people have been found to be particularly fragmented (Coles 1997), the analysis also examines the students' reflections on their educational biographies.

## **Conclusion**

As Ball (1991) suggested, the interpretation of data in this thesis was thus based on an appreciation of the 'complexity and inter-relatedness' of a social totality (Ball 1991: 189). The case studies are instrumental, following Stake's definition (2005: 445), in that they facilitate understanding of a broader issue. The study 'locate[s] and explain[s] what goes on in a case in terms of its wider societal context' (Hammersley and Gomm 2000: 6). However, concerns in any consideration of case studies obviously relate to issues of generalisability, and typicality. Donmoyer (2000) states that debates on generalisability dominate discussions around the use of case studies, but that a more complex understanding of the process of research is required, whereby each individual case or study expands the range of interpretations available to the research consumer, providing a richer schema of understanding. The aim of the interpretation was thus not to suggest a predictive hypothesis, but rather to provide a 'thick description' of the life worlds of visually impaired students in further education. In addition the analysis and interpretation aimed to develop a series of inter-related analytical conceptualisations of the practices, performances and opinions of actors in the field of visually impaired further education which could be applied in future studies. In the following chapters it is hoped the ethnographically observed world of the visually impaired student will come to life, through 'thick description' and analysis of the colleges, the contexts of provision, and the narratives of the students, before the final empirical chapter hones in on the 'pedagogic moments' of teaching and learning.

## Chapter Five: An Introduction to The Colleges

In this Chapter, descriptions of each of the colleges serve as a contextual introduction to each of the sites, providing a 'thick description' (Geertz 1993) of the locations of the fieldwork, and of the participants involved in data generation. Depicting the college settings here enables the reader to contextualise the analysis of the student experiences and professional practices in later chapters.

The ethnographic in-depth description of the educational environment to be found below includes data generated from student and professional interviews, fieldwork observations, and college documentary data and inspection reports. Comparative analysis revealed a number of themes pertinent to the study. The history of each college, the geographical location, and the related student intake each impacted on the ethos, culture, and practices of each college. In particular there were marked differences in the organisation of support services for visually impaired students, and in professional attitudes towards this support, which had a direct impact on the ability of each site to enact inclusive practices in the classroom. These situated and professional dimensions of the enactment of policy (Braun et al. 2011) will be subject to more detailed critical analysis of issues in the college contexts discussed in Chapter Six, where themes of funding, course provision, ideology and politics, pedagogy and support will be analysed in some depth. However firstly, in this chapter, each of the sites will be described in turn, drawing out the history of the college, the academic courses available and the student intake. In addition an ethnographic description of each college will place the student participants in each site. Subsequently, for each college, the organisation of support for VI students will be described, and the experience and attitudes of professional participants explored. Finally, in each section, the processes and practices in providing support will be outlined.

## 5.1 Brinton College

We have very high aspirations for all of our students and have built our reputation on our outstanding results year after year. We have a tremendous track record and we have some exciting projects coming up...

Brinton College Prospectus 2013

Brinton College began as a mining institute, becoming a Technical College in 1949 (Brinton College 2013a). In 1999, the technical college merged with a nearby college, becoming an independent college of further education. In 2013 Brinton College merged with another large college in an adjoining county, creating a large multi-site institution of which Brinton College was one (Jones 2013). However, due to the recency of this event at the time of writing, data was only available for Brinton College, as a distinct institution.

Brinton is located at the edge of a large town, and serves the town and surrounding rural areas. It offers a wide range of courses, in both A-levels and in vocational courses such as the BTEC awards, with some subjects available up to level six on the Qualifications Framework (Brinton College 2013). The prospectus (Brinton College 2013) enthusiastically described the course options:

More than just an education. Brinton offers outstanding results and consistency that can only be offered by a large stable college. Brinton has one of the widest ranges of A Level courses in Wales and offers vocational courses in every conceivable area. It is a truly inclusive College with courses that appeal to all ages and interests.

(Brinton College 2013: 3)

It had a student population of over twelve thousand in academic year 2012-13, the majority of whom were white, working or lower middle class, and living locally (Jones 2013). It has over six hundred and sixty staff (full-time equivalent). Estyn (2012:1) reported that:

In 2011-2012 the college enrolled nearly 4,000 full-time and about 9,700 part-time learners. Just over 50% of learners are female and about 3% of learners are members of ethnic minority groups. Forty-six per cent of full-

time learners receive the Educational Maintenance Allowance. About 2% of the learners at the college speak Welsh.

The local authority of Brinton issued over one thousand three hundred EMA grants in the academic year 2012/13 (Stats Wales 2014), an amount only exceeded by colleges in the two major cities in Wales. The numbers eligible for Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) suggests that a large number of Brinton students live in low-income households , as eligibility begins at £20,817 or under (annual income) (Welsh Government 2014). In the local authority area of the college, only one independent school has a sixth form (Estyn Inspection Report 2012), and therefore the majority of local A-level students attend Brinton college. When compared with other further education institutions in Wales, A-level students thus comprise a high 8% of the overall population of full and part-time students (Jones 2013: 14). Brinton received an overall evaluation of 'Good' in its last overall inspection, with an assessment of 'Good' for 'Care, Support and Guidance' (Estyn 2012).

The diversity of courses available resulted in a fascinating assortment of students and staff in the corridors and social spaces of the college:

In the afternoon I left the odorous sports campus, and travelled the few miles to the main campus. This was a much larger, with seven or eight large buildings. I waited for Alex in the café. There were two pool tables with ten students crowded around them, heckling and laughing. There were also about ten café-type tables, and some comfortable sofas and beanbags. A television tuned to a music station was blaring loudly from the end of the room. There were two serving hatches, with a variety of food from a range of countries to choose from. This site hosts a large range of courses, and the students were therefore much more mixed in terms of age and dress than the sports campus. EMOs were mixed with heavy metal fans, and a young man with long hair and a beard, dressed bohemian-style, was strumming a guitar in the corner. A group of young men dressed in construction gear (protective boiler suits and heavy-duty work boots, covered in a film of dust) walked past, sneering at the guitarist. There was a very different atmosphere to the sports campus, with what appears to be an even gender split, a range of ages from sixteen to over sixty five, a number of students from a range of ethnic groups, and lecturers and business-suited visitors sitting having their lunch.

Fieldnotes 27/2/13

In Brinton College I conducted fieldwork with two visually impaired students, Steven who was registered partially sighted, and studying sport, and Alex, who was registered blind, and studying drama. The fieldwork thus took me to two of the many buildings that make up Brinton College, located across several miles. An 'obsessive football fan' (Fieldnotes 27/2/13), Steven was seventeen at the time of the study, and had nystagmus (a condition resulting in an 'eye wobble') since birth. He was completing a level three BTEC in Sport and Fitness (full vignettes of Steven and the other student participants appear at the beginning of Chapter Seven). I observed Steven in the sports campus, which had a unique atmosphere and physicality:

The corridors down to the changing rooms were very crowded with students, all in sports gear and trainers, and had a strong smell of sweat, deodorant and muscle spray. There were a number of play fights and scuffles in the corridor during the wait for the tutor. When he arrived we entered the sports hall, which was large, echoey and well-lit, with a brightly coloured climbing wall at one end and cricket nets pinned back at the other.

Fieldnotes 22/2/13

Alex, was eighteen at the time of the study. He described himself as blind (Interview 1/3/13), having only twenty five per cent vision in his left eye, and none in his right. He was completing a level three BTEC in Drama. The 'dynamic' drama department (Brinton College 2013: 63), Alex's location, also presented a distinctive atmosphere, driven by the imperatives of the course and the facilities:

The next lesson was 'directing', in a studio room in the theatre. The room had a bouncy wooden floor, and full-length mirrors all along one wall and windows on the next. These were partially covered by blackout curtains. The curtains were on a rail which extended around the whole room, so they could be dragged around to completely darken the space. There was a pile of music equipment in one corner, topped with a candelabra, some packs of pungent greasepaint, and a nineteen-twenties style telephone.

Fieldnotes 6/3/13

The 'support needs' (Brinton College 2013b: 2) of students are met by the specialist 'Inclusive Learning Team', a department dedicated to providing

support for students with Additional Learning Needs. The department consists of an Inclusion Manager; her deputy, the Disability Support Co-ordinator; two Senior Support Workers; and thirty Support Workers (ten of whom are dedicated to dyslexia support, and ten dedicated to the Independent Living Skills (ILS) department for students with learning disabilities. In addition there is an Alt Format' Officer, who has a dedicated role transferring learning materials to appropriate formats for learners with additional needs. During the course of the fieldwork, six formal interviews were held with professionals at the college, and numerous other informal conversations and observations were conducted with other members of staff.

**Figure 5.1 Participating Staff Members at Brinton**

<b>Staff Interviews Conducted</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Date</b>
Inclusion Manager	Amy	21/3/13
Disability Support Co-ordinator	Jane	13/3/13
Senior Tutor (Sport)	Alison	28/2/13
Senior Tutor (Drama)	Karen	12/3/13
Support Worker (Sport)	Denise	26/2/13
Senior Support Worker (Visual Impairment)	Sara	6/3/13
<b>Informal Discussions</b>		
Alt-Format Officer		
Support Worker (SEN)		
Literacy Tutor		
Receptionist (Learning Resource Centre)		
Tutor (Drama)		
Tutor (Sport)		

The key participants who were interviewed were all directly involved in working with Alex or Steven (Figure 5.1). Amy, the Inclusion Manager, was a long-standing member of senior staff at the college. An enthusiastic advocate of inclusion in education, she was working towards developing a specialist resource for visually impaired students at the college, in a partnership with a

third sector organisation (Amy Interview 21/3/13). Jane, the Disability Support Co-ordinator, had many years of experience in providing support for visually impaired students as Senior Support Officer, and extensive knowledge of the technical and technological equipment for visually impaired students (Jane Interview 13/3/13). She had been promoted to the more challenging managerial role four months prior to the interview. Alison, the Senior Tutor in Sports, and Karen, Senior Tutor in Drama, both had over fifteen years experience in lecturing, and both had been at Brinton College for more than five years. Both declared they had little knowledge of visual impairment, and had received no training (Alison Interview 28/2/13; Karen Interview 12/3/13). The Support Worker in Sport, Denise, was an experienced member of staff, having been at the college for seven years, after many years working as Learning Support Assistant (LSA) in schools. She saw herself as a 'mentor' and confidante for students, and believed her 'banter' with the students helped them accept the support they required (Denise interview 26/2/13). She had worked with one visually impaired student before Steven enrolled, however the specialist Senior Support Worker for visually impaired students had provided the majority of the input. Sara, the Senior Support Worker for visual impairment, had specialist training in Braille and extensive knowledge of visual impairment. After nine years as LSA in a specialist unit for visually impaired pupils in a local school, she moved to the college in 2003. After one month, Alex had refused any support worker involvement, and therefore Sara's experience working with Alex was short-lived.

Brinton states in all its documentation that it is committed to the principles of inclusion (Brinton College 2013a: 3; Brinton College 2007: 1), 'ensuring equity and equality for all' (Brinton College 2007: 1). However a degree of honesty is displayed in the 'Disability Statement' (Brinton College 2007: 1):

Brinton takes seriously the need to make the college accessible and welcoming to learners with disabilities of all kinds. We cannot guarantee that all our programmes and facilities are fully accessible to all people at this stage, but we are constantly working to improve our services in this way.

This suggests a college that is sincere in its undertaking to provide accessible learning for all, and to actively improve provision, whilst allowing for a degree of unmet need in certain cases. Brinton College's 'Inclusive Learning Policy' states that the college fosters the concept of inclusive learning 'to provide the best match or fit between how a student learns best and the learning opportunities provided' (Brinton College 2013b: 1). The Inclusion team of thirty four supports over three hundred learners in the Mainstream College (Amy Interview 21/3/13), across all the campus sites, including those students with sensory and physical disabilities, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, and conditions such as Aspergers syndrome. Additional staff support over fifty learners in the separate 'ILS' department for people with learning disabilities. The mainstream Inclusion team provides the human and technical resources (such as support workers and equipment) to meet the individual student's support needs. The Inclusion team also provides or 'buys in' targeted induction training specific to the condition, for tutors who are likely to be teaching prospective students with an additional need, including visually impairment (Amy Interview 21/3/13).

On enrolment, if the 'College Support Questionnaire' is completed, students are assessed by a Senior Support Officer or the Disability Support Co-ordinator. An Individual Learning Support Plan is drawn up, which identifies the human and technical resources required by the student (Brinton College 2007). This may state the number of hours and nature of support provided by Support Workers; the equipment, technology and training required; and/or the adapted learning materials required. The Disability Support Co-ordinator also attends the school reviews of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs prior to enrolment, and gathers information which feeds into the assessment process. Assessments for examination adjustments are also completed, to meet examination body requirements. During the academic year, annual reviews of support are held with students and their parents. Issues arising during the academic year are dealt with more informally, and rely on feedback from the course tutor (Jane Interview 13/3/13). Throughout interviews with staff this process was presented as positive and forward thinking:



What we've got now, we got this dialogue, it is triangulated. You've got the tutor working with the learner support. You've got the learner support working with the tutor, working with the learner, got the tutor working with the learner and the learner support... And that dialogue is really important because as part of the planning process, the tutor will say to the learning support, "Oh, I'm doing such and such, this week or next week." And now, they've got access to the schemes of work, the ILPs et cetera so they know the certain goals, targets or certain materials that are needed.

Amy Interview 21/3/13

The 'Inclusive' service provision proudly presented by professional participants in Brinton will be analysed in more depth in Chapter Six, and will be seen to contrast strongly with the ethos and service provision available at the next college under discussion, the specialist college of Ospley.

## **5.2 Ospley College**

Education, empowerment and employment for the visually impaired. Ospley is a specialist residential college for people aged 16+ who are blind or partially sighted. Our aim is simple: to empower you with the skills, confidence and independence you need to realise your potential and take the next step towards your future.

Ospley Prospectus 2013

Ospley College was founded in the nineteenth century as a specialist institution for visually impaired people in London, by a Victorian philanthropist and a blind American musician. It moved (via a number of sites) to its current location in England in the 1970s. The prospectus suggests that the college has maintained its emphasis on the preparation of visually impaired students for employment and independence, and its focus on the performing arts, throughout its history (Ospley College 2013).

Ospley is now an independent specialist residential college with charitable status, for students aged over sixteen with a visual impairment. It consists of one campus, which was divided into residential and educational facilities (Fieldnotes 28/11/12). The college offers courses from Entry Level to Level

Three, including BTEC and A-level qualifications in a range of subjects, including complementary therapies; sports massage; anatomy, physiology and pathology; performing arts; art and design; information and communication technology (ICT); English literature; French and Spanish (Ofsted 2013: 2). Until 2013, all courses were accessible to blind learners, however in 2013 two modules which required a degree of vision (including multi-media) were introduced (Emily Interview 30/4/13). The Department of Work and Pensions also funds adult 'Work Ready' programmes, which prepare students for employment through skills training and support for applications and interviews (Ospley 2013).

The college had 45 full-time residential students in the academic year 2012/13, 14 of whom were from Wales (Ofsted 2013: 8). This is a significant reduction from the 152 full-time students enrolled in 2008 (Ofsted 2009), due to a combination of austerity measures and drives towards mainstream education (Paul Interview 2/5/13). There is considerable diversity in terms of social class and ethnicity in the student population, with half of students from ethnic minority backgrounds in 2008/9 (Ofsted 2009), and thirty per cent of students identifying as non-white in 2012 (Ospley 2012). In addition, there were five self-funded international students. The College received an overall effectiveness level of 'Good' in the latest inspection (Ofsted 2013), with an 'Outstanding' for services falling under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children's Act 2004 (Ofsted 2009).

The distinctive environment of the campus was of particular note during fieldwork:

The college has a diverse range of buildings, including the halls of residence and a new multi-purpose teaching block with sports facilities, and a complementary therapies area. From the moment of arriving I became conscious of the change in pavement etiquette. There were large numbers of people with guide dogs and canes negotiating walkways, and the resounding noise of white canes clashing as students made contact. Conversations between students facing in opposite directions were observed throughout the college. Walking became self-conscious and significant. I was conscious of slipping into old habits, scanning for eye contact, to assess the approaching pedestrian's level of vision and the amount of movement I was likely to need to make to avoid collision.

The three student participants at Ospley were enrolled on a number of courses. John, who was eighteen and studying A-Level Mathematics and BTEC Sport, was registered 'Severely Sight Impaired', having lost a significant proportion of his vision very rapidly when he was fifteen (John Interview 17/4/13). I observed John in Mathematics classes, and in the Sports facilities:

The next session was John's Fitness Instructor qualification assessment in the training gym. This was a small room, with range of gym machines, all with dark handles and bright yellow buttons or controls, and yellow edgings, with tactile symbols or Braille. The room was warm and humid with sweat, with the odour of muscle spray and sports drinks. Sounds of 'encouragement' from instructors leading other exercise classes drifted through the windows from above. The tutor had a word with John beforehand, reminding him of the key criteria for passing. There were nine students in John's group, all friends from the college. All of John's descriptions were very verbal and appeared to be accessible to students with no sight, who followed his instructions accurately in most cases. There was an atmosphere of acceptance of difference: To blind 'clients' 'do you want an arm to the next station mate?'. The younger men were working competitively, regardless of their visual levels or other disabilities.

Fieldnotes 16/4/13

Keith, who was seventeen at the time of the fieldwork, described himself as 'partially sighted', and had variable visual levels which altered daily, and could be affected by stress, tiredness or illness (Keith Interview 18/4/13). He was studying Business Studies and an additional module in Multi-media:

In the afternoon Keith had 'Multi-media', in a large IT room at the top of the college building. Throughout the session the 'bash bash bash' of long canes against the skirting boards of the corridor outside could be heard. There were eight computer stations, each with a clipboard stand adjacent, and one large whiteboard screen at the front, operated by a PC located behind the screen. There were three students present, who were tasked with beginning to design a learning object, which could be used by a business. All the students were slow to start and frequently distracted one another from the task, discussing nights out, past and future. One student used voice and enlarged screen in combination. He unplugged his headphones so everyone could hear the voice- 'listen to this, listen to how fast I have his

voice going now'. A male, robotic sounding voice talked at what sounded like double normal conversation speed, without intonation or pauses.

Fieldnotes 18/4/13

The third student participant at Ospley was Ffion, who was studying Drama and Business Studies. The oldest participant, in the study aged 21, Ffion identified herself as blind, and considered herself to be part of 'the blind community' (Ffion Interview 23/4/13), as all her family had a visual impairment. In addition to her academic study, Ffion was receiving teaching in Mobility and Orientation (involving use of a long cane), Independent Living Skills (including cookery) and Braille:

For the final session of the day I met Ffion for her Braille lesson. The large room had seven teaching stations, each of which hosted a number of grey metallic Perkins Brailers, and piles of Brailled books and teaching materials. The walls were filled with shelves stacked high with Braille materials, which created a musty, old library book smell. Five students were receiving Braille teaching simultaneously; three as one-to-one, and two being taught together. Ffion was finding the bright sunshine very difficult; her eyes were streaming with tears, and she was squinting, and struggling to move around the corridors and into the room. As she entered, two tutors immediately rose and drew down the blinds, and one approached and offered an arm to guide her to the seat, which was positioned facing away from the window. The tutor, who (she explained) was without vision herself, sat opposite on the breakfast bar style table, and sympathised with Ffion, talking gently until her eyes had settled down.

Fieldnotes 1/5/13

Ospley College was organised around departments, reflecting a distinction between academic and independence needs. The teaching teams consisted of tutors and teaching assistants dedicated to particular curriculum subjects, such as languages, Braille, complementary therapies, sport and Mathematics. The Independent Living team included independent living skills tutors, personal care workers, counsellors, work-ready tutors, who supported skills acquisition for employment, and pastoral skills tutors who support life and social skills training.

**Figure 5.2 Participating Staff Members at Ospley College**

<b>Staff Interviews Conducted</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Date</b>
Principal	Clara	1/5/13
Senior Residential Manager	Paul	2/5/13
Mathematics Tutor	Mary	17/4/13
Sports Tutor	Steve	17/4/13
ICT Tutor	Emily	30/4/13
<b>Informal Discussions</b>		
Residential Support Worker		
Pastoral Support Worker		
Independent Living Skills Tutor		
Waking Nights Residential Support Worker		

Five formal interviews with professionals were completed during the fieldwork, in addition to a number of informal discussions and observations (Figure 5.2). The Principal, Clara, had been in post for three years, following a number of Principals whose tenure had been short-lived. She had previously been in the mainstream post-compulsory education sector, and had not worked in visual impairment prior to appointment (Principal Interview 1/5/13). Paul, senior manager in the support team, had previously worked in social care settings in the broader field of disability, and had been employed at the college for seven years, supervising over twenty residential and pastoral support workers (Paul Interview 2/5/13). Two of the three tutors interviewed, in Sports and ICT, were qualified teachers of the visually impaired, holding the Postgraduate Diploma for teachers of children with a visual impairment. Mary, the Mathematics tutor, however, had not yet completed the Diploma. She was teaching John. She had previously been a Braille tutor at the college, joining after ten years experience as an LSA with visually impaired pupils in a local school. She began teaching Mathematics when her mathematics degree had been ‘discovered’ by Senior

Management, after the previous staff member left. Mary was undertaking the specialist teaching qualification, 'but I have deferred the diploma for a year as I find it quite very hard going to do the work alongside all the preparation for Maths' (Mary Interview 17/4/13). Sports tutor Steve was also teaching John, and was involved with Ffion as part of the 'Learning and Leisure' programme on a Wednesday afternoon. He was permanently dressed in Ospley-branded sports gear, and was an enthusiastic proponent of Paralympic sport and what he saw as the unique sporting opportunities available for visually impaired students at the college. He had come to the role after volunteering as the sighted goalkeeper for a seven-a-side visually impaired football team (Steve Interview 17/4/13). The ICT tutor, Emily, was teaching Keith and Ffion. She had been at the college for seven years, and as a Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired, was responsible for teaching both qualifications and independence skills in technology which students might require for academic or social purposes. She believed strongly in the power of technology to enhance the independence of visually impaired people, and stated that 'the best part is watching and being with the students when they learn things that will help, you know, them do everyday stuff, everyday, forever' (Emily Interview 30/4/13).

Ospley College documentation reveals the corporate ethos, focussing on its perceived strengths of support towards independence, higher education and employment, which is in addition to the drive for high academic achievements of the students:

The Ospley experience is about more than just vocational and academic qualifications. It's about achievement beyond the classroom, a time when you start to develop the self-confidence, personal independence and communication skills you need for your next step. This is your journey, your future.

Ospley 2013: 4

The documentation appears carefully worded to demonstrate the 'learning plus life' value-added dimensions of the specialist facilities and support. The 'integrated' academic and support departments (Ospley 2013: 3) provide

twenty four hour cover for the student population, all of whom live residentially on campus.

Ospley's Single Equality Scheme report states that: 'We strive to provide a fair, safe and respectful environment, where everyone accepts the differences between individuals and values the benefits that diversity brings and how it enriches the College' (Ospley 2012: 2). In the academic year 2012/3, ninety two per cent of the students at the college had a visual impairment, and forty five per cent also had additional needs, such as a physical disability, mental health issue, or an autistic spectrum disorder (Ospley 2012). With over 200 full and part-time staff employed in 2012 (for the student population of ninety in that year), the staff: student ratio was extremely high (although some departments, such as enterprise, marketing, research and administration do not have direct student contact) (Ospley 2012). The college operates a twenty four-hour service, with academic provision available (dependent on individual student timetables) from nine in the morning until seven in the evening. Skills teaching sessions, such as Mobility and Braille, are timetabled alongside academic learning. Support services from the Well-being, Residential and Pastoral Teams are available until ten in the evening, with Waking Night residential workers working overnight. Some support services, such as pastoral support (which may involve elements of daily living such as shopping), or work-ready skills, are also timetabled for weekly sessions. There were no Support Workers present in lessons, although support was provided where necessary during the 'Learning and Leisure' activity programme; an extra-curricular activity programme which included sport or hobbies such as fishing, on a Wednesday afternoon.

Upon application, students are invited to an assessment visit, in which they stay residentially with a group of other potential students and are assessed on their academic abilities, and on their levels of independence. Course options are discussed, alongside support and independent living skills training (Ospley 2013). The Principal could not envisage a scenario in which a student may not be accepted, as she stated the college was fully accessible to students using wheelchairs, with nursing support also

available. However some additional support needs could prove more challenging, for example in the case of a very significant mental health condition (Clara Interview 1/5/13). Upon acceptance, students attend a two day residential visit, where more detailed assessments of additional curriculum needs such as mobility and daily living skills are completed, orientation around campus is begun, and social activities introduce students to one another (Ospley 2014).

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are drawn up for each student by the beginning of the academic year, which identify educational, independence and personal goals. These goals are shared across departments, and termly reviews are completed, to enable alterations to the plan if necessary. Representatives from the teaching and support teams meet weekly to discuss each individual student's progress and any problems identified. The high staff: student ratio discussed above obviously enabled the high levels of organisation and planning observed in Ospley, contrasting with the ratios apparent in the mainstream colleges such as Weatherwell.

### **5.3 Weatherwell College**

*Working together for a brighter future:*

At Weatherwell, we are passionate about helping you to achieve your ambitions. The College is fully inclusive and provides equal opportunities for everyone. Each campus can provide dedicated support for learners with visual or hearing impairment, or who need assistance due to mobility.

Weatherwell 2012a

Opened as a technical college in 1968, Weatherwell College has been subject to a number of organisational changes and mergers. It is now part of a larger group of mainstream colleges, spread over a wide area (Jones 2013: 3). Again, due to the recency of the changes, information for the college was only available for the distinct college of Weatherwell. The campus is large, and located adjacent to a large town, serving both urban and rural areas.



The college offers over 150 courses in a vast array of topics, from Entry (Level One) to Post-graduate (Level Seven) courses. These include Apprenticeships, Foundation and Honours degrees, A-levels and GCSEs, Access courses, and Vocational Courses (Weatherwell 2012a). Weatherwell and its associated group members have one of the largest student populations in Wales. There are over twenty thousand students, of which 24% are full-time (Jones 2013).

The majority of courses are available bilingually, in English and Welsh, and the college is described as a 'bilingual setting' (Weatherwell 2012a; Estyn 2005). According to the college Equality Report, ninety four per cent of the student population is white (Weatherwell 2012b), and the catchment draws students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, including from a number of districts designated as Communities First areas of deprivation (Estyn 2005). Twenty five per cent of students were aged 16-19 in the academic year 2011-12 (Weatherwell 2012b: 8).

The college is a large campus, with a number of buildings located on one site:

The campus was quite intimidating, with a number of distinctive departments. The buildings were each of a different fabric and design, suggesting a number of add-ons in the last few decades. The latest re-vamp appeared to be the modern reception area, with squeaky beech floors and a modern, open design. However this 'public face' gave way to a more dated and tired warren of traditional style classrooms with a nineteen seventies feel. The smells of chemistry experiments mixed with the odours from the kitchens and serving areas, throughout the corridor spaces.

Fieldnotes 5/1/12

During fieldwork, much observation took place in the College restaurant, as I observed Tom learning to prepare food, 'wait on' (serve food), take payments and cash up. Tom was sixteen, and had recently developed kerataconus, a deteriorating condition resulting in problems with reading and distance vision. Tom had joined the course at the beginning of the academic year without declaring his eye condition, but it had been discovered during the first term, when a family member had informed the Catering tutors.

The restaurant was run as a viable business, and was a popular destination for staff and students at lunchtimes:

The room was set up as a large restaurant. It had twelve tables, a central breakfast bar with six stools, and a large window with a view into the kitchens, where students and staff could be seen preparing food. The food smells drifted into the restaurant all morning. The staff and students all wore kitchen whites, and then changed into smart navy serving uniforms before the restaurant opened. Matching red tablecloths, table decorations, minimal poster displays and the uniforms of the students all contributed to the professional atmosphere.

Fieldnotes 13/5/13

Approximately ten percent of students in the college had disclosed Additional Learning Needs (ALN) upon induction in 2012, but managers suggested only one percent, about 200 students, needed active support (Alice Interview 20/5/13). In interview, managers recalled only four visually impaired students attending in the last five years. Students with Additional Learning Needs are supported by a large team. The Independent Living Skills Manager was responsible for all aspects of student support services, including counselling, careers and welfare advice, and the independent living department for people with learning disabilities. Her deputy, the Disability Support Manager, co-ordinates the provision of sixty support workers, all of whom work generically with students with a range of additional learning needs, across the campus.

**Figure 5.3 Participating Staff Members at Weatherwell College**

<b>Staff Interviews Conducted</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Date</b>
Disability Support Manager	Alice	20/5/13
Catering Tutor	Ann	21/5/13
Support Worker	Steph	20/5/13
<b>Informal Discussions</b>		
Senior Tutor (Waiting-on)		
Mathematics Tutor		
Senior Tutor (Catering)		

The Independent Living Skills manager was unavailable during the course of the fieldwork; however three members of staff agreed to participate in interviews (Figure 5.3). The Disability Support manager, Alice, was responsible for the organisation of direct support for disabled students and those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. This included the management of support workers and the organisation of equipment. Alice had been in post for five years, coming from a background in Basic Skills. She was enthusiastic about the support provisions at Weatherwell, stating ‘I think they just fly, once they’ve got the correct support’ (Alice Interview 20/5/13). The Catering tutor, Ann, had been in post for eight years, after many years experience ‘in the trade’ (Ann Interview 21/5/13), but was retiring at the end of the academic year. She had a firm but gentle approach with students, and stated that sometimes she ‘can’t help but mother them’ (Fieldnotes 14/5/13).

At 11.45 Ann, the lead lecturer in the café, drew all the students together to allocate tasks and assessments for the lunchtime sitting. She created a composed and professional atmosphere and the students responded with respect, with very little backchat or slips of concentration. Ann performed all of the multiple tasks of teaching, running a café, serving, and completing assessments of practical skills calmly, an approach which seemed to be reflected in student behaviour.

Fieldnotes 13/5/13

Steph, the Support Worker, had been in post for six years, after being persuaded to apply by a friend. In Weatherwell Support Workers are allocated either to an individual, or to work with a group of learners as a class, and in Tom’s class she was supporting a number of learners with a range of ALN. She saw the rewards of support as ‘seeing them achieve and build confidence’ (Steph Interview 20/5/13). She also appeared to act as teaching assistant:

The support worker was stationed in the corner for over half of the session. In conversation with the lecturer, she was assisting with organisational teaching tasks related to the portfolio.

Fieldnotes 14/5/13

Weatherwell College has produced a Strategic Equality plan (Weatherwell 2012c) and publishes an annual Equality Report (2012b). The college also has a Disability Equality policy and a Disability Statement (produced in 2009), which stated that:

The College aims to enable people to access, participate and progress within, and from, a learning programme. We are continually looking to improve procedures to provide an inclusive environment that ensures that the learning needs of all individuals are met, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Weatherwell 2009

Following disclosure on the college application form, students are assessed, and a 'support plan' is drawn up, by the Inclusion and Disability Support managers. Alice reported some difficulties obtaining information from schools (Alice Interview 20/5/13):

Occasionally, you'll get a learner who'll come in with a report or a statement or whatever it is, but mostly not. So we then chase the schools and so we spend, like, the whole year chasing for evidence from schools, parents, guardians, whoever.

The course tutor meets with the student and agrees the plan and the level of support (whether group or one-to-one, for example): 'It can be study skills support, it can be dyslexia support, it can be equipment' (Alice Interview 20/5/13). Alice stated, 'I'd like to say that my LSA's are on the ball. They're pretty aware of what support is needed, I try to go through that at the start of the year with them' (Fieldnotes 14/5/13). This contrasted with Steph's assessment of the process:

You're sort of told where you're going, but you pretty much walk in blind, I suppose, so you don't know what... what they are. It's just a case of assessing things, really. The tutor might say, keep an eye on this one or...you know. So you sort of work between you both, and figure it out.

Steph Interview 20/5/13

Students are assessed for adjustments to examinations and tests: 'Yeah, they usually get extra time. That that goes without saying. We put that as a recommendation anyway, just par for the course because obviously, the way they have to work is totally different from everybody else.' (Alice Interview 20/5/13). They also have examination provision for readers and scribes, if

appropriate. Annual reviews are held with the student, and their family and key tutor.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that while all three institutions are dedicated to the provision of learning opportunities and support for disabled further education students, the environments, organisations and particulars of each college were highly distinctive. Even in this simple descriptive account of the college contexts it is evident that these particulars have an impact upon visually impaired students' experience of further education. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Seven, the location, availability of funding, and the course choice options all had an effect upon the students' decision making upon entering the college. The organisation of support, and provision of training in the specialist skills required for learning (for instance in the use of access technology) were also diverse across the colleges. As will be seen in the following more critical analysis, the use of generic support worker staff, without specialist knowledge or training, impacted upon the ability of the college to provide adequate adjustments to teaching and learning. In addition the environmental specificities of the different departments in each college created a sense of 'career belonging' for the students, which will again be discussed in more depth in Chapter Seven. The process of support provision also created differences in the experiencing of disability in each college. For example, the annual review of support provision did not allow for students whose needs may change rapidly during the academic year. Further critical analysis of these themes can be found in subsequent chapters of this thesis. In the following chapter, critical cross-college comparative analysis of the further education context in Wales, and of the ideologies, policies and practices in each college will be explored. Key themes emerging from the data on college contexts will be discussed in depth, drawing out similarities and differences in terms of funding, courses, ideologies and politics, and provisions and practices.

## Chapter Six: Contexts

Policies are ...the instruments of power/knowledge relations through which the identities and experiences of children with special educational needs are constructed.

Slee 2001: 389

In order to address research question one, this chapter explores how national policies of inclusive education and special educational needs impact on the policies and practices of specific institutions. The following discussion thus aims to interrogate the interface between the institutions, the professionals' opinions and understandings, and the visually impaired students. The colleges selected for the study, described in Chapter Five, have distinctive dimensions which impact upon the interface with the students *in situ*. Braun et al. (2011) have suggested that 'policy enactment involves creative processes of interpretation and translation, that is the re-contextualisation... of the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices' (586). Thus the specific conceptualisations and contexts of the actors within each college shape the application of the ideology of inclusive education or special educational needs provision. The interpretation and application of legislation and policy drivers in the provision of teaching and learning opportunities for visually impaired students will be seen to be very much dependent upon these contextual factors. As Thrupp and Lupton (2006) have suggested, the 'nuances of local context cumulatively make a considerable difference to school processes [sic] and student achievement' (309). The 'agents' involved in interactions with visually impaired students, for example tutors, support staff, disability service managers and residential staff, all had particular political and ideological dispositions, and varying degrees of knowledge, training and experience of working with visually impaired students. These dispositions and knowledges impacted implicitly upon interactions with students, and upon the expectations and understandings of teaching and learning processes when working with visually impaired students.

Thus in this chapter the key themes that emerged from the data are explored, in order to illuminate the contextual practices of each college location. Thematic analysis draws on observational fieldwork, interviews and documentary analysis, and on the various professionals' and students' *understandings* of context and policies, as both agents and subjects of policy enactments (Braun et al. 2011: 586). This chapter will firstly explore issues in the organisation and application for funding, before course choices and restrictions are discussed in more depth. Ideological and political differences and similarities are then discussed, highlighting professionals' opinions on the differences between the colleges, and exploring issues in attitudes towards visually impaired students. Finally provisions and practices, in terms of pedagogy, the varieties of academic and pastoral support, and additional curriculum opportunities will be explored.

## **6.1 Funding**

In the introduction to this thesis, it was noted that visually impaired students have three educational choices as they complete year eleven and make the transition to the post-compulsory phase of education; remaining in a mainstream school until year thirteen (where such provision exists), attending a mainstream further education college, or becoming a residential student at a specialist college for the visually impaired (Kiel and Crews 2008).

In Wales, if the student chooses to remain in school for the sixth form, funding is usually available from the local authority to continue the level of support received in years seven to eleven. Following guidelines in the Education Act 1981, and the Code of Practice (WAG 2004; WAG 2006b), a 'Statement of Educational Need' is drawn up following a comprehensive assessment involving a range of professionals, parents and the student. The statement identifies the resources required to enable the student to access the curriculum, and is reviewed annually. For visually impaired students support may include regular visits from a Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired, orientation and mobility training from a qualified Mobility Officer,

support from a Learning Support Assistant, input from a specialised Information Technology Officer and/or the provision of access equipment.

Students who choose to attend mainstream further education have their support needs funded by the Welsh Government, in a direct arrangement with the individual college. The level of funding is identified through the assessment of each individual by the college, and subsequent application to the Welsh Government. Students may attend further education colleges full- or part-time, and may have followed a non-traditional learning route. If a student decides to attend a mainstream college, the local authority is no longer responsible for educational provision, and the statement and support available in school is discontinued (WAG 2004: 117).

Some visually impaired students attend specialist FE colleges, which are specifically designed and organised to meet the needs of visually impaired students in terms of course selection, tutor and staff expertise, pedagogy and environment. Funding is provided by the local authority, following a comprehensive assessment, which must identify a lack of appropriate provision in the local area. Colleges of this nature are residential, and therefore entail significant expense. Colleges generally provide additional life skills training in addition to the academic curriculum. This may include orientation and mobility training, 'daily living skills', counselling and communication skills such as Braille and Information Technology (Royal National College 2012; New College Worcester 2012). At present all the available specialist colleges are in England, and therefore, for Welsh-domiciled students, involve relocation away from the home area.

Visually impaired students theoretically have a choice between these three options. However data collected during fieldwork revealed the extent to which this decision was actually influenced by the funding arrangements, and by the types of support available in each institution. Of these situational and external contexts (Braun et al. 2011), funding was believed by participants to play a significant role. The intersections between the transition decisions outlined above, funding arrangements, and support emerged as a significant theme from the data. Both students and professionals were acutely aware of



both the current funding arrangements and options for visually impaired students, and of the proposed changes to these arrangements in Wales.

Student discourses in the study focussed on the 'fight' for funding. Students attending the specialist college talked in great detail about their funding bids, which supports Miles' (2002) assertion that during transition periods young people are capable of exerting power within the educational structures.

You have to, you know, completely argue every single thing with the funders. If they find one thing just to deny you the funding, give it to somebody else something else then, they will deny you. I don't know, how long the funding took us to do, like, a few months just because we were getting evidence everywhere, trying to contact everyone we could think of to write us...if they could write a letter. Because we were lucky, we knew...being like in a visually impaired world, in one way, because we had a few contacts of people who would be used to saying they can't do this sort of thing and Ospley is this specialist place, a good place, because they will teach you how to do that and they will do that. But going through that, it is hard.

Ffion Interview 23/4/13

While waiting for the other students, we talked about John's quest for funding to come to Ospley. He was originally turned down, and went to appeal, and simultaneously he and his family mounted a campaign in the local papers. He was laughing as he said he thought the publicity had got him the two years funding. He got 40% funding from social services and 60% education funding, and he is hoping for a third year.

Fieldnotes 7/3/13

Students in mainstream educational settings were also acutely aware of the potential 'fight' for specialist funding, and of the complex intersections between courses, location, funding and support for their visual impairment when making their transition decisions:

Alex: We went to look at Ospley; went to one of their like, family open days. I went there with the mindset that I wasn't going to go there because I really didn't want to...I didn't see the point of me leaving. I can see why other people would do it because there's obviously no help or support, but I thought I'd cope in mainstream. It's just the fact I didn't want to go somewhere where everyone was visually impaired and just living...I just want to....

CM: Yeah, be part of mainstream?

Alex: And I guess I was probably nervous about moving, anyway. I think I would have considered it more if I was doing academic, if I was doing more A-levels, just because of the exams, the written work. And all the technical things. So, like comp I probably would have someone in my lesson with me, maybe. But I know now this is really practical course. The only reason I picked Brinton was one because of the support was there and I wouldn't have to fight for it, and just because it's close to where I live, so it kind of all fitted, really.

Alex Interview 6/5/13

This supports Hewitt et al.'s (2011) findings that while funding is significant, good transitions for visually impaired pupils also take place when there is adequate advice and opportunities for taster sessions. These are provided when professionals working with pupils in secondary education have good levels of understanding of the student's needs and wishes, and the funding available. In addition, in the cases cited above, students themselves had quite complex understandings of the contextualised policies and practices (Braun et al. 2011) of funding bodies and individual institutions, and used this knowledge in their decision-making processes and actions. Four of the students in this study had used their specific, visual impairment-related cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) to influence their outcomes. The two students who did not apply this kind of knowledge, Steven and Tom, had not adopted a visually impaired identity, and had limited involvement with other visually impaired people. Steven, for example, stated in discussion that his reason for agreeing to participate in this study 'was because he had never met anyone else with a visual impairment' and he was interested to find out more about other students in a similar situation to himself (Fieldnotes 13/5/13). This suggests that forms of knowledge in relation to visual impairment are significant in transition processes, and therefore that further research on the link between involvement in the 'visually impaired culture' and transition decisions for visually impaired students, extending Kiel and Crewes (2008) study of transition, would be highly beneficial.

In contrast to the students, professionals' perspectives on funding were highly focussed on the changing nature of the sector and the imminent cuts and changes to funding arrangements. This emerged as a significant theme in all of the colleges. In the mainstream sector a change of policy had been

proposed by the WAG Task and Finish group (WAG 2010a), whereby funding for students with disabilities would be moved from direct funding for individual colleges to Local Authority (LA) Education departments. LAs were to become responsible for assessment and allocation of resources in FE colleges. To date (2014), this proposal is still under review. All those interviewed were generally negative about the proposal, as they believed somewhat pessimistically that the Local Authority may not ring-fence funding, and did not understand the further education sector. This issue was revisited frequently in interviews, for example with the Student Support manager, Alice, at Weatherwell:

Alice said the silence throughout the conference on funding was 'notable by its absence'. All colleges had been required by WAG to submit a supplementary funding bid this year, which had previously been suspended for 4 years. WAG had been funding ALN students using the same funding application devised in 2009. She said, 'we wondered what that was about, but still nothing was brought up at the conference, so who knows, it has been going on and on for years, and nothing changes, it is just hanging over you the whole time'.

Fieldnotes 13/5/13

It was also evident that the arrangements for funding applications were bureaucratic and often led to negative self-perception by professionals. For example, Jane, the Disability Support Co-ordinator at Ospley, outlined her perception of the difficulties:

She spoke about filling in a form to apply for additional funding for students with disabilities, and said that the funders were 'so picky', needing many additional details, and querying many aspects of the application. One student had additional medical needs, and wanted to go from school to Ospley College. The local authority had queried why the college could not meet these needs, and they had to provide evidence that they currently did not have an on-site nurse. She said 'it is just so disheartening, doing these'.

Fieldnotes 6/3/13

In the specialist college, funding levels had been affected by changes to ideology, as rejection of specialist institutions in favour of inclusion in mainstream provision had resulted in significantly reduced funding opportunities. This presented significant challenges to the college:

Paul, a residential and pastoral team manager, said that the College had been engaged in an 'on-going struggle', hit by a combination of the inclusion agenda and austerity measures, with LEAs now really reluctant to fund. He discussed the future direction of specialist colleges – some colleges had tried moving to pan-disability provision, but reports from students and staff suggested that this diluted the specialism and some expertise had been lost.

Fieldnotes 28/11/12

Yeah, it's in our mission statement that we're primarily a college for those who are blind or partially sighted and we've revisited that, so, should it be re-broadening out like many others? But no, our stakeholders say it's important to them that we are specialist.

Clara (Principal) Interview 1/5/13

## 6.2 Course Choices

A number of the students interviewed for this study cited course choice as one of the main factors in decision-making about post-compulsory education (Ball et al. 1997; White 2007). Through interview it became apparent that considerations of the intersection between course topic and the individual's visual impairment had been significant throughout the compulsory phase, and that this had influenced decision-making at post-compulsory level.

I have absolutely no geography knowledge whatsoever. I did the first couple of years in comp., I only did it for 2 years or something. That's all fair trade, volcanoes, things like that. Then when we started moving on to the maps, of course, it was quite a big thing, and all they could do at the time would've been to enlarge it on a photocopier, which meant I had this huge and massive...and I still couldn't see it because I couldn't, at that point, my sight...well, I couldn't really see photocopied enlargements. So, I couldn't really see the map, so, because they...basically they took me out of the lesson.

Ffion interview 23/4/13

The considerations cited by students and professionals focussed on the practical and visual dimensions of each topic, although professionals had a stronger emphasis on the health and safety aspects of activities. In

compulsory education, several subjects were deemed unsuitable, and students were disapplied (that is, formally removed from the obligation to take subjects by their school). For example, a large majority of the students interviewed, including those who were moving into employment, were disapplied from PE and art:

Philip: I think the opposite, in secondary school my favourite subject was PE, and they stopped me from doing it.

John: They stopped me too

Matt: I stopped myself.

Dewi: They stopped me, but then I ended up becoming a fitness instructor (laughs)

Philip: The first week I went there I fell over and split my leg open and had to go to hospital and then they wouldn't let me for about two years.

Matt: I wasn't stopped from doing any but I got taken out because I needed, because my writing was bad and still is. I got taken out of a few subjects, to help the progress with other stuff.

Rees: I was actually, when I was a couple of years into my education, withdrawn from art, but I wasn't particularly sort of interested in the subject and it gave me time to catch up with alternative work so it worked out quite well for me. I think as well you have to really think, there's a fine line between the core, or the particular course of education, not being acceptable, and the course not be right for you. Not so much in high school education, where it's all core, but in further and higher education one really has to consider, is it the course, or the way that the course is organised, or the people teaching the course and the way it's being presented that's the problem.

Focus Group 19/6/12

In theory, all courses were available to visually impaired students in the mainstream colleges, however professionals perceived restrictions in some options. They cited either health and safety considerations, or issues in the visual nature of some subjects. For example there was a general acceptance amongst professionals in all three colleges that STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects could be too challenging for those with restricted vision (although Ospley provided Maths up to A-level). The diagrammatic and visual affordances of the topic were often perceived as too challenging, even by those committed to inclusive education, such as Amy,

the Inclusion Manager:

Depends on their level of eyesight, their level of vision, sorry the level of vision. For example, it would be very difficult for a young person to go into a welding course if you are blind. You know, it would be impossible because there, the hot metal, you've got to think of health and safety, construction trades. And we advise, you know, against that, you know. Some of the science courses...We have to respect that they want to choose but at the same time, we've also got to advise and guide. Is this realistic, you know.

Amy Interview 21/3/13

Where students had attempted these courses in previous years, any failure to achieve was often perceived by participants as being the student's responsibility, rather than as a result of any inadequate knowledge on behalf of tutors, or any lack of resources. Alice, the Student Support Manager at Weatherwell, outlined her perceptions of one student:

Thinking back to another learner who did really struggle. And I always suspected it's because he'd chosen the wrong subjects, subjects that didn't possibly...maybe some could have coped with but maybe he wasn't academic enough. He was doing Geography, Biology and Physics. And he was really struggling with all three. I did everything I could, but I was always worried about LSA's doing the experiments for him. Guided by him, because, you know, health and safety. It just was a bit of a worry but he did struggle but I think, part of it was academic.

Alice Interview 20/5/13

However research suggests that teaching in these topic areas is possible. For example, Rule et al. (2011) completed a small-scale study of fifteen STEM subject teachers who perceived their subjects as being primarily based on visual media. They found that when provided with adequate resources, equipment and training in pedagogy for visually impaired students, these teachers developed distinctly improved attitudes towards inclusion, and more successful learning outcomes for visually impaired students were achieved.

In the specialist college, courses were only offered in subjects that were accessible to all students, regardless of the level of vision, although in the academic year 2012/13 some courses using visual media had been introduced:

In the afternoon Keith had 'Multi-media'. Emily, the tutor, explained that this was the first academic year such a module had been offered, 'for our more visual learners'. This had presented a challenge for some members of staff who felt that all modules offered should be accessible to all learners, but that it had been agreed following requests from a number of students for it to be included as an option in the college.

Fieldnotes 18/4/13

A number of students referred to the significance of the interaction between their visual impairment and exams and course work assessments, and described how this influenced their course selection. This had an influence on the status of the courses they selected, which were mainly BTEC, non-examination courses. Exams were perceived to be particularly challenging for VI students:

In exams students have an amanuensis (a reader and scribe). The Maths tutor said 'it is not a good way of working, there is so many opportunities for things to go wrong, if you think, they read out the question, the student listens and gives a response, there are just so many opportunities for things to go wrong, particularly in a subject like maths, one wrong number or symbol...' John stated that he had been given 100% extra time in his GCSE's, and went on to tell me he had tried to do his Welsh GCSE exam on his own, using a CCTV. He was given 6 hours, and said 'imagine that, six hours in a room on your own – the scanning back and fore trying to read stuff, even then I didn't finish it, it was a nightmare.' He said he preferred having an amanuensis rather than adaptive equipment despite the difficulties in thinking through voice, because it was still less visually and 'every other way' tiring.

Fieldnotes 16/4/13

I failed my English exam because I've always been used to typing on a laptop for all my course work. So, I used to look through it. I started to read things back just to make sure. And then, when I had to handwrite my exam, so I just think...I just couldn't...I just failed.

Keith interview 16/4/13

For Keith, who had chosen to come to a specialist college following his difficult emotional experiences in mainstream compulsory education, his course needs were subsumed by his need for a supportive environment. He was aware of the impact of the restricted course choice on the opportunities he might have in the future:

They don't do much choice in courses. Because it's only a small college, they only try and go for, you know, the most popular courses. Like, if they'd done mechanics here, I would normally be doing that because I've...I'm quite into electronics. So, if I could, then I'd do electronic engineering or painting decor or something like that, and carpentry, I've always wanted to go into as well.

Keith interview 16/4/13

Thus it is evident that perceptions of course suitability are predicated on perceptions of health and safety concerns and the visual nature of subjects, and that these presumptions influence students' opportunities for education and future employment. Inclusive education is tempered by these beliefs, and may alter the future life course of visually impaired students. While some subjects, such as art, and geography, were deemed 'not worth the effort' (Ffion interview 23/4/13) by visually impaired students, others, such as the STEM subjects, are highly valued, both in education policy (Science and Technology Committee, House of Lords 2012; WAG 2010b), and by employers. Thus the impact of these perceptions on course provision for some subjects, along with the students' selection of courses by assessment method, may have significant influence on the future employability of students.

### **6.3 Ideology and Politics**

As outlined in Chapter Three, debates around the provision of services for disabled students date back to the 1944 Education Act. Prior to this date, disabled students were medically categorised and segregated accordingly. The 1981 Education Act created the category of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and promoted mainstream education. The SEN model was criticised for its focus on individual deficit, with a number of scholars suggesting that the 'twin track' (Hodkinson 2010: 62) of SEN and mainstream provision had created a bureaucratic medical-based model which emphasised and set apart individuals as 'different' from the norm (Booth et al. 2006; Dyson 2001; Kenworthy and Whittaker 2000). An alternative conceptualisation, of



'inclusive education', was seen to progress educational and social justice through 'education for all' (Ainscow 1999). However, scholars such as Runswick-Cole (2011) have argued that, in practice, political rhetoric on inclusion for students with disabilities had failed to ensure a move away from the traditional model of special educational needs.

These contested concepts and their practical applications were found to be significant themes in the data, with college managers aware of the implications of these ideologies and the policies of SEN and inclusion in their daily practices. The strong interdependencies between values and how policies were pursued (Braun 2011: 591) was evident in all interviews with managers, although the 'slippery concept' (Ball 2004) of 'inclusive education' led to a variety of interpretations and enactments. The 'Inclusive Learning Policy' at Brinton was interpreted by Amy, the senior manager of the inclusion service thus:

But the inclusion bit [of my role] is slightly different. As part of that role, we provide the in-class support or the additional support, the out of class support that some of our, again, young and not so young people who come to college to do a course require so that we can help them on that journey to actually get there at the end of the day. And that could be having somebody like an auxiliary support person in the class, somebody with them to help them make their notes et cetera, even to those learners who require to have their lunch cut up for them or fetched for them, you know? It's a variety of support methods that we use, you know?

Amy Interview 21/3/13

A similar interpretation was apparent from Jane, her colleague:

When it comes to the lecturers and staff adapting there's not much adaption because we are inclusive. It's the support workers there that would make the adaptations with the resources required, with large print et cetera. And anything that's up in the board, board work will be provided, should be provided prior to the lesson.

Jane Interview 13/3/13

The interpretation of 'inclusion' here seems very similar to the SEN model, what Dyson described as 'a "recalibration" of the inclusive ideal' (2001: 27), with individually assessed needs provided for by support workers and

technology or equipment. It appears that the definition of inclusive education, as defined by policy-makers and academic scholars such as Ainscow (1999) has been subjected to re-contextualisation *in situ*. Similarly at Weatherwell, tutor interpretations of inclusion could be seen to 'fit' the SEN framework more closely than the inclusion agenda. Alice, a manager with five years experience working with tutors in Weatherwell, detailed the process, and explored some of the challenges to developing inclusive practice:

And one of the biggest challenges, I think, is getting tutors to understand that they need to make some changes/adaptations for these learners...Some of the more experienced tutors can be hard work. They don't see it as their role to do something, and that can be a challenge, you know? When a student with a disability comes to the college, as long as they disclose... they're then given what we call a green dot and the green dot is an indication to everybody that this learner's got a learning difficulty and/or disability and then we start chasing for evidence for them, finding out about them. We've got what we call the support plan which then gets printed out and sent to the tutor. They sit with the learner, they go through it...So then they start sending back to me, they need group support or one-to-one support. It could be study skills support, it can be dyslexia support, it can be equipment. And then that gives me an idea and then I can start timetabling LSA's from that.

Alice Interview 20/5/13

Although viewed by mainstream college professionals and a number of other interviewees as 'completely segregated', senior management professionals at the specialist college of Ospley had their own interpretation of their inclusive practices:

I think the diversity, we're very proud here. I mean it's wonderful the diversity of our students. And you know apart from all the different eye conditions but just the...you know we've got students from all sorts of different backgrounds and ethnicities and personality types of characters.

Clara Interview 1/5/13

This interpretation resonates with Shakespeare and Corker's assertion that understandings of 'disabled people' as a homogenous group fail to acknowledge other aspects of identity and 'axes of inequality' (Shakespeare and Corker 2002: 15). While the college is segregated in terms of the visually impaired/sighted dichotomy, the Principal viewed it as inclusive, in terms of social class, race and gender. However a recent Ofsted inspection report

detailed further work to be done in acknowledging aspects of race and gender in the classroom , to improve the ranking from 'Good' to 'Outstanding':

Teachers do not always take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to reinforce students' understanding of race and gender

Osfted 2013: 1

In terms of the enactment of these understandings of inclusion, practices varied greatly, both between and within colleges. Although issues of pedagogy will be explored in more detail in Chapter Eight, some organisational details are relevant here. For example, training in visual impairment for staff was intermittent in the mainstream colleges. In discussion, the Inclusion manager at Brinton explained that the Inclusion policy ensured that visual impairment awareness training was provided for all tutors and support staff likely to become involved with visually impaired students, to ensure that lessons were delivered inclusively (Amy Interview 21/3/13). However the tutors interviewed in Brinton, who were working with visually impaired students, stated they had not had received this training. The Senior Support Worker had received extensive training in Braille, and visual impairment awareness training, and the Support Worker in the sport department had received some CPD training. In Weatherwell none of the staff interviewed, all of whom were working with Tom, had received visual impairment training. Thus ideological intentions were not necessarily matched by practical enactment.

Possibly as a result of this lack of training, in mainstream, perceptions of responsibility for pedagogical adaptations by tutors were variable:

To be honest, with Alex, I kind of don't really...I mean obviously, I'm aware that he's got vision impairment but I kind of ignore it in a way because I just think, well he gets on fine, he manages fine.

Karen Interview 12/3/13

In contrast, other tutors appeared to actively promote accessible learning:

Alison's PowerPoint slides were written in large print Arial font, and when she used the whiteboard she wrote with a black pen in bold handwriting, and simultaneously repeated what she was writing, out loud.

Well, I always ask him if he can see things before we start. So, "Can you see what's on the blackboard?" And he goes, "Yes, I can." I always make sure he's got his glasses because sometimes he forgets his glasses. In practicals probably I do more one-to-one whereas if I'll teach the whole class something, whereas I would say Tom, right, and I'll show him personally how to do it, one-to-one.

Ann (Weatherwell Catering Lecturer) Interview 21/5/13

In the specialist college, all adaptations were the responsibility of the tutor, as there were no support workers in classes:

I observed a level one maths lesson, with three students; one Braille user, one using large print n36, and one using standard print with English as his second language. Alex, the Braille user, returned his Brailled homework, which the tutor said would be marked and returned to him the next day. Bill, the large print user, was issued with a large print worksheet (designed by the tutor) and proceeded to complete it. Alex began to type on his Perkins Braille, after reading the Braille question paper with his fingers. The tutor worked with Ali, the third student, using a tactile line graph of monthly temperatures she had created using Braille machine and paper and wiki sticks, pinned on a cork board.

Fieldnotes 30/4/13

The above extract suggests that while the specialist college may be viewed as a form of segregation, judged negatively by those following an inclusive agenda, the learning opportunities in this classroom are fully inclusive of all students, regardless of their levels of vision or text media, and are free of support worker intervention.

In addition to these ideological differences in the interpretation of inclusion, one of the most recurrent themes in the data was the extent of the perceptions of more general divisions and differences between institutions. The brief college profiles in Chapter Five illustrated some significant differences in the organisation and atmospheres of each college. In Chapter Four the rationale for the selection of colleges was outlined. In part, decisions were influenced by the need to represent the different organisational models for education and disability services. Thus, disparities were expected, and anticipated in the research design.

However, comparative analysis of themes emerging from the data revealed the depth of the differences in opinion between professionals in the colleges. These differences were apparent in ideological, policy and practice levels. For example, the strong feelings of division between specialist and mainstream colleges were palpable. Discourses of competition and criticism resulted in dialogues of 'them' and 'us', demonstrating an explicit example of Hargreaves' 'contrastive rhetoric' (1984) in their perspectives:

You know, why shouldn't these people be in the mainstream? Why should they be shut away in a college, perhaps, hundreds of miles from their families, from their peer group, from the culture that they've grown up with, the area they've grown up with and it's a huge cost to the government anyway.

Amy Interview 21/3/13

There are two [visually impaired students] I'm aware of. The problems they both said were, that at school, they were in a mainstream course, they had never mixed with other people who were blind. And suddenly, being in Specialist, they were in a completely different community. They both said, they were lost as people, because they had suddenly become 'blind people'...part of this group of people who were all over-catered for, in many ways, and they wanted to be back in the community.

FESN Discussion group 27/4/12

The Principal said 'I am very interested in what local colleges really have to offer, and whether, if you added it all up, it really offers value for money, when you consider everything going in, the support workers, inclusion people, the equipment, plus the mobility, and social work from social services, careers, and all that, and how the lack of co-ordination affects what actually happens for the student. We've got one joined up team who talk daily, who look at the whole person, and how it all joins together.'

Ospley Fieldnotes 28/11/12

The divisions were also enacted in the classroom:

The Business tutor began a discussion about direct and indirect competition, using the college as an example. 'OK you all know the college has some problems with money – so they'll be looking at the competition, to see how they maximise their input. So who would you think would be the college's direct competitors?' Keith 'well other blind colleges' 'yes good, and who are our indirect competitors?' No response. 'Well it has got to be mainstream colleges, yes? They can't do the same as us, but may take from our businesses'.

However elements of competition between mainstream colleges were also evident:

Amy stated twice that she's hoping to work with other colleges, in a non-threatening way; 'I'm not trying to take over other people's services, but they don't always see it that way'.

These competitive professional and external contexts (Braun et al. 2011) and the ideological frameworks that supported them thus fed into enactments of policy. The complexity of interpretations of the ideology of 'inclusive education', and professionals' expressions of division and difference was evident in many levels of college organisation and management. However these values also had implications in shaping the attitudes of professionals towards visually impaired students, and in the provision of services which will be discussed below.

Analysis of fieldwork observations also suggested that professionals' levels of experience and ideological perceptions impacted upon their attitudes towards, and expectations of, visually impaired students. These attitudes were not demarked by the particular institutional location, but varied on an individual level across all three sites. A large body of research conducted over forty years suggests that teacher expectation can influence student outcomes (Good and Brophy 2008; Weinstein 2002; Smith 2013), and more recent work suggests that the strongest effects take place for 'stigmatised' groups such as those with disabilities (Madon, Jussim and Eccles 1997; Smith 2013). Following Goffman (1963), numerous studies such as those conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), and Rist (1977) support Goffman's 'labelling theory' and the relationship between teacher expectations and the student's development of their self-concept (Saha and Dworkin 2009). The attitudes of professionals discussed below were therefore key considerations in their interactions with students.

Professional's expectations were divided, temporally, into three phases, which were common to all those interviewed: their fears prior to meeting the student, their current experiences, generally of the student as 'surprisingly

high achieving', and their levels of aspiration for the student in the future, after further education. In the mainstream colleges each of the tutors and support staff described their worries (prior to meeting the student) about their ability to cater for the needs of the student, and their fears as to the student's ability to meet the demands of the course:

We were all wary, all of us, because this was the first time ever we had one in sport. I mean we're obviously going to be wary. I think because you're frightened of something really mad happening or dangerous or risky.

Denise Interview 26/2/13

What worried me about VI, was, we don't really know what we are doing. It is so hard isn't it, and they are all different. I was worried about the knives etc, I mean I couldn't imagine how a blind person could do catering, and the tutors were like "argh...we've not had one like him before".

Steph Interview 20/5/13

While the assessment process and longevity of specialism created less of a tension in the specialist college, those with needs additional to their visual impairment prompted similar reactions. One tutor spoke of the difficulties they had anticipated in working with a student with a visual impairment and schizophrenia, and another discussed the additional challenges they perceived in planning for a potential student with a physical impairment. In addition, in interview with John, it appeared that his dyslexia had not been addressed since coming to the college.

In terms of their current experiences, all tutors and support staff in mainstream colleges used language which suggested they viewed the students as 'surprisingly high achieving' and admirable. Support Workers, such as the Specialist VI Senior Support Worker in Brinton, were consistently enthusiastic:

Because, I find, they amaze me some of the visually impaired students...it's how poor their vision is, but you don't realise. And I think you can go into a class... because they sit and look at the board, it doesn't mean, I mean, they can't see it... but the lecturers almost would forget. One student, he was so clever. He did all the science A-levels. And like in Chemistry he was like a whizz. Absolutely amazing. He had A-stars in his A-levels. He's just so clever.

Sara Interview 6/3/13

However experienced managers also expressed surprise and admiration for high achieving students:

I mean we've got a student who comes in, he's a mature student. He runs a restaurant. And he's done his Cert Ed. He's done his degree and he's done everything. He comes on Tuesday sometimes because he does a course here and he always carries a white stick with him but it's never put him off.

Alice Interview 20/5/13

Some of the descriptions from professionals, particularly support workers in mainstream, supported disablist notions of the 'tragic figure', which simultaneously respects and undermines the efficacy of the individual (Shakespeare and Corker 2002):

I felt awful for him when I found out [about Tom's deteriorating vision]. I just thought, God you poor thing. You think of the future, don't you, and I don't think he thinks that far. You know: will he ever get married, have children. It's just one of those sort of heartbreaking stories.

Steph Interview 20/4/13

While there were discrepancies in attitudes regarding visually impaired students between mainstream and specialist colleges in terms of their expectations of the current levels of achievement, opinions on their future prospects were uniformly negative. The ICT tutor in Ospley, for example, stated:

I don't, actually see a future in employment for my students. I don't. So I don't have a very positive, you know. I don't...if I thought about where our students, my students will go after. That's tricky. I have to stop thinking because it would just be too bleak, I think.

Emily Interview 23/4/13

I think, possibly, employers need to be educated. I could just imagine that straight away, it's like, "Oh, crikey. Right. Oh no, we can't have you." So I think they've got a lot of barriers in life once they leave college and I don't know that they'd ever be removed by employers. It's...I think, maybe it's almost like tunnel vision, isn't it? It's like, "Oh, they're not going to be able to do this, that and the other."

Alice Interview 20/5/13



When some optimism for future employment was expressed by support staff and tutors, aspirations for students were generally for employment within the disabled community:

Like I say, like if he was to do disabled sports. You know, you usually get a disabled coach because they've got the empathy. They know what they are talking about don't they? So it's visually impaired or hearing impaired. You see a lot of coaching going into that area.

Denise Interview 26/2/13

Or qualified by a series of restrictions and conditions:

Yeah, I mean obviously you know, as long as there's no issues involved with safety with gym equipment and things like that. I mean if the individual is aware of everything they need to do and the employer is happy with that, I don't see there being an issue with a job as a gym instructor.

Alison Interview 28/2/13

While these concerns for future employment and the students' prospects could be judged as evidence of exceptionally negative perceptions, statistics suggest that they are in some ways justified, with only one in three visually impaired people of working age in employment in the years 2009- 2012 (Hewitt 2013).

## **6.4 Provisions and Practices**

While attitudes towards visually impaired students were, overall, found to be fairly uniform, a significant finding in the data was the extent of variations in understandings of legal and policy-related responsibilities for educational provision. The ideologies of special educational needs and inclusion, and the resultant responsibilities for provision and practice are legislated for in compulsory education. In post-compulsory education in general, and in further education in particular, there are particular challenges in the provision of services for students with a disability. Following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, the provision and organisation of services for students with disabilities became increasingly fragmented, as each college in Wales created its own system. While all colleges are bound by SENDA (2001) and the Disability Equality Duty (2006), there are no specific guidelines for further

education colleges as to the specificities of provision and practice. As discussed in Chapter Two, although there is a Code of Practice for Local Authority provision (WAG 2004) this does not apply to the further education sector.

These changes led to variations in understandings of responsibilities, which at times appeared to be sketchy:

CM: What's kind of statutory duties does a college have in relation to SEN?

Paula: The DSA. We got to oblige with that.

CM: Are there any other policies or codes of practice you have to follow?

Paula: Off the top of my head, I don't know. In an inclusive college... you'd find the policy, et cetera on the website... so that's that. But you know we've got to follow with the DSA so we go by that. The Disabled Statement Access, is it?

Paula Interview 13/3/13

The Principal of Weatherwell seemed unsure of statutory duties for SEN, and phoned HR for advice. She printed off the college Disability Statement, Vulnerable Adults Policy, Equality and Diversity policy, and Disability Equality Scheme for me, but had not read them herself.

Fieldnotes 5/1/12

A number of the professionals with cross-national further education responsibilities, such as Sarah, head of a network of SEN educators, saw disability as a low priority for managers and tutors:

Currently we ask tutors to deliver more and more – deliver the main qualification, deliver essential skills, support the Welsh language and culture, include citizenship and sustainability, monitor and implement the ILP, and it's not feasible to add SEN specialisms on top of this. Staff are getting better at recognising diversity, but this doesn't necessarily mean they can meet the needs of specific learners. We need to skill up the Support Workers. That is where the future lies.

Sarah Interview 27/2/12

Differences in service provision thus appeared to be due to ideological and political re-contextualisations of responsibilities in practice. For example, in the following extract from a discussion group held with those professionals in

further education who have a responsibility for provision for disabled students, it was evident that visually impaired students' needs were understood in a variety of ways, and that levels of expertise varied widely. When asked 'what type of services would you think would be essential if you were going to provide for a visually impaired student?':

N: If the student is going into a mainstream then there has to be some sort of worker, who can arrange any adaptations, because mainstream lecturers don't have either the experience, the knowledge or the time to do it themselves, so you need a person, who can be freed up, to actually investigate.

(Murmured agreement from A, E, H and I)

To produce materials in an appropriate format, and to check out what might be available, what you can purchase, or what you can produce, somebody who has got the time to do that.

CM: And that would be something you would consider to be important? How many colleges have got something like that?

C: We have, as you know. And that is part of why we are known for it...

I: There used to be the sensory service, in the old independent college, which is now going to be part of our college, so that would be their role and responsibility. The vast majority are the signers, so it is more for the deaf students.

O: We are buying in from the local authority, we haven't got it ourselves, but we are buying in.

C: We have got a unit, where they can come in any time, whether visual or hearing loss, they can come upstairs to my work area, we've got all the large screen software, things like that, and if they need them in the specific area, I can put the software there. Like into science or IT or whatever.

FESN Discussion group 27/4/12

Interestingly this set of exchanges also goes some way to explain how professionals in mainstream colleges interpret the complexities of teaching and supporting visually impaired students, and how this may result in lack of provision, or signposting to specialist facilities. While all colleges in Wales have a department or individual responsible for the support of the generic category of 'LDD learners' (learning difficulty and/or disability), only two colleges were identified in any interview or discussion group as claiming to have, or being recognised as having, a degree of expertise in visual impairment. As Paul, in the specialist college stated, 'Most LA's [Local

Authorities] in England are really reluctant to fund us. But in Wales, we have many students from Wales, because local authority area colleges are still happy to admit they cannot meet their needs' (Fieldnotes 28/11/12). Evidence suggests that a disproportionately large number of Welsh visually impaired students attend residential college. For example in 2008, 19 of the 207 students with any form of disability funded in residential colleges attended specialist facilities for visually impaired students (Welsh Government 2013). This is a large proportion (9.2%), when visually impaired students accounted for only 3.6% of the total number of disabled students in Wales at that time (WAG 2010d).

The professionals' views on the complexities of provision for visually impaired students may be explained, in part, by the low incidence levels. Welsh assembly figures suggested that in 2012/13 there were 105 further education students aged under-18, and 325 students aged over 18 with a visual impairment as their primary disability, with an additional 25 students disclosing a multi-sensory impairment (Welsh Government 2014c: 24). However interviews suggested the figures may be significantly lower. The meeting I attended in April 2012 had representatives from eighteen of the twenty colleges in existence at the time, and of these only four professionals could recall students with a visual impairment aged 16-25 being enrolled, with eight students being enrolled at one single college, two at another, and one student each in the two remaining colleges. The discrepancy may be of course due to the categorisation of students with a disability; while students may cite visual impairment as their primary disability for the purposes of disclosure, as collected by the Welsh Government, they may have an additional learning disability. These learners were excluded from the study (see the discussion on sampling in Chapter Four).

Perceptions of this low incidence and the complex needs presented to tutors by visually impaired students appeared to impact on tutors' interpretations of their responsibilities towards visually impaired students. One tutor (who had not worked with a visually impaired student) discussed the issue informally:

The tutor said that so many students have pastoral care needs, and that someone with a VI attending would put 'impossible strain' on the tutors, and that currently 'dealing with all the problems takes up enough time as it is'

Fieldnotes 5/1/12

A third-sector professional with cross-national further education responsibilities for visually impaired young people discussed the attitudes this tutor had expressed:

Daisy stated that she had met with large number of tutors and other professionals in FE colleges across Wales, and that she had been shocked at the range of attitudes presented; a number had stated they wouldn't want a VI student in the class as it would slow the others down, and that it wasn't fair to expect them to know all about every different condition, especially one such as VI which has such a large impact on teaching and learning, but low incidence.

Fieldnotes 7/2/11

The exception was in one of the participating colleges, Brinton, which was aiming to become a centre of excellence for further education for visually impaired students in Wales. However the expertise required was understood by professionals in this college to be outside the remit of most mainstream colleges' support capacities:

The managers, Amy and Jane, discussed the short-comings of other colleges in enabling provision for visually impaired students, due to a lack of understanding and lack of awareness. The manager stated: 'Visual impairment is a low incidence but high cost disability, with the technology, with the specialist training that is needed to support someone appropriately, and it is expensive.'

Fieldnotes 21/5/12

These findings support those of a number of studies which have investigated the impact of teacher attitudes and perceptions of self-efficacy on the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom (Jablan et al. 2011; Rule et al. 2011; Hong et al. 2009; Ernst and Rogers 2009; Brady and Woolfson 2008; Jordon et al. 2009). For example Jablan et al. (2011) suggested that teachers *with* experience and training evaluate the problems presented by visually impaired pupils as considerably lower than those without training or experience. The fear of the 'impossible strain'

discussed in the extracts above may therefore be as a result of the low incidence of visual impairment and the concurrent lack of experience.

In terms of academic and pastoral support, professionals interviewed in each of the colleges had their own ideological, political and practical understandings of the role of disability support services in education, which informed their understandings and applications of support policies in the classrooms. As discussed in Chapter Five, in Brinton, support workers provided assistance and note-taking in the classroom, and students were issued with equipment to aid access to text, such as CCTV's and laptops. In addition Brinton's 'Alt Format' Officer converted information into accessible forms such as Braille or large print (re-typed, rather than photocopied, to ensure clarity). Training in access technology such as JAWS (a speech package on the computer) was also available. Similarly in Weatherwell, support was understood by managers and teaching staff to be a combination of support worker assistance in the classroom, and the provision of enlarged text and/or equipment such as an iPad to support access to information. Support workers completed tasks such as experiments where a health and safety issue was perceived. In Ospley, no support workers were present in the classrooms, and tutors were required to produce all materials in accessible forms, to the students' preferred format. Additional curriculum training was available to teach independence skills in areas such as mobility, communication, equipment and the use of technology, outside of the curriculum timetable. Pastoral support in life and social skills was also part of each student's Individual Education Plan.

While these arrangements appeared on the surface to be straightforward, enactments in practice proved far more 'messy' in practice. Firstly, the role of the support worker was subject to a range of interpretations by the support workers themselves:

Depending on the student, it'd be either taking notes for them...what else do I do? Taking notes, just encourage them and keep them on task, stop them sort of getting distracted and.... Like Tom; he has all his things blown up, doesn't he? It's just sort of taking his notes, note writing and help... or...get him the iPad and things like that.

Steph Interview 20/4/13

In-class support mostly I do. Nancy does the typing. I'm the link between really. Because Nancy is here and they are scattered everywhere... There have been students who use Braille in lessons. So, I'm in the lesson with them and then they've got the Braille and you transcribe it back. If they give out a sheet that day you quickly Braille that and give it to them. We've got the Duxbury printer, it's just so much quicker to do it on that, isn't it? But if it was like a little bit then probably I would do it myself.

Sara Interview 6/3/13

I do grammar... basics skills mainly... how to write assignments, using spell check, and using their own skills as well; building up skills that way. Anything else they need help with. I do it on one-to-one or on whole class; depends on the need of the class. Some classes have more need. Other classes, I'm only in there for maybe one or two students.

Denise Interview 26/2/13

Support workers and managerial staff appeared to emphasise the support required to access text information through note-taking, enlargement or alterations to course materials. Support did not appear to be routinely provided for the physical or practical activities demanded by the courses, such as sport, drama, or cookery. This has significant implications for interactions and dependencies in the classroom, and for learning and pedagogy, and will be explored further in the discussions in Chapter Eight.

Understandings of the roles of support workers were further complicated by dialogues of judgement about the use of support. In a number of interviews and informal conversations, professionals associated independence from support as being 'good':

Alison stated 'He's so good, he doesn't need support'

Fieldnotes 8/2/13

He's hardly ever come to me for support, even though he's on my list, he's never come to me saying what do you think of this or do you want to read that? You know he hasn't. He's great, so independent. And he's a nice lad too.

Denise Interview 26/2/13

The message to the students appeared to be that independence from support was positive, and that use of support could be perceived as failure:

So this student this year, he's fabulous. He's just, you wouldn't even know he was visually impaired because he just melts in with the rest of the class and he doesn't make a fuss about it, whereas last year's student did make a fuss about it.

Denise Interview 28/2/13

However these covert messages contradicted professionals' own views of the benefits of support, which appeared to be entirely positive, and based around the support worker's role in enabling the tutors to 'get on' with teaching. This view of 'independent learning with support', which could be viewed as a contradiction in terms, was validated by a number of professionals:

The main advantage is they can participate totally in the lesson. And the disadvantage is they got some adult trailing round behind them (laughs).

Sara Interview 6/3/13

Oh, well, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages because whether these students wouldn't...I don't think...I'm not being big-headed, but they would not get through without support, I don't think...I don't think about disadvantages. The only disadvantage is if they don't want the support.

Denise Interview 26/2/13

CM: Do you think support has any impact on teaching and learning?

Jane: Yes, especially if the learners have got major difficulties because it allows the teacher to work with everybody yet the support worker is there to reinforce for the learner with the learning disability or difficulty.

Jane Interview 13/3/13

In Ospley, 'contrastive rhetoric' (Hargreaves 1984) was again evident in discussions around the use of support workers. A number of members of staff at the specialist college expressed a belief that the presence of support workers in the mainstream settings reduced independence and learning:

[In mainstream] the blind young person might be the only one in the school and that can be really isolating. They typically will have a learning assistant



who.. they don't need it, but who then typically might do a lot of the work for them. It means that students sometimes end up here a year or two behind.

Principal Interview 1/5/13

Students dialogues in mainstream colleges failed to support the professionals' positive views of the use of support workers. Ferguson suggested that in education 'the real outcomes can be limited by the very special education supports designed to ensure their success' (2008: 111). Both Alex and Steven in Brinton aimed to receive minimum adult support, preferring to rely on their peers. They appeared to view the presence of support workers as a negative, in terms of their social integration.

CM: How'd you feel about having the support worker with you if you needed?

Steven: I don't know. I don't really want one next to me. Just like, I can go and see them if I need them.

CM: So you don't want someone sitting next to you?

Steven: No.

Steven interview 22/2/13

I remember I hated the first week of college, because I came in and I had a support worker for the whole week, which was great because I needed it, but it's never a good thing when you walk into a class with your people and your support worker is following behind you.

Alex interview 6/5/13

Steven also believed that the presence of a support worker interfered with his learning:

When I was in year 7, 8, I didn't learn as much because...like people, like teachers were basically doing the work for me, copying it down and stuff. Once...when I do it myself...copy it down, I get it, it gets into my head.

Steven interview 22/2/13

However for other students with a more significant visual impairment, the support was viewed as positive, as it facilitated learning:

And the thing I loved the most was as well because, like, I had support one-to-one, they'd read things on screen because I did ECDL, which is an online thing, so basically, you read a load of pages and stuff, and then answer the

question at the very end sort of thing. If my eyes were getting really tired after, like, two pages, especially with the magnification, I think, it took like an hour just to read, say, two pages, but somebody with normal sight probably reads six or seven. So, like, my support assistant started reading them.

Ffion interview 23/4/13

In Weatherwell the support worker was present to support the whole class. Although individual support could be provided to some students with 'significant needs', Tom was supported as part of a group, and no support was provided for his GCSE Maths class. Unlike the students in Brinton, Tom felt a sense of 'losing out' on support (Fieldnotes 14/5/13)::

Seth, Tom's friend in the meantime, filled me in on the issues of support; 'we have a support in the class, but some of them only work with one person, if they've got something big, you know, severe dyslexia and that. If there's one person with a load of needs, the others don't get a look in, even if they're getting behind, or don't get something.' Tom interjects 'and sometimes you just can't get that little bit of extra help'.

In her wide-ranging review of inclusive education findings across Europe and the USA, Ferguson (2011) argued that truly inclusive learning requires a shift in the practices of teaching and learning, with strategies operated by teachers in place, which ensure truly differentiated learning opportunities. She suggested that support provision may create social and educational barriers to true inclusion: 'Students can be "in" but not "of" the class in terms of social and learning membership' (Ferguson 2011: 111). On balance the findings of this study sustained these claims. Where targeted support for a particular need was provided, as in Ffion's need for a reader, access to learning was enhanced. However where provision was sketchy, or knowledge of the specific needs of the individual was not present, as was evident in Tom's use of his iPad, support acted as a barrier to true inclusion. Although support provisions were viewed positively by professionals, these same staff members also valued independence from support. The use of support workers was perceived by the majority of the students to be a barrier to true integration with peers. This mirrors the findings of many other studies, summarised in Mortier et al.'s 2011 report on children's perspectives on support. A large majority of the studies suggested that while support workers

are appreciated by children when they enable access to the curriculum, (Lightfoot, Wright, and Sloper 1999; Hutzler et al. 2002; Messiou 2002; Hemmingsson, Borell, and Gustavsson 2003) they are seen to inhibit true social integration (Giangreco et al. 1997; Hutzler et al. 2002; Norwich and Kelly 2004; De Schauwer et al. 2009; Curtin and Clarke 2005).

In Chapter Three, literature on findings related to the 'additional curriculum' for visually impaired students was discussed. Both in the UK and the US, studies have suggested that access to specialist provision is essential to educational access, improved achievement and the future employability prospects of visually impaired students (Douglas et al. 2009; Kiel and Clunies-Ross 2002; Wolffe and Kelly 2011). Known as the 'additional curriculum' (Douglas et al. 2009), such provision includes training in orientation and mobility, independent living skills, communication (for example in the use of alternative forms of text), and social and life skills. However each of the colleges in this study had their own particular understandings of these needs, and interpreted responsibility for provision for these needs differently. This resulted in widely varying provisions made in each setting.

In terms of the understanding of responsibilities, one specialist third sector professional supporting visually impaired students across Wales outlined her concerns:

The issue she felt was that VI is so low incidence, and the needs of visually impaired people are so little understood, in terms of the range of eye conditions, the functional needs of people with a sight loss, and the abilities of visually impaired people when correctly supported with the appropriate equipment and training. She stated that: 'There are often so many things VI students don't know, and they're often the little things, the visual things, the life skills and social skills that need to be taught, you know, the things sighted people take for granted and would never dream of adding to a curriculum. They need to be taught, but for that to happen people need to realise what is needed. So often teachers rely on the students to tell them, but *they* don't know what they don't know, if you see what I mean? The assessments just look at accessing the curriculum, and all the rest is just forgotten'

Daisy Interview 7/2/11

A number of professionals in disability service provision in further education across Wales perceived the issue as a need for extra help from support workers, rather than as a need for independence training:

And sometimes they need a support or a guide within a building, where it is busy. It is quite frightening for students to be in college, in a busy atmosphere of an FE college, that's a big barrier for students. They need that support, for safety. To be safe in the environment. And they need a safe environment, as well.

FESN Discussion group 27/4/12

In Weatherwell, such provisions were generally viewed both as a need for a support worker, and as the responsibility of Social Services:

CM: Are there any additional areas of learning that vision impaired students might need in addition to the course curriculum? Do they get any additional...?

Alice: No. Unfortunately, we don't. It's something that I should be looking at and I've got quite close links with...and I always forget, but it's called Sensory Services. I'm actually meeting with them next week. I've never...I don't think we've ever had any problems as far as learners getting around the college because we always make sure that there's an LSA, meets them from the bus, taxi and whatever they need and guides them around and, you know, just to support them and make sure that they're okay.

Alice Interview 20/5/13

However in Brinton, managers were aware of the need for additional curriculum input, and were campaigning for funding to enable them to provide these services:

CM: What would be the main reason for a vision impaired student to choose to study in a specialist college, do you think?

Amy: Well it's down to choice, isn't it? It's down to choice from our sort of angle at the moment, we haven't got the 24/7 curriculum which is what I would like... [In a specialist college] they all have the same difficulty or disability, however you want to call it, or additional need. So they are together, they are doing mobility training, they've got the rehab officer there, everything is set up... But I suppose, the advantage of that is you've got all that on tap. We have, you know, we wouldn't have that at this moment in time... They've [the visually impaired students] got to be prepared for the rest of their life to face the challenges that are out there, and we need to be able to prepare them to face those challenges, whether it's improving their mobility,

their social skills, their personal interactive skills, the way they communicate.

Amy Interview 21/3/13

For the Principal at Ospley, the specialist college, these additional curriculum needs were the first area of consideration for visually impaired students, before course decisions were made:

CM: For students deciding, at the point of deciding where to attend, what do you think their considerations are? What do you think they need to consider?

Principal: I think they need to consider their degree of independence and is it being encouraged? Because if they can't...if they're not, you know, they're not learning independent living skills, they're going to really be limited in their life choices. And so they do need to consider that. Then they need to obviously consider a sort of program and qualification that's going to suit them because we don't offer the whole everything.

Principal Interview 1/5/13

In terms of provision, these understandings resulted in three distinctly different forms of service availability. In Weatherwell, there was little consideration or provision for additional curriculum needs, although during the course of the research, the staff seemed to become aware of the need for this. Tom had been provided with large print in some of his subjects, although his take-up of this was variable. A 'Lookie' (a magnifying device for accessing text) was kept in the catering cupboard (although this had only been used once). He had also been given an iPad, although there was no one with the expertise to teach him how to access text, whiteboards or videos using the software available on the device. Although his level of vision was such that he had no need for mobility training, the lack of specialist advice in cooking skills for his catering course was evident in many of the lessons:

Tom prepared the first batch of toast by toasting on one side, and stacked it in a large chrome pan. He did not appear to be able to see whether the toast was done when it was under the grill, as he peered closely (3") into the eye-level toaster, and then went to get a tea towel, which he used to remove the grill pan. He narrowly avoided setting fire to the cloth as he swooped it underneath. Once the toast was out he appeared able to see it, although he

checked a number of pieces for hard texture with his hands, to confirm they were done. The tutor prompted him to keep the toasting area clean – he fetched a cloth and wiped the surface, missing several areas completely. The tutor and the support worker periodically came though and cleaned it for him.

Fieldnotes 20/5/13

In Brinton, the acknowledged need for additional curriculum provision led to a range of related services. The specialist support worker for VI students was qualified in Braille, and the Alt Format (alternative format) technician provided course materials in each student's preferred medium. Training in specialist IT software was available from the Disability Support Co-ordinator. There were links with a national charity for visually impaired people, including those responsible for employment support. However training in mobility and orientation by a qualified professional, and independent living skills training were seen as the remit of the local social services department. Alex had received 'orientation' to the college prior to his enrolment by an unqualified support worker, but no professional interventions from a specialist mobility officer.

In contrast, in Ospley, independence training and the additional curriculum were an integral aspect of the Individual Educational Plan, and seen by both students and staff to be a central function of the college:

Paul, the residential manager, explained that services included mobility and orientation, independent living, specialist IT training, Braille and audio teaching, residential teams with waking night staff, and a pastoral support team working on 'soft skills', for example interpersonal skills and work-ready skills.

Fieldnotes 28/11/12

One residential staff member said, in informal discussion: 'It's such a deep and broad knowledge of visual impairment that we have here, that is what's so significant. It runs through every aspect of the teaching, every aspect of everything really. Even when you are doing a fire drill or a room check, your understanding, your knowledge of the vision and the ways of doing things, tactile, or whatever, how they perceive stuff is central, and you are constantly aware of it, until you get to know them so well you do it automatically. The knowledge here is so specialised, and accumulated over decades'.

Student narratives supported this perspective of the college:

Here, you tell them what you want. And then you go in and they just say like, "Here's the work for today. Here's yours in Braille, here's yours in...yours is 30 bold, isn't it?" So it's ready for you, which is a huge shock. Obviously, in the, like the kitchens and that for when you do your living skills, you have here, your bump-ons and all that sorted, talking timers and that sort of thing. So that's good. And your mobility training, so, you can...you have your independence to go down the shop on your own.

Ffion Interview 23/4/13

In general, the extent of extra-curricular provision at Ospley was praised by students and professionals both within and outside the college, for its potential to enable students to live independently in the future. However some of the students and professionals were critical about the impact of the high levels of adjustment for the additional needs of visually impaired people, and the high levels of specialised knowledge. Amy, for example, working in mainstream, felt that specialist colleges created a 'bubble', which would be far removed from what would be available in the 'real world':

In the real world. It's not like that. And we often get young people who'll come back to us [from specialist to mainstream], they've been away for three years. They come back to us, they find it quite difficult because in the real world, everybody is different, and everybody's got differences. You don't live the rest of your life in a closed off specialist area.

Amy Interview 21/3/13

Thus, it appears that perceptions of these 'additional curriculum' needs varied across colleges. In the mainstream colleges the external contexts of provision, and the implementation of policies as a result of the historical framework of departmental responsibility, created a split between educational and social needs. The social needs were thus believed to be the remit of the local authority social services department, although Brinton was hoping to develop a service to meet these needs in the future. However these needs were understood by professionals in the specialist college, and by some researchers and scholars in inclusion, to be elements of the 'additional curriculum', and an integral part of disability support provision. For

visually impaired students these educational and social needs were often intertwined: being able to access classrooms and corridors required mobility training; weighing and measuring skills were essential in science and cookery classes; and access to text, whiteboards and videos, used frequently in the classrooms, were reliant upon communication and technology training. When independence training in these areas was not available, needs were met through the use of support, and learning opportunities for life skills were therefore lost.

## **Conclusion**

Returning to the research questions of this study, and specifically question one, 'How do the policies of inclusive education and special educational needs impact on the policies and practices of specific institutions in the provision of teaching and learning for visually impaired students?', it is evident that national legislation and policies, such as SENDA (2001), while recognised by each institution, are re-contextualised by actors in individual colleges in distinctly different ways. These site-specific enactments of inclusion policies have a significant impact on the learning and interactions of visually impaired students. As Slee (2001) suggested:

This fundamental reduction in educational disablement to location and resources frequently undermines our capacity to deconstruct exclusionary educational practices and the oppressive social relations in schools. All too often curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and school organisation are absent from the pathological probing of disablement.

Slee 2001: 388

From transition decision-making processes to daily interactions and actions in further education classroom settings, the specificities of the location, funding, courses, support and specialist input all have a direct impact on the achievements and performances of visually impaired students. These specificities are influenced by the ideological frameworks of inclusion and special or additional needs. Such values have been interpreted and translated into contextualised practices by colleges in unique ways (Braun et al 2011).



In Brinton, ideological adherence to the principles of inclusion was evident at a policy and documentation level. There was also awareness at a managerial level of the necessity for appropriate tutor training in visual impairment, and of the desirability of resources to provide for the additional curriculum. However, at the 'chalk-face', practices continued to follow the Special Educational Needs (SEN) model, with support worker-resources provision. As will be seen in the following chapters, while students appreciated the resources provided to ensure the accessibility of text materials, support worker assistance was rejected and the practical tasks within courses were rarely addressed or supported. The ideology of viewing students as a 'deviation from the norm' thus persisted in practice, and as will become apparent in Chapter Eight, exclusionary practices, at a micro-level, persisted in pedagogy and in enactment of the curriculum.

In Weatherwell, the lack of knowledge of the needs of students with a visual impairment, discussed and acknowledged openly by the professionals interviewed, resulted in well-meaning but inadequate levels of support and resource provision. Ideologically, the provision remained firmly embedded within the SEN model. Professionals within the college perceived elements of the additional curriculum to be separate from the remit of an educational institution. They saw these as located within the home life of students, and therefore the remit of social services' sensory services departments. In Chapters Seven and Eight, it will become evident that these organisational and ideological dimensions of Weatherwell had specific implications for the student's ability to access text and diagrams, PowerPoint presentations and the practical tasks of a catering course.

The specialist nature of Ospley College meant that the ideology of inclusive education was rejected, in favour of specific provision for the pedagogical and additional curriculum needs of the visually impaired students. However this resulted in a 'bubble', an 'unrealistic' microcosm of adapted education. This specialist institution was increasingly viewed by funding bodies and mainstream educators as both too expensive and too ideologically challenging to fund, as was evidenced by the drop in student numbers. Course choice was, in the main, restricted to those subjects deemed

accessible to all blind and partially sighted students, therefore restricting access to visual course options for partially sighted students. Managers at Ospley viewed the remit of the college to be the *preparation* of students, both academically and socially, for their futures. However critics argued that the segregation of visually impaired students into specialist colleges is the ultimate expression of an exclusionary educational practice which continues oppressive social relations. Counter to this argument, professionals in Ospley suggested that there is a significant difference between being 'in' and being 'of' the mainstream classroom in terms of learning membership (Ferguson 2011: 111), and that only through individualised specialist intervention can true independence in adulthood be achieved.

Students' choices and experiences in further education were thus influenced by the nature and location of the colleges, the availability of funding, and students' course options. While each of these considerations may be similar to those of their sighted peers, some issues were specific to visually impaired students. Location, course choice and levels of specialism intersected with issues in funding. The ability of colleges to cater for the particular requirements of the course and the individual's specific needs in relation to their visual impairment influenced the selection and experience of college. The more practical or specialised the interventions or support required in terms of pedagogy and the additional curriculum, the more likely that a specialist environment would be required. In addition staff ideology and attitudes were highly significant, and dependent upon experience and training in the specialist resources and pedagogical practices available for visually impaired students. Without sufficient knowledge, training and experience in mainstream colleges, visually impaired students were viewed as an 'impossible strain'. Exclusionary educational practices were evident where issues of disablement had not been addressed. In the following chapter, the student participants in this study will be discussed, as each had unique characteristics which shaped their educational decision-making, interactions and performances in the college settings discussed above.



## Chapter Seven: Students

It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explanations, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers.

(Geertz 1973: 16)

The 'strangers' central to this study were the six student participants who willingly shared their histories, feelings, experiences and daily lives, through interview and observation. These six individuals had complex stories and histories to tell, which they saw as having a significant impact on their actions, feelings and choices in the educational settings discussed in the previous chapter. In Rabinow's (1986: 258) classification of ethnographic texts, the following vignettes fall under the 'critical cosmopolitan' tradition, in that they aim to be 'highly attentive to (and respectful of) difference, but...also wary of a tendency to essentialise difference'. In order to explore how individual visually impaired student's characteristics and learning journeys affect the experience of teaching, learning and support in further education settings, as outlined in research question two, this chapter will provide a narrative account of each of the participants. This will include an analysis of their explorations of self and identity, and an examination of accounts of their educational biographies; their 'learning journeys' (Jephcote et al. 2007) and educational transitions. These detailed explorations of each individual's 'life-world' within the microcosm of the college environment constitutes a form of 'appreciative ethnography' in which students are seen as 'active in the construction of their social lives' (Hammersley 1999: 154).

It is not my intention to claim that the following vignettes represent the full 'essence' of Alex, Steven, Ffion, Keith, John, or Tom. As discussed in Chapter Four, the authorial interpretation of personalities, actions and narratives must be acknowledged. In addition, some facts have been changed to preserve confidentiality. However, collectively they enable an analysis of the significant themes that emerge from their accounts. Thomas

(1999) argued that disability is formulated and enacted in the intersection between the individual (including their impairment and psycho-emotional status), and the social setting. In this chapter, participant perspectives on individual impairment, past experiences, psycho-emotional responses, identity, and other 'axes of inequality' (Shakespeare and Corker 2002: 15) are explored. The data supported Thomas' proposition, highlighting the significance of each of these factors to interactions in the social context of the further education college. Thus, in the final section of this chapter, comparative analysis is used to explore emerging themes, such as the interactions between the dynamic nature of impairment, psycho-emotional stability, the students' learning journeys and the impact of significant others. Thematic analysis also revealed the significance of identity to educational and social well-being and choice-making, and the commentary will thus explore the role of identity building and the capacity for re-imagining identity that emerged as important themes in the students' narratives.

Firstly, however, the following vignettes provide an opportunity for the reader to 'get to know' the students, so that when placed in the context of the classroom environment in Chapter Eight, the impact of educational processes, practices and social interactions on each individual can be fully appreciated. In short, they allow the reader to ask: 'why should we care?' In each vignette, student self-descriptions and fieldnote observations will be followed by a brief pen picture. Then a descriptive analysis of the student's identity is given, before a description of their educational journey is outlined.

## **7.1 John**

I'm white Welsh. And one hundred per cent Rastafari.

John is waiting in the lodge when I arrive. He has a vivid red Mohican haircut and a pierced eyebrow, and is wearing a skull T-shirt and ripped tight blue jeans. Though shy, he makes conversation politely while waiting for his friends, laughing nervously at their tardiness, and explaining his campaign to secure funding for Ospley. He has a rich Welsh accent, which I struggle to understand. When the other three students arrive John relaxes visibly into 'student mode', giggling and sharing private 'in-jokes'.

Fieldnotes 7/3/13

John is eighteen, and comes from a small village in West Wales, where he lived with his Dad, Step-Mum and two brothers. His Mum, who lives with her partner, also has a visual impairment. When John was fifteen, he noticed a sudden drop in his sight, and it deteriorated rapidly over the next three months, as a result of the genetic condition inherited from his mother: 'I've lost 90% of my right eye and 80% in my left'. Despite this he gained eight GCSE's grades A-E in the same year.

A Social Worker supported John to visit a range of mainstream and specialist colleges at the end of his GCSE year, and 'once I'd seen here, that's all I wanted'. John attends Ospley College as a full-time residential student, and studies Level Three Sport and Fitness, and AS-level Maths, and attends the football academy daily. He currently uses 48pt font, which results in one word on a monitor at a time, or one letter on a mobile phone screen. He has resisted switching to audio or tactile modes for access to information and learning as he 'likes to be able to see things'. He only uses a cane at night, or in new places, and chooses not to have independent living training, counselling or Braille classes.

John has a fiancée, Sophie, with whom he 'unofficially' shares a room in the college hall of residence. The couple are seen as a dominant force: 'It isn't worth the battle, the room...take those two on and you'll have a problem' (Residential Staff 18/4/13). They are comfortable being physically affectionate in public, in classrooms, and during football games.

John's attendance at Maths is poor, while his attendance at sport is at 90%. During fieldwork this attendance deficit comes to a head. Despite claims during interview 'That's why, this Maths, I'm passing it', he and Sophie miss five out of six Maths lessons in a fortnight, and are formally disciplined by the senior management:

John is sat on the bench with three residential staff, looking despondent and slightly ashamed, discussing the disciplinary hearing. I hand him his voucher, and he mutters, 'sorry I haven't been about much'.

Fieldnotes 2/5/13

John has created a particular persona in his interactions with his peers and staff members. His jokey 'Rastafari' identity appears to support his rebellious image, which is also evident in his behaviour: 'you play drinking games and stuff with your friends and stuff. Have a good laugh'. As noted previously, this has an impact on his study:

...The tutor then phoned through to the halls of residence to inform them of John and Sophie's absence, and was told that they 'had spent the night partying the night before, until the early hours'.

Fieldnotes 17/4/13

However this rebelliousness contrasts with some of his language: 'Because I know *you are not supposed to* but if you get in an argument of people here, other people have to be involved, like staff members'. He also has traditional plans for the future: 'To own my own house...Obviously have a job...Marry my fiancée and getting two kids'.

John's persona in the sports hall is also distinct, as he embodies the 'macho sportsman':

Ten PS [partially sighted] students are kicking the ball about in an unstructured way, attempting headers (John missed by 12" - 'ooh I'm rubbish'). John complains to a team-mate 'don't kick it in the air, you know I can't see it up there, you bastard' and exchanges banter with the other students: 'oh how crap was that, you blind git'.

Fieldnotes 17/4/13

In his interview John explains that 'Welsh was my first language and [school is] where I first learnt how to speak Welsh and English altogether'. His use of English as a second language is evident in his unusual turns of phrase (for example, 'that was quite certainly'). However recognition of his Welsh-speaking identity is conspicuously absent in the rest of the data from John (or from the professionals).

It is evident in John's use of language and narrative that his sudden loss of his vision was a 'turning point' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 71). He remembers the exact date: '12<sup>th</sup> December when I was 15', and uses vocabularies of 'going' and 'loss'

That happened over a period of three months. My left eye, was it on the left? I don't remember, trying to think back now, was it...? My right eye went first. And then it was just blurring more. And I was testing my eyes basically because me and my auntie were looking at a letter from a distance. And we were covering both eyes separately just to see. I didn't know anything about it at this time. That's when I first noticed a massive decrease in my right eye. My auntie immediately was kind of worried. She told my dad about it and we went to the hospital because my mum who's also got my condition.

This narrative presents as a 'well-worn tale', tidy, often repeated, and devoid of emotion (it is his auntie who was worried). It is one that also indicates the significance of family, inheritance and guilt, supported elsewhere in John's dialogue: 'my mum still feels guilty about it'. He also appears to have formed his emotional responses in relation to his mother's: 'Because she dealt with it so bad, I was like, "I don't want to be like that"'. Although John speaks of being 'happy it happened', he describes blindness using strong emotional language: 'Because obviously if you are blind, the world is not going to be possible'. John uses emphatic language when describing how he feels:

I don't really like talking about it, but I'll talk about it, but I don't really get emotional about it very often. So it doesn't.... Although majority of the time it does not affect me emotionally. Sometimes I will think 'why can't I... oh rubbish, I wish I could do that'. Majority of the time I'm happy it happened because I'm happy here.

This contrasts strongly with professional views:

He's still in the very early stages of coming to terms, really, with his visual impairment and that means that he's often despondent, angry, frustrated and finds it hard to, you know, keep the train on the track.

Paul Interview 2/5/13

Throughout the data there is evidence of contrastive rhetoric of 'blind and not blind', his form of 'before and after' his sight loss. He describes his Dad's response:

My dad feels, not guilty, but he feels like he needs to do more around and worries a lot more about me...It kind of...it stresses me out and that, like, stop treating me differently. If I want to ride my bike, I'll be fine.. (laughs)

John's use of language is significant in his perception of his relationship to 'blind people', as he switches between various descriptive terms. Throughout the interview he is keen to emphasise the adaptations for 'other people', for



example, 'here [in Ospley] we've got like a skeleton, we got something else for *people* to actually feel what things are...But, it's not just for feeling about. It's like *you* can look at it as well'. It appears that he classifies himself as still outside the frame of 'blind people'. When directly questioned he states, 'I use "blind"', however in the following sentence he switches between 'people', 'me' and 'you', as if to remind himself of his own visual impairment:

Obviously, a lot of problems with people who are visually impaired, me included, is you can't see the ball if it's in the air because you rely on the contrast of the ball and the floor.

During interview John emphasises the significance of friendships. At school, prior to his vision loss, he says he 'wasn't the most popular kid to be honest', however at the college: 'I'm happy here. I've met new friends, and my fiancée Sophie... I like drinking with my group of mates'. He contrasts this with his arrival at Ospley: 'I was really shy and one of the saddest people here'. John frequently demonstrates kindness and empathy to other blind students, who he sees as 'less fortunate' than himself:

For a warm-up the students are told to jog two laps of the pitch; 'grab a B1, someone'. John volunteers to guide Jak (the 'total', as the students describe him), and they begin jogging, with Jak taking John's arm. They are soon last in what has become a race, rather than a warm-up.

Fieldnotes 17/4/13

The turning point of vision loss had a significant impact upon John's educational journey. He attended local mainstream primary and secondary Welsh-language schools, with few problems apart from some queries about his spelling and writing: 'they wanted to test for dyslexia but I think they just put it down to my eyesight nowadays'. He describes how the secondary school 'struggled' to support him as his sight deteriorated so rapidly, although he shows appreciation for their 'help': 'In the beginning, all they would do is just stick it on an A3 piece of paper and thought that would be good enough...harsh for them to understand'.

He describes his visit to Ospley in the manner of an 'epiphany' (Denzin 1989: 70), a revelation of the possibilities for blind young people and sport:

When I first came in, I can remember going like...it was one of the sports officers that was guiding me around. And he took me out. He took me to play the B1 football as well. With the bells and everything, I've never done that before. He took me into the gym and showed me all the equipment. I was just amazed by...like how adapted things are because of visual impairment in this college.

John's descriptions of the college as a 'great place' remain positive in terms of the opportunities, but it appears that he has become gradually more aware of the separation between the college world and the 'real-world':

It's not living a real life here. You're living in basically a dream world I guess. It's like living in basically your own little thing in here. And like...you can't...it's not living in the real world.

As he has grown 'confidence-wise' he also appears to have become increasingly resentful of the adult overview: 'I feel sometimes like you're trapped in here... Like you get basically spoon fed. It can be too easy'. However he sees the college as a transition to his future: 'I've been using this as a stepping stone from moving from home'.

John's sudden visual loss has challenged his sense of self, and he has struggled to forge a new identity as he deals with his psycho-emotional responses. Despite having similar recent sight loss, Ffion's narratives in the following vignette illustrate the significance of family and belonging to emotional well-being, and demonstrate how important exposure to new appropriately-adjusted learning opportunities can be to an individual's sense of self.

## 7.2 Ffion

I won't like something I'm doing...but I'll keep doing it anyway because I'm determined to do it. I don't like giving up on things. I've always been the eyes of my family, and I can't stand it if I don't use my eyes.

I arranged to meet Ffion in the refectory at lunchtime to discuss her taking part in the study. We had specified a table, and she came bounding up and said 'I heard you need help – what can I do?' Ffion was wearing a baseball cap and glasses, with her hair pulled back in a ponytail. She had jeans, a T-shirt and a hoodie on, with red converse baseball boots. She chatted excitedly about the project, and told me about the recent drama production for her performing arts course; 'I was well chuffed, it was fabulous. Four distinctions!'

Fieldnotes 18/4/13

Ffion is 21 and grew up in a small village in mid-Wales, with her father, mother and brother, all of whom had a visual impairment:

Growing up visually impaired, I've never thought of myself as disabled or anything. I'm just normal because in my family, we're all just, you know, blind. It's like, say, if you're visually impaired, but in a family of sighted people, then you kind of know you are visually impaired more.

In primary school Ffion had 'normal vision, more or less', but her sight has deteriorated ever since, and she now only has vision in one eye and 'everything is basically fuzzy, silhouetted'. She appears to identify and compare herself most frequently with her father: 'He always used to say I had more [vision] than him...but for a few years...he has more than me now'.

Ffion attended mainstream primary and secondary school, and then a local mainstream further education college, achieving a level two qualification in Business Administration. After this she was unemployed for three years. She now attends Ospley College as a full-time residential student, studying level two Performing Arts and level three Business Studies. She also has time-tabled weekly sessions in Braille, Independent Living Skills and Mobility and Orientation. She has a boyfriend, Ed, who she met at Ospley College, who also studies Performing Arts, and who lives in the same hall of residence.

Ffion's sense of self appears to be closely linked to her identity as a member of a visually impaired family. She tells 'cute' stories of her childhood:

When my brother was younger, apparently something that used to happen was the guide dog walking around the house, and my brother would hold on to his tail. And the dog would be like guiding him around the house. Guide dog at the age of two!

This contrasts with her views on the misguided perceptions of 'sighted people': 'one of the other things about being a visually impaired family, it's because sighted people they are like, "Ooh, I can't say that. I can't say that." But us, we're just like, "I'm blind." "Well, so am I."'. However the sense of her relative position in the family has been challenged by the deterioration in her vision:

And obviously, because I got a visually impaired family, I have had to be the eyes for everybody else in my family as well. Even if it's my dad, who has sight, we have to, like, help each other sort of thing. So I've always been the eyes, and I can't stand it if I don't use my eyes. I obviously can't stand it.

Her language is strong when describing the change in her vision: 'I was like, oh my God. I can't see what is going on there...so the worst eye then came to be the best eye, which was a bit shocking'. As a result she is uncomfortable with the implications for her learning and independence. She describes the word processing font she now has to use to access information: 'I now use, urgh, disgusting. I now use 30 bold Arial', and is uncomfortable with the alternatives: '*If I did lose my sight, I don't know how I am going to cope* because I can't stand Braille and I can't stand speech'. The change in tenses, emphasised, indicates her reluctance to accept the future, which is supported a number of times later in the interview: 'And it's like denial, then reality sets in and it's like crap'.

Her powerful sense of the 'visually impaired world and the 'sighted world' appears to have been influenced by her 'horrible' experiences in secondary school, where her sense of isolation and difference left her lonely and lacking in confidence. Her narrative about being forced to go in the schoolyard is touching, and indicates the significance of her problems with friendships:

One of my hugest problems was because I... I'm extremely photophobic. So sunny days like today, like summer and that, I completely...it's like quite painful to go outside. And I really did not want to go. But it's kind of, in a way, social as well because I didn't want to really go outside with other people out. I didn't want them to see me or, like, you know, that kind of stuff as well. So I was like, "Can I stay in here?" But they basically told me I had to go outside, so I'd have to go outside with the other kids and do stuff like that. Basically, for the hour of dinner, I'd basically stand on a wall, just blocking my eyes. I couldn't see. I was in, like, really a lot of discomfort. And then I didn't...and everybody else was like quite, you know, chavvy and stuff like that. So, they were like hugely confident and I was, like, not. I was scared.

Her sense of not wanting sighted people 'to see me' is reflected later in the interview, where the metaphor of hiding continues as she describes other girls' sense of fashion: 'They could be in like, you know, chavvy stuff and you come in with like a pink dress or something, you're going to feel extremely stupid and you're going to just, you know, just dig inside, just stay there'. She also returns to this sense of feeling stupid whenever she discusses the paraphernalia of blindness: 'I always think people will think me silly, if I have the stick and I'm like... left and right, left and right' (mimicking the action of the cane).

Ffion states she has found confidence and independence since attending Ospley. She spends a great deal of time with her boyfriend Ed, and their friends. They enjoy drinking in the college social bar ('my God they can welly it': Fieldnotes 30/4/13), but have good attendance and are well regarded by staff: 'She's great, really lovely' (Emily: Fieldnotes 1/5/13). She also feels she has discovered new talents; whereas previously she chose her options in relation to her father, 'my Dad's like, an office person, so I thought I'll be like my Dad probably', now she states, 'but now I've learned from here as well, is I want to do something practical, something in the creative industry'.

In terms of her educational journey, Ffion had negative social and psycho-emotional experiences in mainstream schooling. However she left with seven GCSE's at grades A-C. She then enrolled at the local mainstream college. She states that this choice was influenced by a friend from school, and her Dad's career, but that it wasn't a conscious career move: 'I didn't know what I wanted to do'. Whilst making this choice she had visited Ospley and 'really really liked it. But at that point, I didn't feel I was ready for just being on my own...leaving home, like, leaving'.

After completing college she found her unemployment difficult: 'I wasn't getting anywhere at all to be honest' and was simultaneously struggling to cope with her deteriorating eyesight, which she found very challenging: 'And I was getting, you know, where you just lack that motivation. I was just getting deeper and deeper, just like when you're falling'. Like John, she describes her decision to go to Ospley as an epiphany:

And I really liked it...I was actually really lucky. He said, "Are you interested in doing the performing arts?" We...I was... "Well actually, I have been thinking about it. I have been thinking more and more about it". And so he said, "Oh right, okay." We're so lucky we came in then.

Ffion's reflections on her educational journey reveal many of the difficulties she has experienced. She states that 'in mainstream you gain the confidence to have an idea of what's out there other than the visually impaired world'. However she feels that mainstream services are 'not used to visually impaired...so they do as little as possible', which seems to indicate an under-current of resentment and bitterness. In comparison, the specialist college

has offered her acceptance: 'they are much more used to, you know, your needs...they have it at hand. Because you can see what's going on. You're basically the same as everyone else in the class...you are one of them'. Given her experiences and her choice of a specialist college for re-training, she expresses concern for her transition out of the college: 'I'm worried that I'm going to get back into the position I was before I came to Ospley, and I'll be stuck at home with my parents, looking after my Gran'. However she hopes for better: 'I think my dream would be to go to Uni, to do something I enjoy like performing arts. Get a flat with my boyfriend, and then find a job'.

Keith's story, outlined below, shows similarity to Ffion's narratives in that it illustrates the significance of family acceptance to emotional stability and self-worth. However Keith's sense of self and educational trajectory are significantly influenced by his visual fluctuations, and by the lack of understanding he perceived in the past from mainstream peers and professionals.

### **7.3 Keith**

Everybody was new to the college. Nobody knew anyone. So it was basically somebody had to pluck up the courage and get everyone talking. So that was basically me.

Keith entered the lounge, along with his two friends. He was a tall, 'larger than life' character, with slow, considered speech. Keith seemed more comfortable than the others in interacting with me as an adult equal. He showed interest in the study, and when the three others claimed they did not know their college timetables, he looked his up on his mobile phone and read it out for me. He only looked uncomfortable when discussing his text access requirements (font size 12); his friends called him a 'faker', explaining the term as 'someone who pretends to be blind to get in here'

Fieldnotes 7/3/13

Keith is seventeen and when at home lives with his mother and father. He has two older sisters. He has had a visual impairment since birth, and a number of the men in his family have the same condition. He says he has a good relationship with his family, and can talk to them about the problems he faces with his vision: 'we talk about different things...because my uncle is still

struggling now like with what's out there to help him'. Keith can read standard print 'on a good day' and can see 'clearly', but he is sensitive to light, and his vision varies on a daily basis: 'my sight changes on how I'm feeling, like drowsiness, tiredness, happy, sad, just emotion, it just changes'.

Keith went to mainstream primary and secondary school, which he found challenging due to the lack of understanding of his variable vision levels: 'they never used to accept the fact that only I knew what I could see'. Having attained D's in his GCSE's, after being refused access to a laptop during his exams, he chose to attend Ospley, taking a level three Business course. He followed his cousin and his uncle to the college, because he believed 'everyone understands everything'. He describes it as a 'massive milestone' in his life.

Keith has a large number of friends at the college, and shares an otherwise empty corridor ('a wing') with a good friend, with whom he spends a great deal of time watching movies and drinking with others who visit. He is a weekly DJ in the social bar, enjoys fishing sessions with his pastoral support worker, and has an interest in photography and media. He also leads the 'Young Enterprise' group, and has put in a great deal of work to make the business a success; auditioning, recording and organising the printing of a college CD profiling the musical talents of his fellow students.

Keith describes how he has changed since he attended Ospley: 'I'm a bit more assertive, slightly talented and confident'. He spends much of his college holidays visiting his peers from college: 'I've learned more about myself now than I ever have because I'm mixing with people from different races, different locations. I've been all around the UK since I've been here'.

Keith's narratives indicate a clear distinction between the 'horrible' experiences of the past and the 'great' present. Much of his dialogue privileges the significance of 'acceptance' which has had a long-term impact on his psycho-emotional well-being:

That's the thing which made me most angry in school because they would just say, "Put your glasses on." I was like, "They're not going to do anything." That's what...then, I actually got sent down a few times for

refusing to put my glasses on because I knew that they wouldn't work. And a lot of the time I'd have to put them on just to keep my teacher happy, which would lead to eye strain as well and headaches and I'd have to be sent home from school because I'm ill, because I'd be dizzy and.... It just used to pile up.

His strong emotional language, of the issues 'piling up' resulted in him receiving counselling:

I used to have counselling in secondary school as well, because I used to get so worked up about it and upset because nobody understood how I felt.

His language is revealing of an emerging personality, freed from the challenges of 'trying to tell them': 'if we are talking about our sight here, as a group, a couple of us sat in the lounge talking about different things we can see and we can't see, then it's great because I can (sighs) relax'.

The significance he places on friendship and belonging to a group is evident throughout: 'since I've been here I've made loads of friends, done things I've never done before', but his apprehension and sense of imminent loss (when he leaves college) is palpable: 'It's two years living with these people who I see every day, then they're gone. Bang. It's gonna be hard'.

Keith has a relaxed attitude to his learning, often arriving late to lessons and chatting through the sessions, getting the minimum work achieved:

In the hour long session, Keith wrote only 4 lines of his economics assignment, despite frequent prompts 'Come on Keith, just get on with it, write something for God's sake – by the way, how is the Young Enterprise thing going?'. Keith and the tutor discussed the fact that he was completing assignments only to the 'P' or pass level, and wasn't attempting any of the exercises which would gain him an 'M' or a 'D' (merit or distinction); 'I'm a 'P' person really, aren't?'. 'Well that's the trouble, you could be an 'M' person, if you could be bothered, have you thought of giving it a try?' 'nah, like you said, can't be bothered, I've got a life to live'.

Fieldnotes 18/4/13

However it appears that he is more motivated in some sessions; he achieved a great deal in the multi-media session, creating his learning object, and in the Young Enterprise group donned a professional approach, successfully chairing a meeting which threatened to be dominated by adult staff members. He also appears to privilege the visual: 'I have an obsession with



making sure it looks good, the tutors all nag me, that I take too much time, but I think it has to look right'.

Keith had what in many ways could be seen as a standard route through mainstream primary and secondary school; however his sense of being misunderstood and different severely affected his self-esteem, social interactions and decision-making at transition periods, both into, and imminently out of, Ospley college. He is quite reflective about his experiences:

Has it had an impact? Yeah. I don't know. I often think about it myself and think "How could I have ever been different?" And I'll always live with regret, "Oh, why I didn't just do that."

He was determined to attend Ospley, and describes his attendance at a meeting at a local college in some depth (potential Ospley students have to prove that their local college cannot meet their needs before funding for Ospley is considered):

I felt so intent going in there because I was thinking, "They [the local college] are going to say yes. They're going to go, 'Yeah, we'll be fine. Come here'" And I was thinking, as I went in there, my careers adviser asked that question to this woman and this woman said, "Better off going to Ospley." And I was like, get in, yes.

Keith is entirely positive about his experiences in Ospley, although at times he expresses regret at the lack of courses that appeal to him, which is reflected in his professed interests:

If they'd done mechanics here, I would normally be doing that because I've...I'm quite into electronics. So, if I could, then I'd do electronic engineering or painting decor or something like that, and carpentry, I've always wanted to go into as well.

However he feels that what he'd 'normally' be doing is challenged by his experiences in the mainstream system. In contemplating attending a mainstream setting to pursue his interests his anticipatory apprehension is evident:

I thought about going back to Mainstream to do a part-time course. But at the same time, is it, do I really want to? I'd give it a couple of weeks to see how it went, but it just wouldn't, I'd have to finish, if I couldn't get on. I think it would be difficult after being here, going to Mainstream. I think it would be difficult.

Although Keith has no clear plan for his future after college, if his application for a third year at Ospley is refused, he has plenty of ideas. He discusses running a mobile disco, working in media or photography, or 'working for the RNIB or the college' in order to 'stay within the visually impaired world'. He is very clear about what he doesn't want: 'Living with my parents. No job', however it seems that it is the plethora of available choices that confuses him:

I'm not one of those people who can look at a jobs list and go, "Bang, that's me." That's what I want to do. Because when I was in work placement, there were so many jobs there, I was thinking, "I want to do that, but I want to do that too."

Keith's narratives project his self-confidence, which he ascribes to his attendance at the specialist college; although he has yet to forge a 'career identity', he is proud of his position as 'jack of all trades'. Tom, below, presents an interesting contrast, as his career identity as a chef is firmly fixed, but due to the recency of his visual impairment, he has yet to identify as a visually impaired person, or to consider the implications of his deteriorating vision for his chosen career.

## 7.4 Tom

Probably I'll set up a restaurant, maybe abroad somewhere. Maybe America and then, you know, cooking at every, you know, cook. And then, maybe retire, I don't know, maybe quite young and just living off my earnings.

I am introduced to Tom in the café by the Disability Support Co-ordinator. He is tall and skinny with short black hair and glasses, wearing jeans and a purple T-shirt. He appears quite shy, allowing the staff members to talk over him, but also quite self-composed and polite – when he is given time to speak he offers; 'Do you want to start now? I could show you some cooking in a minute?'

Fieldnotes 9/4/13

Tom is seventeen and lives with his mother and father. Two years ago, while studying for his GCSE's he noticed he was struggling to see the whiteboard

at school, and was diagnosed with Kerataconus, a deteriorating condition likely to result in a significant visual impairment by the time he is in his thirties. Currently he can see clearly at close distances, and can read font size 12 comfortably, but struggles with fine tasks and smaller font and handwriting, and with seeing things at a distance, even with glasses.

Tom is studying the VRQ1 Diploma in Professional Cookery (a level two course) at Weatherwell College as a full-time student. He is also re-taking his GCSE Maths for the third time. He hopes to return next year to take the level three cookery course.

Tom has a number of good friends on his course, and from school, alongside an almost symbiotic relationship with his best friend Seth. Seth is extrovert in classes, and also provides overt and covert support to Tom with aspects of tasks he finds difficult as a result of his visual impairment. Outside college Tom mainly socialises with his old school friends, 'going out and stuff' but has dropped football and other sports as a hobby.

It is unclear from Tom's dialogue how he feels about his visual impairment, and it appears on the surface that he is comfortable with his vision loss, both in himself and with his peers:

CM: Do you mind people knowing?

Tom: No, it's fine. Don't mind. Fine. Def- no problem noticing, I just said "I can't see that well" and it's fine

However when discussing his future his anxiety seems apparent, through his frequent use of pauses and over-use of 'like':

It's...I don't know the actual full description but I know it's like...it mostly affects you when you're in your late 20's, 30's. And then you get...so it's better to get it at first. But it's like your sight, like, goes more blurry. You don't go blind but like.... So, it's like I'm in my 30's now and I hadn't had anything done yet. It's probably I'd...I could just make out shapes and stuff.

His actions also seem to contradict his words. For example, when explaining his vision, he says, 'everything is clear', however when working in the still (the area used for preparing drinks and light snacks), Tom tries to avoid the task of making toast, as he struggles to tell when it is cooked:

After a time Tom tries to swap with Seth, but Seth is resistant, and they end up trying to do the drinks, frequently bumping in to one another, and getting in a muddle. Tom mis-reads one of the chitties, and this causes confusion with the waiters as they try and work out which drinks are for which table. He tries again 'two hot milks, one cold?' 'no, two hot milks, one tea', and Seth says 'you go and do the toasts buddy' and Tom retreats to the toast bar.

Fieldnotes 20/5/13

Tom is a man of few words:

CM: Did you enjoy your secondary school?

Tom: Not really.

CM: Why was that?

Tom: It's boring.

CM: It's boring?

Tom: Yeah. It was alright like, up to year nine. But then, in the last two years, when you've gotta, like, when you get a lot more work and it's...I don't know. The exams were quite hard.

The above also reflects his negative approach to academic work; he views himself as someone who could happily do nothing: 'I knew I didn't really want to carry on at school. But my mum is the sort of person that, you know, you can't just take a year off'. He differentiates clearly between academic work and his current vocational course: 'I'd done work for quite a lot of years. So I didn't want to do it again'. However Tom is very keen on his course: 'It was like, "I want to do this"'.

His co-dependent relationship with Seth seems to provide both friendship and mutual support. Seth seems to help Tom out with practical tasks, while Tom was observed helping Seth with the more academic work, such as completing worksheets and assignments. During observations, this appeared to be accepted by him, Seth and the teaching staff:

He's always got friends around him and that's a big part. If his friends aren't there, he probably would be a bit lost. But you'll find that somebody like Seth is always with him and they're always together. So he will take him places if he didn't know where to go.

Interview 20/5/13

Tom defers to the adults in his life happily, whether his family or tutors: 'My mother always says, "You don't know what it's like, how it's like to see out of

a good vision". Within the teaching spaces of the college he is polite and obedient, although he occasionally achieves disruption through antics with Seth:

Seth starts singing: 'So I'm done now, so can I gooooo please?'. The tutor replies, 'the more you ask me the longer you'll wait, so just shut up'. Tom whispers to Seth: 'Just walk out, go on, see what he does, I'll wait here and tell you what colour he goes'.

Fieldnotes 13/5/13

Tom had a straightforward trajectory through primary and secondary school, until his diagnosis, early in year 11. He had very little support: 'there was one teacher that printed stuff out for me for about two weeks and then that was it'. He doesn't make any connection between this and his struggle with exams, despite college staff suggesting he has the potential to complete a degree. Tom speaks positively about the support in college: 'work printed off bigger...I use the iPad which is for, more help generally...with the support worker, a little bit more focus on me in the classroom...I think it's good, better'.

It was unclear through interview or observation what understanding Tom has of his level of vision and its impact on his learning. He states that 'I don't want it to affect me' and projects a calm, self-contained determination which is reflected by staff: 'I think he's accepted it' (Support Worker 14/5/13):

I think he's coping very well and I don't think he's making a barrier with it which is probably a good thing. So he's coping with his condition and he's adapting to it and he's doing very well... Maybe he deep down worries about it but he doesn't show it and he doesn't play on it.

Interview 20/5/13

However this has implications when he is attempting tasks made problematic by his vision, for example in his GCSE Maths class:

One question asks students to count the number of squares filled on a gridded graph. Tom struggles (he is still using the standard print at this stage), and gets the wrong answer as he fails to see the squares that are half filled. He struggles with a histogram, even in large print, and again gets the answer wrong. He is also unable to use the protractor accurately – it is standard size and the sections are minute – he squints and hunches down, but his markings are at least 20° out.

Fieldnotes 14/5/13

It appears he is currently unclear about how to ask for suitable adjustments, extra support or specialised training for tasks, and thus relies on Seth and other peers for informal, unacknowledged support and confidence building:

Tom is asked to clean the salad trolley, and he spends ten minutes cleaning. As he is returning the cloth to the kitchen, he says to Seth 'Is that alright?' Seth: 'no, it is still full of dirt and shit', Tom: 'you give it a wipe now, then', Seth: 'Fuck off (smiling) it is your job'. The catering tutor overhears: 'No. Tom you finish it off, it is part of the assessment'.

Tom hopes to take a level three Professional Cookery qualification next year, and then to use his catering skills to travel, as he emphasises his desire for 'opportunities to leave' the area:

It seemed like it could take me somewhere in life...with this, it could sort of take me to different places around the world and stuff.

Tom's use of peers as informal support has given him a sense of belonging and security, but may prove problematic in future education or employment settings. A contrasting approach to adjustments was taken by Steven, below, who successfully hides his visual impairment from the majority of his peers, and rejects the 'visually impaired' label, in order to forge his 'sportsman' identity and win acceptance and approval from his peers and the educational professionals.

## 7.5 Steven

From Year 7, Year 8 to Year 9, I was in school, it was just football, football, football. But from Year 9, after Year 9, I got a girlfriend. I'm still with her now. As for football, like, it was half-and-half then. Then, towards the end of Year 10, because I'll go out on the weekends, have a drink with the boys. And then, it was the same; football, out with boys, girlfriend.

I met Steven in the café of the sports campus, identifying him as my potential participant by his distinctive 'eye wobble' which suggested a visual impairment. He was tall and slim, and dressed in sports gear – Adidas top, tracksuit bottoms and Nike trainers. The support worker Denise joined us, beginning the conversation with 'I don't think this will work, his eyesight is too good'. Steven appeared quiet, reserved rather than shy, but confident.

Fieldnotes 8/2/13

Steven is seventeen and lives with his Mum and Step-dad. He has an older brother, who also has a visual impairment 'worse than mine'. He sees his Dad, who lives in London, a couple of times a year: 'I don't like going up there. It's boring'. Steven had girlfriend he had met secondary school when the fieldwork began, but they 'broke up' during the study, causing him some distress: 'Girls, that's why I get stressed, girls'.

Having nystagmus since birth, Steven has an 'eye wobble' which distorts the images viewed. His vision has remained constant throughout. He can read clear font size 12 and above, but finds smaller font or handwriting more challenging. He also finds it difficult to see writing or images on the whiteboard, and was observed to find some practical demonstrations difficult to follow.

Steven is attending Brinton College as a full-time student studying a level three Sport and Fitness course. His attendance at college is high, and staff speak positively of his academic and practical ability: 'he's very organised and that is so important in his case. I suppose he's got used to being methodical, he has to be, and the thing is he really doesn't want you to make a fuss' (Alison Interview 28/2/13). In contrast, he is less positive about his academic level. However he is confident of his ability in relation to his classmates: 'Oh, some of them are just thick'.

Steven has a side-line selling drinks and chocolates to his peers:

You may see me selling stuff. I'm known for selling bottles like Coke and chocolates on the cheap. I'm known for it so don't worry if you see me handing out bottles, that's all I'm saying'

Fieldnotes 8/2/13

Ever the sportsman, Steven 'lives and breathes' his sport: 'All I like doing is sport. So that's why I'm here'. Whether in class, or during leisure times, the majority of his conversation and activities are around sport. Steven embodies the 'sportsman' in his dress and behaviour, comfortably joining in 'macho' banter with his peers:

In the IT room there was a great deal of banter between students and the Support Worker, who was assisting one student with her project. When one male student said 'Man City are shit' she said 'oy you, out, if you can't be

quiet, out'. Steven joined in the banter, trying to get him into trouble, 'Did you hear that, I heard him swear, Miss'.

Fieldnotes 8/2/13

Steven identifies himself as 'visually impaired' but repeatedly defined a transition in his identity during secondary school: 'I see myself as visually impaired. Like, all the boys at school would. But none of them here would'. This appears to have been part of a conscious decision to disassociate himself from the 'strange' pupils in the Visually Impaired resource room in school, and to forge his 'sportsman' identity:

They were a bit strange. They just weren't like me or my other mates. Yeah, they'd have a laugh. But it was a weird sort of laugh. The way they talk and the things like... my mates it's just football, what's going on on a weekend. With them, it's like, I don't know, work and stuff, just TV and boring shit.

In Brinton College this rejection of 'strangeness' results in him performing a great deal of work to 'hide' the needs he has as a result of his visual impairment. The tutors profess confidence in his independence: 'he's worked so far without any issues to me. Although he is visually impaired he's no different to any other student.' (Interview 28/2/13). Steven tends to use close friends for support instead of the more formal arrangements:

Sometimes the work's basically done for you, like the copying, if you can't be bothered to write it down. So, they just do it and you just read off it. I'll just ask a friend. Because if I can't be bothered I'll just be...can you do that for me, and they'll be like, yeah.

This nonchalant 'can't be bothered' approach seems to mask his need for support. At times Steven also appears to use 'clowning' to distract from his visual impairment, and to win the approval of his peers:

The tutor (Archie) began targeted questioning, pointing at students without using names. He pointed at Steven and said 'and we want to get rid of?' Steven couldn't see that this question was directed at him as Archie was using eye contact. Steven looked around, as he was in a group of four. Steven pointed at himself, and said 'Me? Sorry I was concentrating on what you were saying'. He paused, with a smirk, looking round at the whole group, and said 'I was distracted by Joe, that knob over there'. The whole group laughed, and the tutor told him off for using bad language.

Fieldnotes 27/2/13

Steven explains his reluctance to discuss his visual impairment in the highly macho, competitive and image-conscious environment of the college in the



following extract. It is evident in his use of 'probably' that he is unsure of the physical appearance of his 'wobbly' eyes, and is aware of his 'strangeness':

They know there's something wrong with my eyes, because they can see that (points to eyes). And they ask...and you have to go through the whole palaver again... I say, I just got bad eyesight... and they are like, see that, can you see there? I'm like no. It probably looks totally strange to them. It does annoy me a bit. It's annoying saying the same thing all the time.

Steven attended a mainstream primary, which he states was 'good'. He recalls: 'I was like, always walking to the board and back...I go up, look at it, remember a few words, come back. I didn't mind at the time. I would do now', which appears to indicate increasing self-consciousness in relation to his visual impairment.

After primary school, Steven attended a mainstream secondary, which was a half hour drive from his home. This was chosen by his mother because it had a specialist visual impairment resource room, and because his brother was already a pupil. He found the transition very difficult as all his friends went to the catchment comprehensive: 'I didn't even know anyone, when I first went there. First, I didn't even know anyone'. The emphatic 'even' was repeated four times during the interview, as he discussed his experience: 'At first I enjoyed it there [in the VI resource room] because I didn't even know anyone at all, so it was that or just walk round a bit'. However as he began to make friends he stopped using the VI facilities. Initially he also had a full-time support worker present in lessons, but this was reduced, and then stopped altogether in year ten, as he began his GCSE's: 'I didn't mind, I prefer it like that'. He couldn't recall how many GCSE's he has attained: 'Five or six...but I failed English, I'm sitting it now'.

Steven presents his decision making during the transition to college as a 'done-deal': 'I just thought, "This is the one, I think the course seems good"', and states that his visual impairment was not considered during his application. He appears comfortable and confident in his relationships with his peers in the college, and states that he 'loves' his course. However in his second interview (5/3/13), he raises some of the problems he has in accessing the substantive materials of his course:

I can't see the board sometimes...I wish they could make the font bigger...I wish they could just make their fonts bigger and stuff on PowerPoints and sheets. I can cope with it. It's just easier if it was bigger...

He also refers to some practical issues: 'Tennis balls are harder in the barn because it's green'. Steven states that if he needed adaptations he would 'just ask', but the reality is he hadn't ever done so. He goes on to state 'I don't get much [support] because I don't need it', which appears to contradict the concerns he raises.

Similarly to his peers on the course, Steven was observed to work exceptionally hard during all of the practical sports sessions, competing and encouraging others in equal measure. In theoretical lessons he seemed to practice 'covert diligence':

Whilst the class was unsupervised two 'play' fights broke out. During this time, five students were crowded around one monitor watching a football match, two couples were snogging, and only Steven and his partner appeared to be working, although they lifted their heads and heckled as the fights began.

Fieldnotes 22/2/13

Steven has his future planned; working in sport, possibly as a gym instructor, and having a home and family, although he would prefer his dream, as a 'Footballer. On the big money.'

Steven's narratives were in dramatic contrast to those of Alex, below, despite their attendance at the same college. Where Steven rejects his visually impaired identity, Alex has taken on the political dimensions of his disability, as a 'role model'. His successful inclusion in the drama group, in contrast to Steven's, has been in part as a result of his forging an identity as the 'independent blind kid'.

## 7.6 Alex

I want to be like some sort of, like a role model or message for other blind kids.

I met Alex at the Stage Door of the theatre. He was tall and broad, with sandy hair and a big beaming smile. He said 'Come in and meet everyone. We're all mad!' The students were getting changed for their movement class in the dressing rooms, and there was much laughter while the doors were shut. Alex came out to 'display' his onesie, a one piece bright blue outfit, which he modelled for me in a 'catwalk' style. The students were all very curious about my presence, and Alex explained my interest in visual impairment without any sign of discomfort or embarrassment.

Fieldnotes 1/3/13

Alex is eighteen and lives with his mother and brother. He explains that his Mum has always worked in the disability field: 'she knows everything about disability going', but that his Dad tries to be supportive without fully understanding: 'I came out of sports one day, and he's like "Oh I think it is really great, what you do, with your disibilliment"'. And I laughed so much (laughing). *Disibilliment!*. His brother was challenged by Alex's visual impairment as they were growing up, and it became a frequent feature in their sibling rivalry: 'He'd go like "Oh, pulling the blind card again"'.

Alex has 'Norrie syndrome' which has resulted in him being 'totally blind in my left eye, and I have 25% in my right eye', since birth. He can read size 18-24 font, and uses 'zoom' on his iPad and other devices to access text, PowerPoint and videos during lessons. He is a 'giant Apple fan' who is often accused of 'kissing his screen' as he uses his nose or mouth to swipe the words on his iPad while acting. Alex states he understands the need for a 'script' to explain his vision to sighted people: 'That's the generic version I give them'.

A full-time student in Brinton College, Alex is completing a level three Diploma in Drama: 'I've always wanted to do acting, I guess it's the only thing I'm really interested in as a career'. He has a close group of friends from his course with whom he socialises during college and leisure time:

We normally have house parties, normally at my house. It has been more of a social two years, not in a bad sense, it's more of just finding out about everyone else, finding out about ourselves.

Alex states he is 'confident. You have to be quite confident'. He appears to be very self-assured, and comfortable with his identity as a visually impaired person, although he does not view it as central: 'Because on my Twitter profile, I did put down I was blind, but I put that more on the end: White, Welsh, aspiring young actor; Glee and Harry Potter fan...blind.'

There are many advantages to being blind, according to Alex: 'iPad is great as well...because it's great for playing games in lessons if I get bored (laughs). They can't tell because it is right up to your face'. He also explains his use of a mobility aid: 'The symbol cane is great on the train because I ask for a child ticket; they don't like to challenge you, when they think you can't see (laughs)'.

Alex has an exceptionally defined notion of the visually impaired identity; a combination of superiority, confidence, and a desire to 'prove themselves' to the sighted world:

I think we are quite sly. We all think we are up there, in the disability world, because we're all quite sophisticated and all we've got is a vision problem. We have great minds and we can talk, and things like that. So when we're all with each other, we like to joke about how the rest of the world doesn't get it but we do... Quite outgoing, because we feel like we need to prove ourselves.

His notion of community is emphasised by his use of the word 'we' when referring to visually impaired people, and his sense of a network:

With the VI lot I know everyone, it's like a big network all strung out across the country. We are a bit different, a bit mad. It's good to feel part of something like that. It's a definite culture, which makes you feel special

Fieldnotes 27/2/13

However some of Alex's vocabularies and terminology demonstrates his awareness of 'difference' and the negative perceptions of others. For example he discusses his over-use of the resource room for visually impaired people at his secondary school, and subsequent 'blossoming' when he began socialising with his sighted peers: 'I was just with people with my class then, I guess it's a bit more natural...Instead of going somewhere, like

segregated... I guess it just sounds weird, just leaving your class to go and sit in the room, but that's what we did'.

His biggest challenge is that 'People make you angry', which makes an interesting contrast to his assertions of the positive aspects of being visually impaired. However he also states that he is immune to the perceptions of others: 'So if I was walking around Cardiff and there was someone who was looking at me with my cane, one, I probably wouldn't even notice them, and two, I probably wouldn't care anyway.'

As a result of his feelings about these perceptions, Alex demonstrates a powerful sense of responsibility about his behaviour and interactions as a 'role model'. The following narrative illuminates his moral approach:

I don't put on an act, but obviously I find everything difficult more than everyone else, but you can't show it. And I don't mind doing that. You put on this kind of bravado, I guess, for everyone else. Everything's, "oh, yeah, Alex is visually impaired, you would never even tell; he just looks normal". Normal: I never liked that word. I also think, talking about it, making a joke of it as well. I always do that. It gets through the barrier there so they can...they feel free to ask questions.

The theme of being 'just a normal kid' is evident throughout his dialogue, both within the interviews and in his interactions with his peers in college. For example when talking about his secondary school:

I probably didn't enjoy it at the time, but not for any particular reason, just an average school and a kid who doesn't want to go.

Alex's confidence and determination have won him the respect of his peers, and his tutors, although much seems to be based on his rejection of help:

He..he..he accepts as little help as possible, like, he's like very independent, he does, well he probably does more work than me (laughs)

Zak 6/3/13

Alex attended a mainstream primary and secondary school, local to his home, both of which had a specialist resource base for visually impaired pupils. Alex states that during school he was most comfortable spending his time in the VI resource rooms, with his visually impaired peers: 'I'd fit in somewhere. You know, thank God I found somewhere I belong in this school at last'. In year ten, his older, visually impaired friends left, and he was

'forced' to interact with his sighted peers. In his retrospective account, from his self-imposed position as 'role-model' to others, he condemns himself for his former 'segregation': 'Thinking about it now with hindsight, it probably is not healthy, not talking to anyone in the class...being in a kind of "mini-school" within the school'. He explains that once he made the effort to befriend other sighted pupils, 'it was from that point on that I really found my confidence'.

Alex states that he enjoyed secondary school, and left with 'eleven or twelve' GCSE's. He found the decision as to his post-compulsory career challenging: 'it was a toss-up either between going for all the academic ones, doing three sciences and history or doing a BTEC in Acting...so two totally different ends of the spectrum' but saw his choice as a 'natural move' due to his involvement in a drama group for visually impaired young people. He viewed but rejected specialist colleges:

I did go up to an open day in Ospley just to see if I'd...but no, I don't think it was for me... It sounds stupid, but I'm not visually impaired enough. Like, I don't need all the confidence and stuff they try to give you up there. Some people do and that's fine. But I just don't think I did.

The first few weeks at Brinton proved very difficult for Alex, which came as a shock as he had been excited about attending: 'Its never a good thing when you walk into a class and your support worker is following behind you...everyone's like, "Oh God, we thought you were going to be really 'special' (does inverted commas sign with fingers)... They didn't want to approach you, you can tell'. His narrative about his induction experience displays his loneliness, sense of isolation and the shock he felt to his confidence and self-belief:

I knew that I'd be going to a class with people I've never seen before. I kind of thought, you know, I'm 16, 17 now. I'd be able to handle it. And I found when I got here, I had no idea where anything was, didn't know anyone. I remember just standing down in the cafe at lunchtime, just by myself. So I knew no one. I just phoned my other friends, and they were all in lessons, and I didn't have a clue. And I didn't...I think the worst part was not knowing where anything was, because I'd never been in this corridor, going down those stairs, thinking they were that stairs. Like, even the rain. The rain was just hard because there were so many different buildings. I'd got my bags and they'd just given me my Mac. So I was carrying that too.

Alex's friend supports his interpretation of his peers' attitudes at the time:

I did think, oh no, what's this kid doing, I thought, oh he's going to be the funny one now, you know, Mary [the support worker] was right next to him.. I thought, oh this is going to be the 'Rob' of the class, I did. (laughs) The annoying one who has someone following him around everywhere.

Zak 6/3/13

However through his 'determination' and ability to 'put on this kind of bravado', Alex gradually became comfortable with his peers, after he had chosen not to have a support worker with him. He now presents a strong sense of identity as 'The Drama Student': For example, when asked whether he is self-conscious about making adjustments for his visual impairment in class he states:

Not in this class, no. But I probably would've been in Comp, [secondary school] but because we're so close in this class, we're drama people and nobody cares about inhibitions and things like that.

Alex is applying to University for 2013, hoping to share a house with some of his peers. In the future he aspires to work in the performing arts, possibly as a stand-up comedian: 'I've always wanted to do something based on visual impairment...I think that is a unique path to go down'.

## **7.7 Commentary and Discussion**

A comparison of the narratives of these six visually impaired students revealed a number of themes which are significant to the decisions, interactions and performances of visually impaired students in further education. Themes included the construct of visual impairment, the importance of historical experiences to current choices and enactments, the influence of significant others, and the capacity for identity building, each of which will be addressed below.

Firstly, the construct of 'visual impairment' is not a static, uniform category. Visual levels may be categorised as blind (severely sight impaired) or partially sighted (sight impaired). Within these categories individuals' levels may vary widely, and result in contrasting abilities and needs in terms of access to the visual world. They may also be stable, deteriorating or fluctuating, and could be congenital, or acquired suddenly, or over time. In

addition, as we have seen above, these variations in visual impairment intersected with the individual's sense of self and identity, with educational choices, and with non-disabled others' perceptions of individuals. As Papadopoulos' (2014) suggests, elements of visual impairment thus intersect with a visually impaired person's well-being and locus of control. The dynamic nature of the construct of 'visual impairment' results in wide variations in the needs of individuals in educational settings. These needs can sometimes be met by adaptations such as alternative forms of text, for example, Braille, large print or audio; through the use of the 'paraphernalia' of blindness, such as canes or guide dogs; or through the practical adaptation of equipment or demonstrations during teaching.

The acceptance, or otherwise, of vision levels and the adaptations required was however highly influenced by factors in addition to the levels and stability of vision. The second theme emerging from the narratives was the significance of historical experiences and psycho-emotional adjustment. This supports Thomas's (1999) assertion that the psycho-emotional experiences of disabled people are an integral dimension of disability. The adoption or rejection of adaptations, and the choices made in relation to educational pathways, were strongly influenced by visual levels and historical experiences, and the impact these had on each individual's sense of self and their psycho-emotional well-being. The young people who accepted a 'visually impaired' identity and were comfortable asserting their needs and using adaptive equipment and support staff in educational settings appeared to be more relaxed when accessing their learning. However these students were aware of the 'price they paid' for the use of adaptations and support, in terms of the perceptions of non-visually impaired peers and staff members, and the impact these perceptions had on their own sense of self and well-being. It is evident in the narratives of those in mainstream colleges that a balancing act between the use of support and adaptations on the one hand, and the need to negate the negative perceptions of non-disabled others on the other, was performed on a daily basis. A range of strategies were adopted to negotiate these interactions with non-visually impaired peers and professionals. Open discussion, humour, denial, and avoidance were all



tactics used to strengthen psycho-emotional well-being. However for some, such as John, Keith and Ffion, alternative strategies were required. Examining the agency of young people in periods of transition, Miles (2002: 58) argued that young people 'actively engage with the power structures that surround them, and that, moreover, they often use such structures as a positive force for change'. Thus, for those choosing specialist education, significant recent visual loss or negative experiences of interactions with non-disabled peers and professionals resulted in a need to step outside the mainstream. This step into specialist education enabled the students to build alternative identities in an environment which they perceived would offer understanding and appropriate support and adaptations. This supports Watson's (2003:51) argument that for disabled people the 'negative emotional reactions that result from experiences of being denied recognition' result in individuals seeking solidarity with the disabled community (in this case the visually impaired community) in order to develop self-confidence and self-esteem.

Levels of psycho-emotional stability were thus highly affected by the dynamic nature of the onset, progress and levels of visual impairment, and by historical contexts and experiences in educational and social settings. Additionally the third theme emerging from the data was the influence of significant others, whether peers, family or professionals (such as tutors or disability support staff), on both educational choices and transitions, and on psycho-emotional well-being.

Taking family as an example, comparative analysis reveals the variations in family influence. For Ffion and Keith, genetic inheritance of visual impairment gave them automatic membership of the visually impaired community, which they viewed as positive. It appeared that when family members accepted the students' visual impairment, a sense of self-worth was more evident. However, even when there was a supportive family network, as in Ffion's experience, there was a need to assert themselves comparatively with other family members, ranking themselves in relation to the 'hierarchy of impairment' (Deal 2003), and thus giving themselves a unique place in the community. However for others such as John, family responses had a more

detrimental effect. His mother's negative psycho-emotional response to her visual impairment resulted in his dis-identification (Kikily 2007) with a visually impaired identity, and in an unwillingness to address its psycho-emotional dimensions. This had a significant impact on his own psycho-emotional wellbeing and sense of self, and on his educational interactions and choices.

While observations of family relationships were outside the remit of this study, peers played an important role in the performances and practices of students in the college environment. For visually impaired students, issues of acceptance, dependence and the sense of a hierarchy with peers were all central to their concept of self. All of the students in the study stated that peer acceptance was a key dimension in their educational experience. Alex, for example, perceived his college years as an opportunity to develop his sense of himself, 'finding out about ourselves', while Keith saw his experience in specialist college as an opportunity to escape the judgements of sighted peers in order to belong. These findings support those of previous studies. Alex's experience of increased well-being following his 'enforced' friendships with sighted peers in secondary school, supports the findings of Bunch and Valeo (2004), who argued that social acceptance is higher in inclusive environments, and less common in schools with specialist, segregated classrooms. His peers displayed a relaxed and accepting approach:

Two students had written scripts for the class; one asked Alex, 'can you read this?' He looked closely, bringing the sheet to his nose, and said 'yes no problem, thank you that's fine'.

Fieldnotes 1/3/13

Well there was a time, once upon a time, before Alex, when I thought, if you are disabled, then you're different, but you are not are you, you're the same.  
Zac 6/3/13

However Alex's need to prove his independence and 'normality' also resonated with Reeve's (2002) and Watermeyer and Swartz's (2007) arguments. Both papers suggested that disabled people internalise the oppressive opinions of non-disabled society, during 'skewed socialisation' (Watermeyer and Swartz 2007: 599). Thus, they suggested, disabled people attempt to conform to expected behaviour through the display of

independence and the taking of full responsibility for social interactions with others (Reeve 2002: 501). This is reflected in the teaching staff's appraisals of Alex's integration:

He's very popular, he gets on very well. He's got a good measure of himself and other people really, so he seems to be quite good at socialising and not getting on people's nerves ...as lots of them don't. He has got a lot of skills in that sense.

Karen Interview 12/3/13

The visually impaired students in mainstream were observed to display some degree of dependence on other sighted students, for educational support. As discussed in Chapter Six, peer support frequently replaced formal support from adult staff members. In Brinton, both students had rejected direct support worker assistance, and in Weatherwell support was provided at a generic class-based level. Mutual peer support was also apparent in the specialist college. In mainstream the use of peers was a conscious choice by students, who appeared to accept the short-comings of the approach, such as unreliability, because they valued acceptance above independence.

Steven appeared to have a reciprocal relationship with his partner, sitting next to him or working with him in every session observed. This relationship seemed to be unspoken, in that the partner, Dave, took the lead in practical sessions, and demonstrated technique to Steven first. In classroom-based sessions it was evident that Steven's organisational skills and academic ability were utilised by them both, with Steven whispering explanations during tutor talk.

Fieldnotes 28/2/13

Tom worked together with Seth, using large print scales and large bags of flour and other ingredients to measure into plastic bags. They worked together for many of the items, for example, when measuring a spoon of baking powder, one held the spoon and the other sliced the top with a butter knife.

Fieldnotes 14/5/13

However peer support was challenged in situations where a hierarchy was perceived. Deal (2003) suggested that internalised social perceptions of a hierarchy of impairments results in a 'pecking order' which feeds into individuals' sense of self. In two of the three colleges, Brinton, and in Ospley, this was very apparent in the interactions in the classrooms. Direct comparisons between students with additional needs were frequently made

by peers and staff, with those further down the pecking order losing out on respect from peers, and becoming the subject of class jokes by students and staff:

No..well maybe with Rob a bit, because you could tell, but with Alex you can't tell at all, like, he just like a normal one of us, like..he's like, one of the main ones of the class, you know.

Zac interview 6/3/13

Rob was sitting on a foldout director's chair, and the teasing began again. Lee: 'hey, sitting on that seat you look like a wheelchair, you know a wheelchair user'; all the class laughed. Rob began to tell people how his girlfriend had 'dumped him', and the tutor responded with 'oh there's a surprise' and again the class laughed.

Fieldnotes 13/3/13

While mutual support was apparent between some students in Ospley, the sense of hierarchy was pronounced in a number of sessions, and again was not challenged by staff:

The enterprise group began to work on the fine detail of the presentation – Keith (as Chair of the group) pulled up a PowerPoint presentation. Abb (a totally blind student) was moved by the tutor to the far side of the room, and tasked with 'writing up the script as we discuss it'. Keith, the other two students, the tutor and the business advisor then spent 20 minutes working on the visuals of the presentation, but did not involve Abb at all. Without vision he appeared to be finding it difficult to discern what was conversation and what was lines of the script, and shouted over repeatedly 'is that to go in, is that in?' but was frequently ignored. Keith was typing up the script, and it became more evident that for Abb this was a false activity, a holding activity without value. Abb began to lose track, and when he asked for guidance, the four students laughed.

Fieldnotes 24/4/13

Keith's growing confidence in Ospley could thus be partly explained by his 'seniority' in the pecking order, with his relatively good vision affording him status over the more severely visually impaired students.

These themes, of impairment, psycho-emotional adjustment, and family and peer interactions, have been well-documented in the literature (Thomas 1999; Reeve 2002; Shakespeare and Corker 2002; Riddell and Watson 2003). However a significant finding in the data is the extent to which educational choices and successful performance as a further education student are dependent upon the individual's capacity for identity-building,

and the part 're-imagining identity' plays in post-compulsory educational settings. A number of the students described these re-imagined identities as significant to their sense of self, and data revealed the intersections between the 'visually impaired' identity and the career choice identity, such as 'the chef', 'the drama student' or 'the sportsman'. Comparative analysis demonstrated the contrasting ways in which the young people negotiated their identities as they progressed through school and college, adopting personas appropriate to their educational choices. As Hopkins (2010: 10) suggested, young people connect with and take up a range of identities, which interact, play off or conflict with one another. Applying the five-fold model Hopkins suggests, the students' had a need to communicate their identity, in order to be recognised by others. This led them to represent and perform 'themselves' in new and different ways, in order to challenge the stereotype of 'the dependent blind child' in school and college settings. For example, Ffion was unable to conform to the performances of her 'chavvy' peers, as she was unable to see the practices and personal cues. Her new 'creative' identity enmeshed her 'tomboy' image with her visually impaired identity, and she therefore grew in self-esteem and psycho-emotional well-being. Steven's assertion of himself as 'the sportsman' during his later secondary school years was what Wetherell (1996: 320) terms 'masculinity as an active project', through which he rejected the dependencies of the 'visually impaired' role in order to adopt an hegemonic form of masculinity (Connell 1995). Steven's negotiations of identity contrast strongly with Alex's. Alex re-imagined his identity as a 'blind drama student' with a political responsibility as a role model for other visually impaired young people. In terms of performances and practices, this led him to be open about his visual impairment with his peers and professionals, but to hide the negative psycho-emotional dimensions and to reject support worker assistance, in order to fulfil the 'independent blind kid' image. John's sudden and significant sight loss severely challenged his identity. This supports Papadopoulos' (2014) findings that self-esteem is lower for young adults with a recent, severe visual impairment, and that such individuals also have a lower locus of control. It was evident that he had yet to develop the capacity to re- imagine his identity, in order to re-construct his presentation and

performance for others, or to re-formulate his sense of self to incorporate the visually impaired identity.

These findings are significant to understandings of the individual characteristics of students in relation to impairment, psycho-emotional adjustment, social and family impacts and the nature of their identity formations and re-constructions. However they are also significant for educational professionals and institutions, as consideration of the particularities of individual students in the classroom is essential to the provision of an accessible, individualised learning environment. In the following chapter a detailed fine-grained analysis of observed practices and performances of staff and students in individual classrooms will be presented. Addressing research question three, the discussion will explore how visually impaired students experience the practices of teaching, learning and disability support, how effective teaching is achieved and what presents barriers to learning and achievement.

## Chapter Eight: In the Classroom

For visually impaired students, successful pedagogy is dependent upon a complex interplay between the self, and the 'contextualised practices' (Braun et al. 2011) of the institutions they attend. These practices include the specifics of the institutional surroundings, the demands of the course and its topics or tasks, the support provided to students, and the pedagogical practices of the tutors. Drawing on scholars such as Lupton et al. (2010), and the work of Ball (1987) and Braun et al. (2011), this chapter will analyse the significance of the institutional context and practices to the learning and achievements of individual students, on a micro level, in the classroom. Firstly the key themes emerging from the data will be highlighted. Then, using examples from further education classrooms, pedagogical moments will be highlighted which illustrate the key themes which emerged from the data. The chapter will thus place the students described in Chapter Seven within the classrooms of the colleges described in Chapter Five, in the contexts described in Chapter Six, and therefore enable exploration of the intersections and interactions between the individual and their experiences of pedagogy.

Firstly, through ethnographic observation and analysis, it was apparent that language and interaction is highly significant to teaching and learning with visually impaired students. There is a long tradition of scholars highlighting the significance of language and discourse in the classroom (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Barnes and Todd 1977; Britton 1970; Bernstein 1971, 1973; Flood, Jensen, Lapp, and Squire, 1990). However for this particular group, of visually impaired students, language has increased significance, as 'language acts as a substitute for missing visual input' (Webster and Roe 1998: 163). Language, as a means of auditory learning, is central to visually impaired students' conceptualisations of information. Further, there is increased emphasis on language in the classroom setting. Verbal communication impacts upon interactions and relationships between tutors, students and their peers, due to the reduction in visual communication available through body language and gesture. Thus, as will be exemplified in

the examples below, the requirement for precise elaborate verbal explanations and descriptions to facilitate access to teaching and learning tasks was paramount in all of the classrooms observed. The success of the tutor in relating and explaining tasks and concepts was related to their ability to conceptualise and effectively communicate a task or concept in a verbal form, or to 'translate' a visual concept into an auditory one.

This relates to a second, sensory theme, that of tactility and texture in the classroom. Touch and texture, as social products, have been largely neglected in ethnographic studies in education, with a 'bias towards the visual' (Blake 2011). However, sensory ethnographers such as Rasmussen (2006) and Classen (2005) have explored the social affordances of touch, and their impact upon relationships and social structures. For visually impaired students, tactility has increased significance, both as a 'way of knowing' the world, and as a teaching tool and construct. Whether through the kinaesthetic teaching of blind football through touch, or through the tactile representation of a circle in A-level maths, the pedagogic moments below illustrate the centrality of touch to the pedagogic moment.

A third theme, of the affordances of embodiment and movement in pedagogy, is closely related to this consideration of touch. Classen argued that touch and movement are affected by social rituals, and are closely related, as 'touch-in-motion' (2005: 1). The body itself is a place of learning and experience (Perry and Medina 2011: 62; Pineau 2002), and the student is 'a learning self that is in motion' (Ellsworth 2005: 7). Shilling suggested that "'the body" remains one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences' (Shilling 2007: 9), however some scholars have asserted that, in an educational setting, 'embodiment is a learning phenomenon' (Powell 2006: 152). Analysis of the embodied performances of students within the classroom context thus enabled exploration of the significance of the body and movement to the learning experience.

Fourthly, there was an intersection between the perceptual and sensory schemas of visually impaired students and the embodied demands of the site of learning. This was particularly evident for those engaged in physical or



practical courses and tasks. Traditions in the anthropology of the senses (Howes 2010) and sensory ethnography (Pink 2009), discussed in Chapter Two, enabled an exploration of the 'complex sensory practices' of everyday routines in the classroom (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009: 220). For visually impaired students, their alternative sensory schemas created particular needs in the learning process, and were addressed and understood in a variety of ways by teaching staff.

Finally, the fifth theme was the relationship between embodiment, movement, and sensory perception, and the spatial and temporal dimensions of the classroom (Adam 1995; Massey 1993). Embodied aspects of teaching and learning were dictated by the temporal and spatial organisational constructs, the affordances of the topic, and the imposition of pedagogical frameworks by the tutors. However negotiations of the space-time-movement dimensions of pedagogy also had an impact upon the power relations of the actors (Holland et al. 2007), and therefore upon the relationships between tutors, the visually impaired students and their peers.

In the following four sections, 'pedagogic moments' (van Manen 1991) from four topics, of drama, sport, preparing food and mathematics, will be utilised to explore these themes, and the relationships between the individual students and the contextualised practices of the colleges they attended. In Drama, the nature of interpersonal interactions is explored, alongside considerations of language and embodiment. In Sport, the particular affordances of embodied experiences and movement are considered. The relationships between movement, time and the power relationships of the actors in the classroom will be illustrated through the fine-grained analysis of one particular 'pedagogic moment'. Food preparation lessons enabled an exploration of the significance of the senses, and the individual's particular sensory schema, to the experience of teaching and learning. In Mathematics, attention turns to the significance of diagrammatic and symbolic conceptualisation, representation and interpretation in the teaching and learning of visually impaired students.

## 8.1 Drama

Drama lessons incorporate a high degree of interpersonal interaction, embodied learning and directed physicality. Observations of drama lessons thus enabled me to interrogate the intersection between the interpersonal dimensions of teaching and learning, and the physical, embodied dimensions of the pedagogic moment. In this section, two such moments, one in Brinton and one in Ospley College, are presented as composite plays, in Figures 8.1 and 8.2, below. The plays also demonstrate the extra work required of visually impaired students, and reveal the impact of adequate and knowledgeable planning and differentiation. The importance of 'precise elaborate explanations' (Webster and Roe 1998: 162) to the achievements and psycho-emotional well-being of the students is also evidenced through the use of this dialogic device.

In 'Alex in "The Crucible"' (Figure 8.1, below) the most obvious theme is the intersection between Alex's access to text, and the physical, embodied demands of acting. Alex stated in interview that 'If I didn't have my iPad and my phone, I probably couldn't cope' (6/3/13), however the short-comings of the use of the device are evident in this scene. As discussed in Chapter Seven, Alex had a keen awareness of his needs as a visually impaired person, in particular in terms of his adaptive access to text. However these abilities were compromised in this lesson by the lack of a final script. Continued cuts to the script by the tutor throughout the weeks of rehearsals made it impossible for him to memorise his lines in advance. The tutor's apparent lack of awareness of Alex's needs in terms of preparation caused disruption to the lesson, when Alex was singled out for attention to effect the changes (while all the other students scan-read the script and scribbled out the cuts rapidly with a pen). As Alex read font size 24, only seven words were visible on his iPad at a time, and page numbers were not available. Therefore locating a certain line or word involved a high level of skill, concentration and patience, and took considerably longer than scan reading. In addition, the tutor mis-read Alex's engagement in the lesson; he was not 'playing' on his iPad, but was in fact the only student working while she was

absent from the room. This supports Bardin and Lewis's (2011) findings that teachers rate visually impaired students as having lower levels of attention, when compared with their sighted peers.

A large room set out as a film studio. At one end, wooden boarding about eight feet high, with mock windows and fake doors. At the other end of the room, video cameras and lights with coiling cables snaking across the floor. A table and two chairs are placed in the middle, as 'the set'. Eight students enter, including Alex, his best friend Lee, and Rob. They begin to mess about, popping up behind the fake windows, making phone calls on the fake telephone. The tutor, Annie, enters.

Annie: Right, choose a scene to work on, we've only got two weeks before this goes public. You've got five minutes. (Annie exits)

Alex: (Taking his iPad from his bag) So have we got scene three sorted? I've got to sort the cuts, what lines has she cut now?

(The other students continue to play, shouting and throwing things about. The noise levels, echoing off the high ceiling, rise)

Lee: (Glancing at Alex and noting his irritation) Quiet all of you, it echoes enough in this room without all this shouting. Right, Alex, we're going from Hathorne, page 102.

Alex: Just give me a minute, there's no page numbers on this thing.

Lee: (forgetting his helpful role, singing) I'm just gonna make love to you, love to you...

Annie: (entering) Right you lot, what have you chosen? Alex, stop playing on that thing.

Lee: Page 102, miss.

Annie: I've cut most of that, we'll need to go through the changes.

Alex (sighing) What, more changes?

Annie: Alex, do you want a cue line?

Alex: (looking irritated) I've got it (he picks up his iPad and begins swiping the screen furiously with his nose)

Annie: Cut from 'Paris' got that?

Alex: (pause) yep got it

Annie: All the way down to 'called'. A page for us, probably a couple for you? (Irritated, to the other students) Will you lot shut up, I'm trying to get Alex sorted here. So, are we done, Alex?

(Alex nods and moves to the stage area, holding his iPad to his right eye. Annie begins chatting to the other students about a television programme. Alex waits a little, then climbs onto the desk).

Alex : (singing and gesturing to the 'audience') Oh greased lightning, oh greased lightning...(he jumps off the desk and continues to perform the greased lightning dance, humming)

Annie: OK OK, I get it. Positions please. Alex, you want to move stage centre, do your line, then move forward, centre front. Turn as Rob enters, and then head back to your lovely safe place, behind the desk.

(Alex walks through these movements, muttering to himself)

Annie: OK? Done? Right, action.

Alex: (moving centre stage and then reading lines from his iPad, held to his nose) 'I'm just not sure which way this is gonna...'

Annie: (Sharply) Stop! You need to move centre front, remember? Try again. And don't forget to incorporate your gestures, you're too wooden...more fluidity please.

Alex: (exasperated, returns to the table). 'I'm just not sure..' (he pauses, drops the iPad to his side, moves carefully centre stage, then resumes reading) '..which way this is gonna go'

Annie: Turn back to him, as well, when he comes in.

Alex: OK. (he doesn't move)

Annie: (Sighing) Alex?

Alex: What? I've got my back to him.

Annie: No, he's behind you now, turn to face him. And use your body, Alex, act with your body.

Alex: (waving his iPad ironically at the other students, and muttering under his breath) Got to look at this thing, to read the lines, can't gesture with this thing stuck to my nose, can't learn the lines while she keeps making fucking cuts at the last minute...  
Annie: From the top...with feeling, this time, Alex.

**Figure 8.1: Alex in 'The Crucible'**

Throughout the data from all three colleges there was evidence of this type of 'extra work done' by visually impaired students, when compared to their peers. This extra work ensures their ongoing participation and access to the learning experience. Again in this excerpt, it is evident that Alex displayed a far greater degree of dedication than his peers. This dedication endangered his social acceptance, when the tutor isolated Alex from the group: 'Will you lot shut up, I'm trying to get Alex sorted here'. It appeared that Alex then attempted to rescue this by 'clowning' (Hobday-Kusch and McVittie 2002) as John Travolta, thereby re-integrating himself with his disruptive peers.

Further interference to Alex's successful learning was as a result of his reliance on peer support. As he explained in interview, Alex had chosen not to have a support worker present with him in class, relying instead on friends within the group. Thus forms of support available from the 'Inclusive Learning team', discussed in Chapter Six as 'support worker plus equipment' were not available to Alex. However throughout the fieldwork it was frequently observed that this dependence on peers could have unreliable consequences, as Lee's engagement and rapid disengagement with Alex's support needs in Figure 8.1 demonstrates.

It is also evident that the tutor did not seem to be able to 'visualise' Alex's unique perceptual schema, or to understand the intersection between this and the demands of the embodied actions in the moment of acting. The skill in interpreting another's perceptual schema is a complex, challenging one, requiring a degree of sensory, kinaesthetic and physical awareness. Research has suggested that tutors view visually impaired students as less problematic following training (see Chapter Six; Jablan et al. 2011). The lack of sensory awareness may thus reflect the tutor's lack of training and

experience in interacting with people with alternative perceptual schemas. The need for 'fluidity' and 'gesture' were problematised by Alex's need to hold the iPad one inch from his eye in order to read, and the dangers inherent in moving across the stage with his vision effectively blocked by the device. It did not appear that the tutor in this extract was able to appreciate the impact of monocular vision and its resultant impact on physical movement in her interpretation and directions. However other tutors in Brinton incorporated a full range of sensory information in their teaching, which Alex described as 'very useful' to his learning. Ralph, for example, the Movement tutor, described motion in a highly sensory manner:

Now I want you to express some sounds through movement. As it's St David's day, we're going to express some specifically Welsh sounds, 'ch', 'll', 'rh' 'dd'. Interpret, no, embrace the sounds as a dynamic in your body... Okay, describe to me what you felt? The textures, dynamics, interpretations and associations. Rob said 'smooth, bumpy and buttery' and Alex said 'doughy, clean and defined'.

Fieldnotes 1/3/13

However this may not reflect Ralph's awareness of Alex's needs, but rather his background as a dancer and choreographer, and his professional identity as defined by movement and sensation.

The lack of successful communication between Annie and Alex when attempting to establish the movements on stage illustrates the relevance of Webster and Roe's (1998) argument for precise, elaborate explanations by teachers and support staff for visually impaired people. The phrase 'turn back to him' failed to explain where 'he', Rob, was located on the stage, and the vague turn of phrase was interpreted by Alex as 'turn your back on him'. In return, Annie interpreted his lack of movement as resistance, rather than as incomprehension. The exchanges thus deteriorated, demonstrating a lack of positive regard between tutor and student which could have had significant implications for future learning. James and Biesta (2007), for example, argued that one of the most significant factors in achievement in further education is the development of a relationship based on the tutor's appreciation of the learning needs of the student.

The contrast between Alex's experience and Ffion's drama class in the specialist college, Ospley, is dramatic. In ' Ffion in "Mrs Brown's Boys Go on Holiday"' (Figure 8.2, below), the interactions and relationships appear to be calm and respectful, despite a degree of 'messing around' on behalf of the students, and conceptual awareness problems evidenced by the tutors.

**Figure 8.2: Ffion in 'Mrs Brown's Boys Go Camping'**

A small theatre with approximately one hundred tiered seats, with a well-lit stage area. The stage is surrounded by very tall mirrors, covered with blackout material. Four students (Ffion and her boyfriend Ed, and Ali and Mack, both of whom have no vision) and two tutors, Helen and Stacey, are sat on the stage.

Stacey: OK now, stop chatting, let's get on. How are we with lines?

Ali: Done.

Mack: Got them.

Ffion: Still struggling, sorry.

Ed: Needing the script for most still, sorry.

Stacey: Look I know it is hard to keep the momentum after a big show, but we can't afford another week without lines – the movement, the staging, the performance itself comes from them, and learning lines comes first so we can discard the scripts and move about, OK? (she issues two ring binders, one with a script in large 48pt font, and one in 16 pt font)

Ffion: I'll need the script but it is hard to follow, to keep turning all the pages, can you prompt me please?

Stacey: Yes no problem. OK, let's get going. (she taps Ali's hand with her elbow, and sighted guides her to her seat, a metre square block which acts as the back seat of the 'car'. Mack gently inches towards his block, kicking Ed repeatedly as he manoeuvres past him, feeling with his hands. Ffion and Ed sit on two hard plastic chairs in the front)

Ed: What is my first line, to set me off? I might remember the rest when I get going.

Helen: I am prompting you and Mack, and Stacey's doing Ffion and Ali. First line: 'Oh it's been so long since we've been on holiday'

Mack: We're asleep, aren't we?

Stacey: Yep, you kids at the back, you're asleep.

(Ali and Mack twist their heads upwards and sideways and pretend to snore).

Stacey: No, that's not doing sleeping. Think about your positioning. To us, as a seeing audience, you look deranged, not asleep! How do children sleep?

Ali: How do I know?

Stacey: OK, try curling up on one another, that is, think about positioning your bodies as if you were cuddling a cushion, and Ali, lean your head on Mack's shoulder (Ali feels out with her hand to locate Mack's shoulder, and leans on him). That's it, now Ali, suck your thumb.

Ali: What? What really? What's that?

Stacey: It's what kids do. Put your left thumb in your mouth, nail pointing downwards, and curl the rest of your fingers in to make a fist. Good. OK, Ed?

Ali: Ed? (pause) Ed, are you ready? (pause)

Ed: (sits very still and silent, grinning)

Ali: (laughing) Ed, where are you, you git?

Helen: Ed, stop it. Ali, he's just to your left, if you reach out quickly you can punch him (Ed laughs as Ali laughs and punches out, grazing his left shoulder). OK that's enough.

Ali, try not to rock, and remember to face the audience. Remember where they are and try to orientate to the breathing and coughing in the crowd.

Ed: 'It's been a long time since we've been on holiday'

Ffion: Look sorry, these lights are really bright, can we do anything?  
 Stacey: I'll dim them a little, love, but when the audience is here they need to be up. Can you wear shades? They fit with the character...  
 Ffion: OK I'll try it, don't dim them, I'll have to get used to it. (she opens up her ring binder and brings it up to her face)  
 Helen: No, that script's not going to work like that. Ditch it and I'll micro-prompt you, you'll learn quicker anyway. Let's practice the movements first.  
 Ffion: So we do the first bit, up to 'why has the bloody car stopped now?'. I open the door (she mimes opening the car door, and then climbs out)  
 Helen: Exaggerated movements, OK? This is a comedy; the movements are larger than life. Think Laurel and Hardy, have you seen them?  
 Ffion: I'm a bit young, miss. And seeing's a bit of an issue (laughs)  
 Helen: (Laughing) Of course. Yep, that's better. Right you lot, come on, from the top, action.

In terms of the planning and enactment of the lesson, the tutors demonstrated depth-knowledge of the intersection between the needs of the students, the requirements of the course and production, and the affordances of the physical and intellectual location. Stacey's awareness of the necessity of script memorisation as a precursor to mobility and movement, for example, displayed an experienced approach to the embodied learning needs of the students. Her awareness of the affordances of 'micro-prompting', giving one word or line at a time, appeared to be significant, not only to Ffion's successful learning of lines, but more generally to the development of a supportive learning environment and positive relationship with her students.

The need for differentiation in terms of access to text in Ospley was taken for granted by tutors, and in this drama lesson, each script was issued in the students' preferred format. However higher level technology was absent. An iPad or similar device may have been more physically accessible than a file for the partially sighted students, while acting (although still problematic, as Alex's experience, above, suggested). Differentiation of physical movement was also evident throughout the session, with precise verbal descriptions being given to partially sighted students, and, in addition, physical support such as sighted guide to seats and 'kinaesthetic' teaching (RNIB 2014) and demonstrations of actions given to those with more restricted vision. However tacit 'sighted' knowledges were still assumed by the tutor at a number of points, for example in her use of 'Laurel and Hardy', and though



dealt with lightly and with humour, ensured a sense of 'difference' remained between the sighted tutors and visually impaired pupils.

In terms of the 'precise elaborate explanations' required, it is apparent that the tutor was comfortable with the verbalisation of physical actions, for example, in her description of children sleeping and thumb sucking. This exchange also evidenced Stacey's awareness of the potential issues in concept development for visually impaired children, as has been suggested by scholars such as Tobin (2008). As discussed in Chapter Three, Tobin stated that the inaccessibility of information in visual forms can cause limitations in the learning of concepts. Ali demonstrated a lack of understanding of sighted peoples' interpretation of 'how children sleep', and she had no concept of the act of thumb sucking. The tutor, through her precise verbalisation of these embodied actions, elaborated the concepts to enable Ali to conceive and enact these movements. Thus the tutor displayed a large degree of understanding of Ali's tactile sensory schema, and the potential interruptions to her learning of the taken-for-granted knowledges of the sighted world. The tutor was also comfortable in challenging Ali's 'stereotypical movements', in stopping her rocking. 'Rocking' (moving back and forth repetitively) is believed a response to sensory under-stimulation, generally more prevalent amongst those with a severe visual impairment. Some believe such movements can be seen as socially inappropriate and 'odd', and teachers and educators of visually impaired children often attempt to dissuade this form of behaviour. The aim is to reduce the social exclusion of visually impaired people as a result of the negative assessments of sighted viewers (Gal and Dyck 2009: 754).

Ffion's interactions in the session illuminated some of the issues she had raised in interview. In Chapter Seven we learnt that Ffion believed her light sensitivity and levels of vision had been little understood in the mainstream school environment. She felt that this had given her negative self-esteem, resulting in her attempts to 'hide' from her peers and conceal her level of disability. In the environment of the specialist college, she was comfortable to raise the issue of lighting, knowing her request would be understood within the context of her light sensitivity. The practical requirements of staging were

discussed and negotiated with the tutor, and an easy compromise was reached which challenged neither the production nor Ffion's visual levels or comfort. This sense of acceptance and inclusion was evident for all of the students. They appeared comfortable with each other's levels of disability, as the teasing of Ali by Ed demonstrated, when he 'hid in plain view' from Ali by remaining silent. This scene, if enacted between a sighted and blind student, could be interpreted as a form of subtle bullying, but in this case, the good-natured responses indicated a degree of equality and respect which belie this simplistic explanation.

## **8.2 Sport**

While drama lessons incorporate a degree of directed and rehearsed movements, sports lessons present a range of alternative challenges for visually impaired students. The quality of interactions noted above remains important in sports activities and teaching and learning contexts. However in sport the affordances of movement, and the types of differentiation practiced in lessons are highly significant. In this section pedagogic moments have been selected to illustrate the significance of embodiment, physical and intellectual movement, and orientation for visually impaired students.

Drawing on and illustrated by extracts from fieldnotes from sports lessons in Ospley and Brinton Colleges, the following paragraphs will illustrate the intersection between physical embodiment and movement and the functional needs of visually impaired people, such as John and Steven. Aspects such as the relationships between tutors and students, and the significance and impact of perceived hierarchies in sports lessons will be discussed. Tutor differentiation will then be addressed, in terms of the verbalisation of embodied actions, the adaptations to the visual dimensions of lessons, and the significance of spatial-temporal dimensions in the power relations of teaching and learning.

In terms of tutor-student relationships and the atmosphere and culture of the sports departments, one of the most striking aspects of the analysis was the

similarities, rather than the differences, between the two sports sections observed, in the specialist and mainstream colleges. For the other courses, such as drama, catering and business, significant differences were observed in the culture and ethos of all three colleges. In sport, however, the similarities were far more apparent than the differences, despite the range of sports offered and the variation in levels of adaptation. The tutors in each college appeared to present a 'harsh but fair' regime, where obedience and engagement were assumed, and lack of compliance was punished through the imposition of physical tasks: 'Oy, you're not listening, shut your mouth and give me twenty press ups, now' (Fieldnotes Brinton 22/2/13). In return the students were highly motivated to achieve in their sports, and viewed the tutors with admiration. The 'banter' between students and tutors was aggressive, but respectful.

The sports hall was then set up for football – six students carried a set of goalposts above their heads across the hall, only narrowly avoiding hitting a blind student who was stood waiting for instructions. John: 'Oh god.. right a bit, we nearly had Erryl then. Sorry mate. You all blind or what?' They began giggling, before the tutor jogged over, putting his arm around Erryl's shoulders to guide him out of the way: 'What the fuck are you lot doing? The blind are truly leading the blind today'. The students calmed down and silently arranged the goalposts.

Fieldnotes Ospley 17/4/13

I explained my presence to the tutor and he was very welcoming, joking 'you going to write it down if I slap one of them?' He then turned to the 'sickies', asking why they were not running. One young man said 'I've got a fight later – boxing. It's Llansillich and we've got to *do* them, I can't risk an injury and I need my energy'. The tutor responded with, 'I'll box you, I'll have you, no problem, Briing it ooon'. There was a bit more banter, and a number of the students swore. The tutor nodded at me and responded with 'If I hear another swearword, I am going to go mental. If your parents were here, you wouldn't do it, now pack it in'. The students became silent and turned to their mark sheets.

Fieldnotes Brinton 28/2/13

However one of the challenges in the culture of both departments was the intersection between the 'macho' culture and the disability of the students. Forms of 'hegemonic masculinity', a social force which influences male behaviour and identities and subordinates other men and women (Mac an Ghail 1994) were particularly apparent amongst those engaged in sports courses. Steven explained in interview and discussion how he was unwilling

to reveal the extent of his visual impairment to his sighted peers, apart from to the two close friends who provided unofficial support in classes. Neither would he ask for adaptations from tutors, as he was acutely aware of wanting to 'fit in with the lads' (Fieldnotes 27/2/13). In an environment where physical prowess was highly valued, he made a number of sacrifices in terms of his learning, to avoid the danger of being 'different' or 'inadequate'. He appeared to do a great deal of work in physical lessons in terms of subtly positioning himself to be able to view demonstrations. This form of conforming and positioning was also apparent in the specialist college. In Ospley, the Paralympics sports categories (Action for Blind People 2014) were used rigidly to assess participation, with all sports students subject to an eye examination to designate their category. In football the categories of B1 (blind), B2 and B3 are used. A B1 category indicates a student will be involved in 'blind football' or goalball, and in Ospley was used as an indicator of 'difference' by students and tutors, without self-consciousness.

For a warm-up the students were told to jog two laps of the pitch. The tutor shouted: 'Grab a B1, someone, we're going to have a game of blind football at one end, then give the pitch over to the partials for the second half'.

Fieldnotes Ospley 17/4/13

John had resisted attempts to re-categorise him as blind, rather than as partially sighted, despite some of the difficulties he had in participating equally in the partially sighted team:

The students stopped to put on sports vests to indicate sides, after one student complained that everyone looked the same: 'can we have the blue and orange vests, they are best for my eyes?' John: 'well them two colours look the same to me, I can only see light and dark, the colour's a nonsense as far as I am concerned'. The tutor stated: 'let's do white and dark blue then, is that OK for everyone?' John replied 'Makes no odds to me, I'm near B1, they keep telling me, not that I'm fucking ignoring them while I can. Wear what you like, if I make out you are running towards me, you're the enemy as far as I'm concerned, I'll have that ball off you in no time'.

Fieldnotes Ospley 17/4/13

These findings also support those of others, who discuss the reality of a hierarchy of impairment, a 'pecking order' (Deal 2003: 906), perceived by disabled, as well as non-disabled people (Deal 2003; Shakespeare et al. 1996; Corker et al. 1999). In terms of sport, Mastro et al. (1996) completed a

small scale project with elite American athletes competing in the Paralympic games in Barcelona. Similarly to my findings in Ospley, they found a strict sense of categorisation, common to most participants, which was aligned with non-disabled opinion. Their participants, like mine, had a greater sense of preference and acceptance for those designated as 'the least disabled'. This reflects Thomas' assertion that disabled people live with 'ubiquitous cultural "messages" about bodily beauty and goodness, about what is to be valued and what is to be despised' (1999:50), which results in negative self-esteem and poor psycho-emotional adjustment. Thus the combination of a culture of hegemonic masculinity and this hierarchical approach to disability had significant consequences for the male students engaged in sport in this study.

In terms of tutor differentiation, a number of significant differences were noted between the two colleges, and also between the delivery of individual tutors within colleges. Firstly, as was noted in the drama section, above, there was a variety of understandings of the significance of precise verbal instruction and language, which had particular implications for the embodied actions of students in sports lessons. The RNIB (2014) provide simple guidance for the teaching of PE, including recommending 'precise language with clear verbal descriptions and explanations' (RNIB 2014: 6). However not all of the tutors in both colleges appeared to be aware of the necessity for this, or to have the skills to carry it out. In Ospley the experienced coach, Steve, explained the significance of verbalisation, and typified it during lessons, as these fieldnotes from 16/4/13 suggested:

Steve: 'It is all in the description, you have to really think about it, how you describe the moves in such a way as they follow and repeat what you are doing. I worry about what they learn, what they are doing in mainstream. Are they actually following what is being demonstrated, if people are assuming you can see the demonstration?'

Steve described the calf stretch in depth: 'Right foot in front of the other, touching, bend your back leg, straight front leg, bring your front toe up' and repeated the same level of detail for the other side. During this there was very little discussion, or back chat, as students listened carefully to the instructions.

However his less experienced colleague, Max, frequently made sighted assumptions during descriptions, which were corrected by Steve:

The tutor next discussed tactical positioning during football play. Using a magnetic tactile board with players as movable pieces, Max explained: 'He passes to him, he moves back there'. Steve corrected him: 'The back player runs diagonally to the centre of the pitch to pick up the ball'

Fieldnotes 28/2/13

In Brinton, no alterations to language or description was made in order to include Steven in sports activities, and directions or advice for tutors on this aspect of pedagogy was absent from his personal development plan and from the instructions for tutors, which read 'needs large print' (Fieldnotes 22/2/13).

As the tutor began to demonstrate the netball pass, Steven first turned his left ear towards the talker, and then as the noise increased, stepped backwards with his head down. He could not see or hear the presentation. When the other students began to mimic the move, Steven passed the ball to his partner, and then watched closely as his partner demonstrated the pass. His first pass didn't follow the instructions given, and his friend corrected him, but he subsequently passed as had been instructed.

Fieldnotes 22/2/13

Steven compensated by watching his friends, or asking one of two close friends to demonstrate moves at close quarters after whole-class demonstrations had been completed. This use of peer support for learning, defined by Alex in interview as 'sly' (6/3/13), could be a risky strategy, as there could be misinterpretation of 'teacher talk' by peers, or peers could be unable to pass on information accurately in a format useful to the visually impaired student. In addition Steven was reliant on particular individuals, which may be risky during a time of shifting friendship groups. In a very small-scale representative study of four students by Wiscochil et al. (2007) it was found that the informal use of untrained peer support in sports lessons did not improve the achievements or abilities of visually impaired pupils. However following training, peer mentors provided more targeted support, and visually impaired sports pupils demonstrated an average twenty per cent increase in their PE scores. In Brinton, although Steven appeared to learn usefully from his peers at times, this was not consistent in all lessons.

However some tutors in Brinton *did* appear to be aware of the need for sufficient variation in language and description to meet Steven's needs. Alison, a senior tutor in the department, supplemented most of her visual

aids with verbal description during her theory lessons, although she seemed unaware that Steven could not access videos. This may have been due to Steven's unwillingness to discuss his adaptations with tutors (Steven interview 5/3/13).

In addition to the use of language, there were wide variations in the use of equipment and environment as aids to learning. In Ospley, the specialist college, the balls, pitches and buildings were all custom-designed for visually impaired sport. The balls for partially sighted football were weighted to slow the bounce, and those for blind football contained bells or ball-bearings to enable audio-location. The hall was honeycomb-lined to reduce 'acoustic bounce' and the pitch markings were tactile and highly contrasted with the floor colour. In Brinton, as a mainstream college, none such adaptations existed. In the large sports hall the lighting was dull and uneven, and the floors and walls a similar shade of green. In addition, Steven's psycho-emotional response to his disability, discussed in Chapter Seven, was such that he would not request the adaptations he needed, such as high colour-contrasted balls. In observation it was apparent that where possible Steven would subtly make these adaptations (for example, by selecting the only light-coloured basketball from a bag), but where absent he would 'make do' without.

Further, 'tactile modelling' (as it is known in the US: O'Connell et al. 2006) or 'kinaesthesia' as it is described by the RNIB (2014) was largely absent from all the observed lessons, apart from during the blind football session in Ospley. Kinaesthesia is 'manual guidance and movement of the body parts administered by an instructor' (RNIB 2014: 5), which aids understanding of spatial concepts such as location, position, direction and distance. O'Connell et al. (2000; 2006) found that kinaesthetic instructions are 'effective methods of improving the motor skills and physical activities of students who are blind' (O'Connell et al. 2006: 475). The absence of tactile modelling can be explained by the visual levels of the participants, the skill levels of the tutors, and the attitudes of the students themselves. For example it was unlikely that John or Steven would have been happy to be physically manipulated in this way. However in the blind football group (Fieldnotes Ospley 28/2/13, below),

it was apparent that tactility was a necessity in the teaching and learning process.

For these 'B1' students, physical posture and movement, verbal communication, tactile contact, and orientation were all essential to sport, and to any independent motion. In this session, the students were therefore learning essential life skills in addition to sports techniques. Thus while such skills in kinaesthesia may not have been essential for the six students described in Chapter Seven, they would be essential for any tutors engaged in the physical education of students with a more severe visual impairment.

The tutor guided Jak to the end of the room, and tapped the end boardings to indicate to Jak his location. He then physically guided each student to their starting positions in turn, located them, and positioned their arms and legs for the starting pose. When the students had finished their kick they had to find their place at the back of the line, using sound echoes from the nearby wall to orientate. At times the line-up disintegrated, with all three students standing in different positions: 'Now lads, you know the score, what's important in blind football?' Jak: 'communication, orientation and positioning'. The tutor prompted 'OK, we ready? Remember orientation – where are you? Where is the ball? Where is your partner? It's one of the very most important aspects of the game'. The students called to one another constantly to assist location: 'ready Jak?' 'yes, here' 'yes, Kyle' 'Bill'.

A number of scholars have considered the spatial-temporal dimensions of context in schools and colleges, focussing on socio-historical educational constructions. Adam (1995), for example, argued that time is an inherent and structuring dimension of the teaching and learning process. Massey (1993) and May and Thrift (2001) suggested that the physical dimensions of the classroom or institution cannot be separated from its temporal dimensions. Burgess (2010) extended this conceptualisation to explore the intersection between the construction of identity and the contextualised practices of learning in the space-time relations of the classroom. Further, Holland et al. (2007) argued that the space-time paths of students and teachers can determine the power relations between actors, and that 'students and teachers negotiate ways in which spatial and temporal order is constructed' (Holland et al. 2007: 222).



These theoretical perspectives had particular resonance when comparing sports lessons and their resultant variations in power. Movement can be viewed in terms of its educational, spatial and temporal dimensions, and inferences for identity formation and recognition can be drawn. For the sports students in this study there was a strongly defined difference between 'moving' times and 'stationary' times (Delamont and Galton 1986: 90), due to the particular affordances of the topic being taught, the students present and the power and control of the tutors and students. A large number of the sessions, as described above, were inherently physical, involving student engagement in football training, use of gym equipment, or running, and involving a high degree of instruction from a dominant class tutor. However the theoretical sessions had an expectation of stasis, and these elements were realised in a variety of ways in different lessons across both colleges. In Ospley, due to the particular needs of the students present, lessons were specifically structured in terms of movement, across intellectual, spatial and temporal dimensions. The example of one anatomy and physiology lesson (16/4/13, below) can serve to illustrate the space-time conceptualisations of teaching and learning, the arguments of Holland et al. (2007) for an intersection between space-time and power relations, and the particular relevance of both for visually impaired students.

The anatomy and physiology lesson focussed on the nervous system, and was timetabled for an hour. There were eight students present, three with no vision, three with highly restricted vision, including John, and two who were able to read large print. The entirety of the teaching was completed through verbal explanation and questioning, without any forms of visual or tactile teaching aids. The students remained seated and still throughout, as any movement or expression of disruptive 'voice' (Gordon and Lahelma 1996) would have interrupted the other students' ability to hear. In terms of positioning, movement and posture, the unique nature of the student group was realised through the embodiment of the visually impaired learners: none eye-contacted the tutor during teaching; some listened with their heads down on the desk, and others turned away, with their ears towards the tutor, Dave. Intellectually, four distinct movements were noted, each approximately 15

minutes long. The tutor glanced at his watch at the end of each phase and allowed some 'down-time' chat. The four intellectual phases were: revision of the previous learning on the autonomic nervous system, achieved through question and answers; introduction of the new topic, the endocrine system, achieved through the reading of text from a booklet by the tutor for ten minutes (Dave, the tutor, who was himself visually impaired, occasionally faltered or paused, adjusting the position of the booklet or bringing it up to his eyes); repetition, discussion and expansion of the teaching material on the endocrine system; and summary and conclusion, with time for questions. Thus while there was no physical movement, the tutor created a sense of progress through the lesson. John had stated in interview that the tutors with visual impairments gleaned additional respect from students at Ospley (16/4/13). It was notable within this lesson that the lack of physical movement and noise by the students (who had been extremely vocal in other, physical sessions) demonstrated respect and equality in terms of power relations between all those present. It also suggested a sense of shared identity between Dave and the students, as visually impaired people. The students did not comment upon the abilities of the tutor when reading, or upon the abilities of each other when discussing or explaining complex visual concepts, thus belying the 'hierarchy of disability' in this context.

### **8.3 Preparing Food**

Phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty (1962), believed that embodied actions, such as those discussed above, cannot be distinguished from the perceptual schema of the individual. However the affordances of the participants in this study necessitated particular attention to the alternative sensory schemas of individuals, in the teaching and learning process. Geurts argued that there is a need to challenge 'traditional models for how we think about how we perceive' (2002: 196). The use of sensory ethnography in this study paid close attention to the range of sensory schemas and their relevance to teaching and learning. It revealed the extent of visual dominance in teaching, and explored the alternative approaches when used, which privileged the full range of senses to facilitate access to learning. In

this section pedagogic moments in cooking lessons are used to illustrate the sensory frames employed by visually impaired students when learning, and the significance of attention to the senses in teaching. In her anthropological study of religious practices in Chicago, Perez (2011) suggested that the sensory affordances of food preparation illustrate the learning of social and carnal practices. Drawing on Wacquant (2004), she proposed that the practical accomplishment of food preparation tasks is achieved through sensory, embodied learning rather than as a mental process: 'the permanent carnal experimentation that is training, as a coherent complexus of "incorporating practices"' (Wacquant 2004: 69). The social nature of food practices are produced through the sharing of 'tastes, smells and embodied culinary techniques' (Walmsley 2005: 55), and, as Pink suggested, 'ethnographic knowledge is produced through food practices' (2008: 181). The cooking lessons with Ffion and Tom, illustrated below, enabled an analysis of the significance of the senses in a pedagogic environment suffused with sensory significance. Touch and texture, smell, and sound were of particular value in these contexts, as Ffion and Tom had particular restrictions in their ability to attend to the visual in learning food preparation techniques.

The sensory nature of the cooking environments was evident throughout all observations:

In one large room there were four full-sized kitchens. All the features, such as plug sockets, chairs and tables, were strongly coloured to contrast with the light walls and floor. The shelves and cupboards had large print and tactile Braille labels, and the room resonated with the automated voices of talking weighing scales, timers and tin lids. The room was very busy, and steamy, with the mixed aromas of chips, steaming vegetables and fried meat. One student, Joel, was cooking chips, one was being introduced to the kitchen for the first time, and Ffion was making a chicken casserole in a slow cooker. The overlapping voices, bubbling and sizzling noises, and robotic chimes and instructions made for cacophony of sound. Across the room Ed was sat at the table, exploring an unplugged iron with his hands. The tutor said, 'Find the hole at the top? You blub blub blub, put the water in here. Now, you've reached the dial there with your index finger, it is ridged, and its flat but it turns. On the flat turning dial you've got bump-ons, can you feel them? That's it, you've got the one bump-on' 'what's that for then?' 'one for warm, two is hotter, and three is for hard clothes, you know like jeans'. Ed: 'you're supposed to iron jeans?'

Ospley fieldnotes 1/5/13

The morning session was 'Kitchen Skills' and the purpose was to prepare and weigh ingredients ready for an assessment the following day. The room was a large training kitchen, with six workstations, each with a chrome cooker, sink and equipment. These were highly polished and reflected the bright sunlight from the large windows, leaving light bouncing across the surfaces. The students all wore whites; overcoats, aprons and hats, increasing the brightness of the room. As the assessment was for desserts, the sickly sweet aroma of flour, cocoa powder, butter and sugar filled the space. Tom was with Seth, using large print scales and large paper bags of flour and other ingredients to measure into slippery see-through plastic bags. They worked together for many of the items, for example, as they measured a spoon of baking powder, one held the spoon and the other sliced the top with a butter knife. Tom sniffed each large bag to identify the contents, and did not attempt to read the indistinct labels. Gradually the table they were working on became more chaotic, and Tom was forced to move on to a separate work area. He had forgotten to label his bags as he measured, and squinting at the bags and then sniffing the contents, he began to label them systematically.

Weatherwell fieldnotes 14/5/13

Although the sessions described above have different purposes (Ffion is learning 'Independent Living Skills' for her future domestic life, and Tom is learning industrial-scale food production) it is evident that in each case the senses are central to any consideration of food preparation. Ffion had significantly reduced vision, while Tom, with his recently acquired visual condition, had the ability to use aspects of his sight to read and perceive the environment visually. However each relied upon their complete perceptual schema and embodied performances (crouching and stirring, for example) while learning to prepare food. Nonetheless differences were apparent in the extent of their reliance on alternatives to visual perception. When chopping vegetables, for example, Ffion relied on tactile methods, sifting chopped onions through her fingers to ensure evenness. Tom, on the other hand, tended to crouch to the work-surface to check his preparations visually. When frying her meat, Ffion used a combination of texture and smell to monitor cooking, scraping the surface of the chicken with her spoon to check its density: 'oh no, still slippery here' and sniffing 'that's getting good'. Ffion's access to the tactility of her environment was enhanced in other lessons, such as Braille, where touch is the dominant sense:

Ffion firstly read the Braille aloud. Both fingers moved simultaneously across the page as her fingerpads picked up the raised dots and she translated the

tactile shapes into verbal letters and words. The tutor, who had explained she had no vision, touch-read the sentences in her own book concurrently. Ffion hesitated. The tutor said, 'If you are stuck, scan your whole word, and see what you can pick out' (although she used visual language, she was referring to tactile scanning and seeing, rather than visual). 'It's the troublesome 'T', if it is giving you trouble, it's a 'T'. Always go with your first thought, because your fingers are probably right'.

Ospley Fieldnotes 1/5/13

Tom was observed occasionally to employ tactile or olfactory methods, when checking the surface of toast, for example, or checking the ingredients as described above. However he still appeared to privilege 'seeing' in most of his food preparation techniques, which at times resulted in lower achievement. For example, when he prepared vegetables in a later session, his visual levels were such that he did not perceive unevenly chopped products, which could be a disadvantage in a catering workplace in the future.

The variations in the students' sensory schemas and their employment of a range of senses were therefore evident in their approaches to learning. Similar variations in approach were apparent in the pedagogical approaches of the tutors, and their willingness or ability to encourage the use of the full range of sensory perception to prepare the food, and to adapt methods for the visually impaired student. Cooking demands a series of linked embodied actions, and the interaction of the perceiving body with tools and food items. The tasks of cooking, on a minute level, require an understanding of the moment of contact between the self and the products. Where presumed forms of visual perception are absent (for example in the presumptions inherent in instructions such as 'brown the meat' or 'cut the vegetables to a uniform size') alternative descriptions, such as the verbalisation of tactile, auditory or olfactory cues, are required to ensure accurate performance of the task. As in the example of Sport, above, demonstrations of embodied actions require precise verbal explanations of the performance required. However in addition, for cooking, there is a need for the tutor to understand the sensory affordances of the task, the sensory schemas of the student, and the possible alternatives to visual demonstration and visual conceptualisation of the activity.

During Ffion's cookery lesson, the tutor demonstrated her ability to conceptualise these sensory affordances from the viewpoint of Ffion's sensory schema:

Ffion was peeling and chopping vegetables. As she peeled the potato, she appeared to be attempting to use her vision to check the peel had been removed. Her eyes were two inches from the potato, head tilted sideways. The tutor said 'Now feel for it, Ffion, systematically remember, top to bottom, swizzle it round, is it slippery all over?' She turned to me: 'Ffion is a whizz at peeling and chopping now'. Ffion tilted her head back and closed her eyes, as her hands explored the potato, top to bottom, twist, top to bottom. 'Yep, that's done'. Tutor 'Now the herbs, remember how?' Ffion sprinkled the oregano onto her palm, sniffed it, and felt it with her other hand, before sprinkling it into the slow cooker. Ffion then felt for the size of the chicken, rather than using her vision ('hate raw meat on me nose'), and began cutting it.

Ospley fieldnotes 1/5/13

For Tom, however, it appeared that some of the tutors did not appear to understand the need for precise verbal explanations, or the potential for alternatives to a visually-orientated approach to the demonstration or performance of food-related tasks:

In the next session, Tom was practicing chopping and peeling techniques in the industrial kitchen. Pete came in and explained he wanted Tom to complete a series of tasks - chopping an onion, preparing a cabbage and performing three different cuts on carrots (rondel, julienne and baton). He very rapidly demonstrated the techniques: 'see, like this, you chop down this way for baton'. He then left, and Tom said 'Did you get that? I've forgotten half of what he said'. He chopped the cabbage, leaving large chunks, and began on the onion, using a very large knife to slice towards his open palm. He crouched close to the board, appearing to have more difficulty with the onion as it was white on a white board. I asked about using different coloured boards, but he explained that food safety guidelines insist that the right board is used for the right foodstuffs, to avoid contamination. Ava, the kitchen tutor came over: 'That's no good, far too chunky, just do it like this'. She chopped the onion rapidly without verbal description, and then moved off. Tom: 'sometimes they don't explain it properly, and I have to ask them to see it again, or try to copy someone else, and get them to show me instead'.

Weatherwell fieldnotes 20/5/13

Thus for Tom, the demands of the intersection between his individual sensory schema and the requirements of the task were such that the tutors needed the ability to adapt the teaching methods to Tom's sensory needs. Pink (2011) suggests that while it is impossible to fully appreciate another's

perceptual schema, 'there are certain forms of knowledge that cannot be understood simply through observation', but require learners to become 'apprentices in those sensory embodied skills' (Pink 2011: 271). Where alternatives to visual approaches to pedagogy were required, it was evident that while Tom was the apprentice in terms of skill development, the tutors required apprenticeship in the conceptualisation of non-visual forms of task completion. As Tom was newly-diagnosed and had not received formal training from others with these pedagogical skills, he was unable to verbalise his needs in terms of pedagogical strategies, and very little learning appeared to have taken place.

Gaffney argues that classrooms act as communities of practice, which 'call forth' disability as a result of the demand for 'teachers and students to act in particular ways that are disabling'(Gaffney 2014: 359). Further, he suggests that 'the impaired/disabled student's body is situated in, and mediated by, the socio-cultural context of the classroom' (Gaffney 2013: 360). In the case of cooking, for Tom, disability was 'called forth' through the visual teaching practices of the tutors, and the socio-cultural expectations of visual involvement in cooking. For Ffion, her socio-cultural environment privileged a range of sensory forms, and her disability was absent from the pedagogical process.

## **8.4 Mathematics**

The lessons described above illustrate the significance of interaction, embodiment, sensory perception, physicality and motion in the classroom, and the intersection of these aspects of learning with the pedagogical process. However the nature of mathematics is such that it presents a range of very different challenges to visually impaired students, in terms of symbolic and diagrammatic conceptualisation, representation and interpretation. As a core subject indicative of future employment (McDonnell 2010), mathematics is viewed as essential to progression to post-compulsory education and employment. Chanfrau and Cebulla (2009) found that in

Wales, visually impaired pupils achieved statistically significant lower grades in mathematics than pupils without special educational needs at key stage three (while achieving higher levels than those in other special educational needs groups). Although not disaggregated into individual subjects, a similar picture was evident in their analysis at GCSE level.

The specific areas of mathematics that are particularly challenging to visually impaired students are those of formulaic and diagrammatic representation. In a survey of visually impaired secondary age pupils, Cahill et al. (1996) found that visually impaired pupils experience particular difficulty with: logarithms (as a result of symbolic representation difficulties); trigonometry (associated with difficulties in reproducing diagrams); graphs (due to the visual nature of the media); and algebra (due to mechanical access problems such as 'accuracy and speed of manipulation...memory overload...control over navigation through an expression, and confusion from the linear layout of otherwise spatial representations' Cahill et al. 1996: 3). Kilingberg (2012) investigated issues in geometry, which is reliant on conceptualisation and recognition of global shapes in the environment, and an understanding of their properties and relationships. Although the study was completed with only two students, she concluded that visually impaired students find access to shape recognition more difficult than their sighted peers. While shapes and spatial features *can* be perceived by touch, the tactile perception of shape is strongly influenced by the sizes and types of objects (Millar 1994). Students may therefore need to employ a range of strategies such as manual manipulation of tactile objects, categorisation of features or, as Kilingberg recommends, 'embodied conceptual understanding' (Kilingberg 2012: 461).

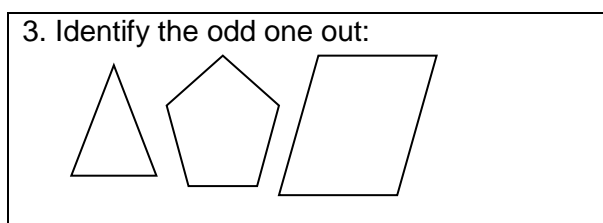
Three levels of maths classes were observed during fieldwork: an entry level class in Ospley with four students who were not key participants in the study; a GCSE class in Weatherwell with Tom; and three A-level maths classes in Ospley with John, Sophie (another partially sighted student using enlargement), and a Braille maths student called Joel. In this section I will firstly discuss the particular diagrammatic challenges presented by maths as



a subject, and the significance of the sensory adaptations for individual students. Each student's sensory schema intersected with the format of textual access used (whether tactile, auditory or visual through enlargement). I shall therefore discuss the range of skills required by the students, and the measures used by tutors to ensure that conceptualisation, representation and interpretation of material was achieved. Finally I will discuss the implications of these issues for the assessment and examination process.

In the Entry Level Three maths class in Ospley, shape recognition was given particular emphasis, as the examination papers contain a number of shape-related questions (Edexel 2014). This element is particularly challenging for visually impaired students. At the beginning of the lesson, Bill was using font size fourteen comfortably, and worked on large-print past papers independently, until he encountered the question in Figure 8.3, below. At this point he called for assistance from Mary, the tutor. Despite his relatively good vision, Bill was unable to answer this question, because, as he and the tutor explained, his visual impairment created a degree of distortion which altered his perception of the shapes.

**Figure 8.3 Entry Level Maths Question**

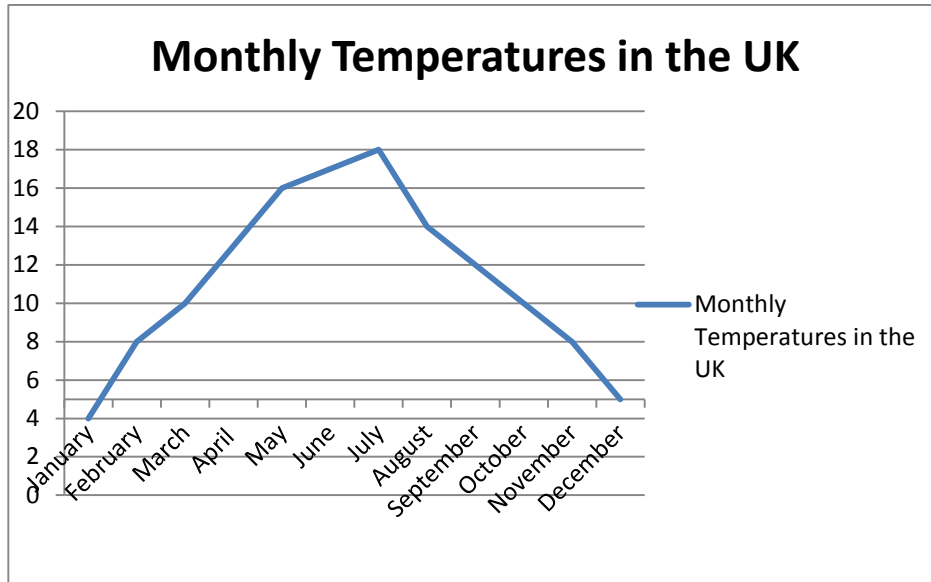


Source: Fieldnotes 30/4/13

Through careful discussion and prompts, the tutor taught Bill how to look for particular characteristics of the shapes, such as size, side numbers or categories (such as square, or triangle). Bill then identified the correct answer. However the technique was far more time-consuming than it would be for someone with full vision.

Ali, another student in the Entry Level maths class, was learning to use graphs, and was required to read a month/temperature line graph (such as that in Figure 8.4, below).

**Figure 8.4 Line Graph of Monthly Temperatures**



Source: Fieldnotes 30/4/13

However, due to the extent of his visual impairment, Ali was unable to access diagrams such as these using his vision. Sighted students visually scan to locate the highest or lowest points, but tactile solutions were required for Ali. Tactile interpretation requires students to track up the line to the required points using their finger, and then to track down in a straight line to find the month. Mary had thus created a tactile line graph, using Brailled card to represent the axes (with tactile lines running from each key co-ordinate), and 'wiki stick' (sticky tactile threads) to represent the line (see Figure 8.5, below).

**Figure 8.5 Tactile Line Graph**



Source: Fieldnotes 30/4/13

However the issuing of this tactile graph alone was not sufficient to ensure Ali's understanding. For forty minutes the tutor used elaborate description, explaining systematically first the features of the graph, and then the process of reading data from the chart, as Ali explored it with his fingers.

So, Ali, we're going to find out which month has the highest temperature. Go up the wiki stick to the top. Got it? Good, now trace your finger down the... no, not down the wiki stick, go back up, then down the bumpy straight line, you know, the Brailled line, to find your month'. Tracking the lowest temperature proved harder, as depending on the angle taken by the hands, it was hard for the student to identify whether December or January had a lower temperature. 'Now is it on the line, or between the lines? So what can you do if it is between?'

Fieldnotes 30/4/13

At GCSE level, diagrammatic representation was even more challenging for Tom, who used font sizes twelve or fourteen. As Tom entered the class of five students, the tutor issued him with a large print GCSE paper to work on. However he forgot to use this for over forty minutes of the hour-long lesson. He was issued with a standard print ruler and protractor, and a standard size compass. Tom worked his way through the first, numerically based questions unproblematically, even though the photocopied past paper was indistinct and he needed to squint to read the questions, which was approximately font size ten. However he encountered difficulties when it came to using the standard print protractor accurately, and despite demonstrating the correct mathematical techniques, got the answer wrong. He was also unable to see the fine lines on the graph paper in question fifteen (Figure 8.6, below), and it

was at this point that he recalled the large print version and switched to the appropriate document. However he was still unable to complete the graph, due to the fineness of the grid. He stated 'to me, see these lines, they are all wiggly. They run into each other, and it's impossible to run down them quickly' (14/5/13).

**Figure 8.6 Plotting Graphs: GCSE Mathematics paper**

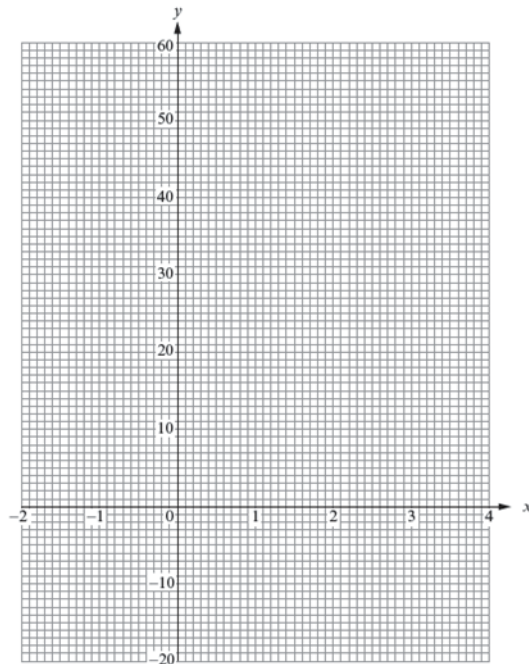
15. The table shows some of the values of  $y = x^3 - 8$  for values of  $x$  from  $-2$  to  $4$ .

(a) Complete the table by finding the values of  $y$  for  $x = -1$  and  $x = 3$ .

$x$	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
$y = x^3 - 8$	-16		-8	-7	0		56

-----  
 -----  
 -----

(b) On the graph paper below, draw the graph of  $y = x^3 - 8$  for values of  $x$  from  $-2$  to  $4$ .



Source: WJEC 2011

The tutor's approach to the lesson, a revision session, was to leave the students to complete the past paper, and then to respond to requests for help or clarification. When Tom raised his problem with the graph, the tutor explained the mathematical process on the board. This proved little help to Tom, as firstly, the tutor did not recognise that Tom's problem was a visual, rather than mathematical one, and secondly, he cleared a small space on a whiteboard full of equations, and wrote in small print, with faint blue pen in

the middle. As a newly diagnosed visually impaired person, Tom had not yet learned how to articulate his level of vision and his needs to others, and thus his issues with the visual dimensions of the GCSE paper remained unaddressed.

In the A-level class in Ospley, the mathematical expectations were high, in terms of reliance on formulae, diagrammatic representation and conceptual awareness and understanding of shapes. In the first lesson I observed, the students were working on algebra, manipulating formula such as:

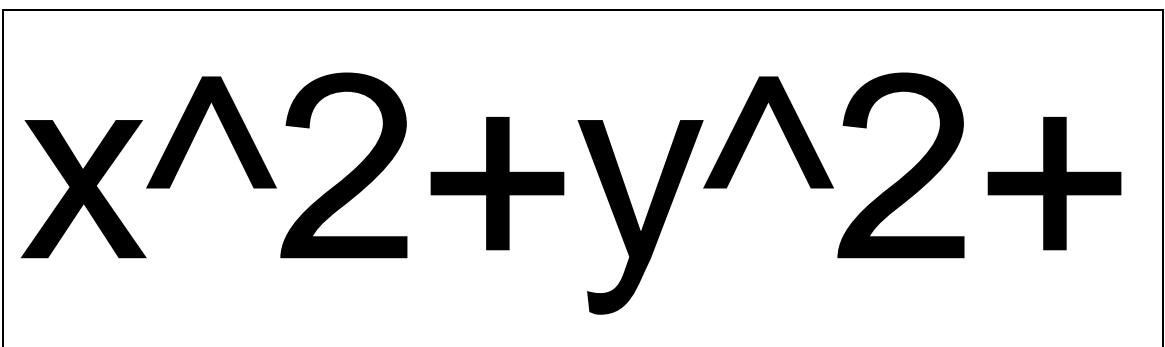
$$x^2+y^2+2x=1$$

However, the magnification package used by John and Sophie did not recognise symbolic representations such as squared, cubed, or square root, and therefore Mary, the tutor, had invented a form of alternative symbolism, such as  $n^{\wedge}2$  for  $n^2$  and 'R' for  $\sqrt{\quad}$ . The formulae therefore became:

$$x^{\wedge}2+y^{\wedge}2+2x=1$$

However, with the level of magnification required by John, on-screen the formulae resembled that in Figure 8.7, below, and he needed to scroll back and forth across the screen to read the entire question, occasionally showing his frustrations when he became 'lost' within the formulae: 'Where the fuck am I now? I'll have to go back to the beginning now'.

**Figure 8.7 John's view of the formulae, on-screen**



As a result of these requirements for access, John and Sophie had difficulty interpreting non-linear formulae, such as  $V/\frac{3}{4}$ , and in accessing A-level past paper questions with complex structures or presentations, such those in Figure 8.8:

**Figure 8.8 A-level Past Paper Question**

3 (b) Solve the equation  $t^2 - 4t + 2 = 0$ . Give your answers to two decimal places.

The solutions of  $at^2 + bt + c = 0$ , where  $a \neq 0$ , are given by  $t = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$ .

Source: AQA (2013)

Mary used a range of strategies to support John and Sophie. The A-level maths materials such as textbooks and worksheets are frequently in small print with a high degree of colour or illustration, and the complex workings are not conducive to enlargement on a photocopier as blurring occurs. The tutor thus typed out all material prior to the lessons. Within the classroom, she gave explanations verbally, or wrote out questions using a large thick handwriting pen, translating the complex static formulae into a temporal and spatial one: ‘So you have “V” first, and next, that is over ‘three quarters’? Does that help? So it becomes  $V / \frac{3}{4}$ ’ (Fieldnotes 16/4/13)

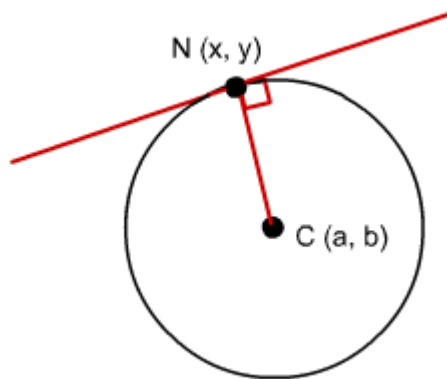
For Joel, the Braille user in the A-level class, the challenges were somewhat different. There is a recognised Braille code for mathematics, with a level of detail far too complex to elaborate here (RNIB 2005). However the fieldnote description from 13/4/13, with the tutor’s explanation of dollars and pound signs should exemplify the complexity of Braille notation, even at a basic level:

Tutor: ‘Dot 4 “L” is the sign for pounds when they are on their own, that is when the number doesn’t follow on...get that? OK, Dollar is a lower “d”, or dot 4 “d” if it is on its own. Now type me, umm.. 35 pounds. OK, and a pound sign on its own?’ The student Brailles it out with one plunge-crunch of the Perkins keyboard, and the tutor checks by looking over his shoulder ‘great’. Braille sign for pounds:

○ ●    ● ○  
 ○ ○    ● ○  
 ○ ○    ● ●

Joel was a competent Braille user, and as a congenitally blind student, learned his mathematics through Braille from an early age. He used a Perkins Braille, a form of typewriter with six keys, which punches tactile dots into card. He read back his typing with the index fingers of both hands, simultaneously, while the paper was still in the device. Joel took frequent pauses following his reading back of a question, apparently thinking, and sitting motionless for up to five minutes at a time, before beginning to type out his responses. Mary informed me that they had chosen not to use computerised Braille maths, as the notation was frequently incorrect. She also stated that some challenges relate to the conceptualisation of visual representations, such as the A-level co-ordinate geometry in Figure 8.9, below.

**Figure 8.9 A-level Co-ordinate Geometry**



Source: AQA 2013

In order to achieve his A-level, Joel and his tutors were required to interpret this pictorial representation of space, using tactile representations of the shapes on tactile 'German film', a material which enabled tactile lines and shapes. Joel had to complete mathematical tasks and represent the findings through the tactile, linear form of Braille. Braille-ing involves the embodiment of the tactile pattern through the simultaneous engagement of fingers when typing on the Perkins Braille. Mary, the tutor, supporting Roseblum and Herzberg (2011) and Kamei-Hannen's (2009) findings, stated that challenges also relate to the temporal and spatial dimensions of mathematics for visually impaired students: 'It is the difference between linear, and parallel viewing. A

sighted person would look at the diagram, the graph or formulae or whatever, as a whole, in parallel. Tactile readers, however, encounter each element individually, one at a time, and then have to try and locate elements of the diagram in relation to one another' (Fieldnotes 30/4/13). Klingenberg states that 'it is extremely difficult to gain insight into the images of concepts that [Braille user] students evoke' (2012:453). The tutor supported this finding, but suggested that successful teaching can take place if the tutor attempts to appreciate their students' conceptualisations. In describing Joel, for example, she stated: 'As soon as you can find the right way to teach him, you know, kind of get inside his mind and work out how to explain a concept, like a circle, and then a tangent of a circle, as soon as his teachers can explain it in a way that he can grasp, then he's flying.' (Fieldnotes 17/4/13).

Given the significance afforded to mathematics qualifications at a policy level ('Mathematical understanding is critical to our children's future': Gove 2010), it is evident that the challenges presented by the subject to visually impaired students could have broad implications for their futures (McDonnell 2010). Tom, for example, had attempted his GCSE four times, and each time had been awarded a 'D'. As he had difficulty with the visual dimensions of four of the twenty questions, it is possible that with adequate equipment and specialist advice on access to diagrams, he may have achieved a pass grade. In interview he stated that 'this is the last time I'll bother' (14/5/13), a decision which may have huge implications for his future education or employment. However, even with more specialised teaching, the nature of examinations in maths presents a range of hurdles, which may disadvantage visually impaired students. As John explained in class, in exams the students have additional time, and an amanuensis (a reader-scribe). The process for John therefore shifted from independent visual reading of a screen, to auditory appreciation as the question was read out. The listening and memory skills required, and the translation from one sensory media to another, create a far more complex process for the student: listening to the question; translating verbal representation to symbolic representation through internal imagery; conceptualisation of the problem; manipulation of the data received; and verbal transmission of the answer, with no opportunity



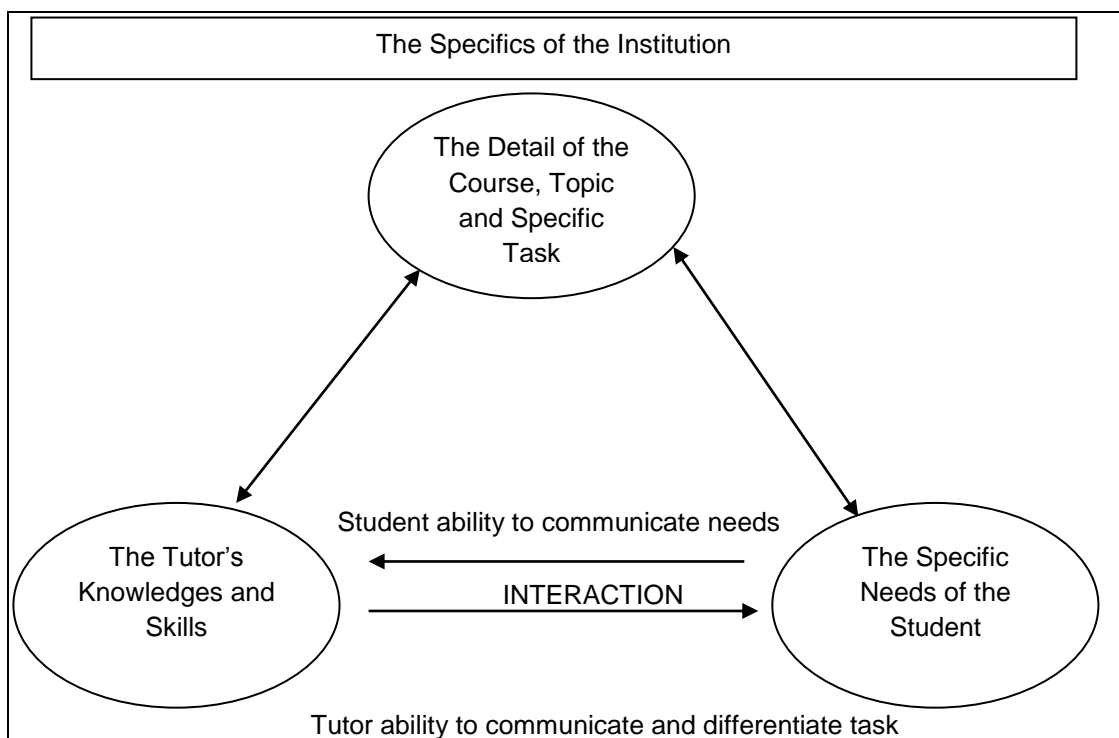
to check the actual text response recorded by the scribe. As Mary stated: 'There are so many opportunities for things to go wrong. One wrong number or symbol' (Fieldnotes 30/4/13). In addition Hewitt et al. (2011) found that where modified papers *are* used, students stated that they have been found to be wrong, due to errors during modification (2011: 77). The challenges posed by mathematics as a subject, the necessity for adequate specialised teaching, and the specific issues in examinations may explain Chanfrau and Cebulla's (2009) findings in relation to achievement, discussed above. They may also explain another of Hewitt et al.'s (2011: 58) findings, that visually impaired students who wish to pursue mathematics tend to choose a specialist college for their post-compulsory education.

## **Conclusion**

The themes of language and verbal interaction, touch and texture, embodiment and movement, perceptual schemas and the intersections of space, time and power in the classroom, which emerged from the pedagogic moments highlighted above, reveal the complexity of interactions in the classroom, and the significance of perception, sensation and movement in pedagogy with visually impaired students. However the data also enabled an analysis of the relationships between the various dimensions of teaching and learning for visually impaired students in further education, which are modelled in Figure 8.10, below. Firstly, the specifics of the institutional context influenced pedagogical practices. The nature of the institution and its organisational constructs such as the provision of support, the accessibility and affordances of the physical environment, and the knowledge, understanding and availability of adaptive materials and equipment were all found to be significant. The affordances of the institutions outlined in Chapter Five were evidently relevant at this micro-level of analysis. Secondly, the particular requirements of the course being undertaken and the subsections of the course, such as the topic and individual task, were also important. Each topic and task required varied degrees and types of reading and writing, diagrammatic or visual content, and practical or physical skills accomplishment. Thirdly, it was apparent that the individual characteristics

and experiences of the student were highly relevant. These included the levels of vision, the recency of sight loss, and the resultant functional needs, such as the format of access to information. There were implications of these visual characteristics in terms of movement, mobility and orientation. The data also revealed the extent to which students' psycho-emotional responses and confidence impacted upon their willingness or ability to articulate their needs to tutors. Finally the pedagogical practices of the tutors influenced the success of the teaching and learning process. Success was dependent upon the tutor's levels of skill in interpreting the course and topic materials for the alternative sensory schema of the student, their understanding of each individual's sensory and embodied needs, and their ability to effectively differentiate tasks to meet the needs of the learner and provide accessible learning experiences and materials.

**Figure 8.10 The Dimensions of Teaching Visually Impaired Students**



This chapter, with its emphasis upon the minutiae of pedagogy, has examined how each of these factors intersected, on a task-based micro level, to create the learning event and determine its success or failure.

Critical examination of the findings would seem to suggest that the expert knowledges of the tutors in the specialist college in Ospley enabled them to provide a far more inclusive learning environment than the tutors in the mainstream colleges. Their awareness of the functional needs of the visually impaired students and their skills in providing the adaptations required enabled students to effectively access course tasks. However 'pedagogical moments' do not occur in isolation. They are embedded within the college setting and subject to the broader political and educational contexts discussed in Chapter Six. In the following chapter, the findings in relation to pedagogy will be discussed in relation to these broader contexts. In addition the conclusions of the research will be put forward, in relation to the research aim and questions. Further suggestions for policy, pedagogy and theory will also be suggested.

## Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusions

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that the provision of further education for visually impaired students presents particular challenges to tutors, managers and disability support services. I also proposed that visually impaired learners bring to further education colleges their educational learning journeys, psycho-emotional experiences, practical equipment and support needs, and their pedagogical requirements. In this thesis I have explored the relationship between the provision of education for visually impaired students within the national and local further education policy contexts, and the individual student's characteristics and experiences. In the introductory chapters I critically examined the theoretical and policy approaches to disability and visual impairment, and related them to developments in education and inclusion. As a theoretical framework, I focussed on Thomas' (1999) conceptualisation of disability as the interface between the self, and the structures and processes of the social world, to create a theoretical basis for investigation. I also drew on the framework of Braun et al. (2011) to explore the re-contextualisation of special educational needs and inclusion policy initiatives in the local contexts of college classrooms. I posed three research questions at the outset:

- How do the policies of inclusive education and special educational needs impact on the policies and practices of specific institutions in the provision of teaching, learning and support for visually impaired students?
- What are the characteristics of educational provision and processes which promote effective learning journeys, and what presents barriers to learning and achievement?
- How do individual visually impaired student's characteristics and learning journeys affect the experience of teaching, learning and support in further education settings?

To conclude, I will return to these questions to draw out the key arguments and debates. Firstly I will address the research questions and discuss findings in relation to practice, discussing the relationships with pedagogy

and policy. I will then present a series of policy recommendations. The theoretical and methodological concerns raised by the study will be discussed. The suggestions for future research will then be acknowledged, before the thesis is summarised in the 'Final Word'.

## **9.1 Addressing the Research Questions**

My first research question was 'How do the policies of inclusive education and special educational needs impact on the policies and practices of specific institutions in the provision of teaching, learning and support for visually impaired students?'. Analysis of data illustrated the extent of the "recalibration" of the inclusive ideal' (Dyson 2001: 27) in the policies and practices of teaching, learning and support in the colleges. This study thus contributes to our knowledge of the re-contextualisation of policy imperatives in local contexts, as discussed by Ball (1997), Ozga (1990) and Braun et al. (2011), in the enactment of inclusion policies for visually impaired students in further education colleges. The study drew out a number of particular issues in policy in the further education of visually impaired students. Of particular note was the provision for the 'additional curriculum needs' of the students, which has been addressed by a number of scholars, such as Amato (2002) and Kiel and Clunies-Ross (2002). In line with these studies, I found that failure to address specific issues can have significant implications for the students' abilities in accessing teaching and learning, and becoming independent in future education and employment settings. For example there were issues in mobility, accessing information, communication, daily living skills and social skills.

In addition, I found that the aspirations and expectations of visually impaired learners by tutors, managers and support staff were significant to the policies and practices of the colleges. It was found that low expectations were linked to low levels of staff experience, knowledge and training in visual impairment. Enactments of inclusive pedagogical practices, and interactions at a

classroom level were predicated by these levels of awareness. Each staff member interpreted their practice in relation to adapted pedagogy and differentiation in a unique manner. Exclusionary practices, at a micro-level, persisted in pedagogy and in enactment of the curriculum. Supporting the theoretical discussions of Florian (2008), in relation to visually impaired students, this study found that students present a 'dilemma of difference' and that there is a need to 'articulate a process of inclusion as practice' for teachers (Florian 2008: 203). Further, the political agenda of scholars such as Ainscow (1991), to use the inclusion of students with SEN as a driving force for overall social equality, can be seen to have faltered. The study concurs with Runswick-Cole (2011), who states that the inclusive ideal is a long way off:

The attachment of successive Governments to the view that inclusion is a response to the learning difficulties experienced by individual children and young people, rather than understanding inclusion as being fundamentally about equity and recognising and supporting the richness of social diversity (Armstrong, 2005), has fundamentally compromised the inclusion agenda.

Runswick-Cole 2011: 117

My second research question was 'What are the characteristics of educational provision and processes which promote effective learning journeys, and what presents barriers to learning and achievement?' In seeking to answer this question, the thesis can make a number of recommendations for pedagogical practice. There were large variations in the levels of successful provision within classrooms, both between, and within colleges, due to the skills levels and understandings of the individual tutors. The data and analysis illustrated the need for clear and precise language by tutors, for example, and for tutors to replace body language, gesture and vague directions with specific targeted verbal information. The specific sensory schemas of the students must also be appreciated and addressed, if successful learning is to take place. This includes an understanding of the tactile, olfactory and auditory affordances both of the student's schema, and of the environment and task. There also needs to be an appreciation of the embodied nature of teaching and learning, for, as Shilling (2003) suggests, educational institutions are 'involved in the production of particular forms of bodily control and expression' (Shilling 2003:

19). Visually impaired students present a challenge to accepted forms of embodied teaching and learning, and successful pedagogical strategies incorporated these alternative dimensions in all aspects of the pedagogical moment.

To enable these issues to be addressed adequately, planning for lessons must involve analysis of the particular requirements of each learning task, including those of an embodied, practical or diagrammatic nature. While in all of the colleges there was evidence of a degree of appreciation of the alternative format requirements of each visually impaired student, successful pedagogy involves more than simply adaptations to text. Greater appreciation of the potential advantages of specialist technology, technical and practical equipment, and adaptations to pedagogical strategies was required in the mainstream colleges. In addition, some organisational factors are relevant to planning. For example, sufficient time must be allowed by tutors for transcription of documents. These findings support the work of Douglas et al. (2009), and Douglas and McLinden (2005). However an additional finding was the need for support to enable students to learn to express their needs to tutors and support staff, and to acquire the skill of approaching a task and thinking laterally about how to perform it with their level of vision. For students with a recently acquired visual impairment in particular, this ability to express their needs and begin to make adjustments, through the use of technology, equipment or embodied action (such as moving closer to the teaching event, using colour contrast or employing an iPad or Braille note-taker) will be essential to their future well-being, education and employment. Barriers to learning were evident where tutors and support staff were unaware of the perceptual schema of the student and the implications for their engagement in the learning task (when using Power point presentations or whiteboards without verbalisation, for example, or when using green balls on a green surface). Where body language, eye contact or visual references were used, significant disjuncture took place in the interactions between tutors and the visually impaired students. In addition, the cultural 'taken-for-granted' knowledges and concepts of the sighted world can pose challenges to student learning, particularly for those

with a significant, congenital visual impairment. This finding supports the work of scholars such as Tobin (2008) and Bardin and Lewis (2008), who have suggested that it is the inadequacy or inaccessibility of information in visual forms that causes limitations in learning opportunities, acquisition of language and concepts, and social interaction.

My third research question was: How do individual visually impaired student's characteristics and learning journeys affect the experience of teaching, learning and support in further education settings? Analysis of the narratives of the students demonstrated how their personal and educational histories influenced their performances within the classrooms and social spaces of the colleges. These intersected with the individual dimensions of their visual impairment, and with their sense of self and identity. The findings thus expand on the work of Thomas (1999) and Reeve (2002) in exploring the intersection of the disabled self and society. This will be addressed in more depth in section 9.3, below. The study also expands upon the body of literature on the education of visually impaired people, such as that by Douglas et al. (2009), in addressing the sensorial and social factors of learning, and their relationship to pedagogy and support.

For example, it was evident that students' biographies and experiences at home and school influenced their educational decision-making processes, and affected their interactions and expectations in the college environments. The degree and recency of visual impairment, when combined with levels of psycho-emotional stability, intersected with each individual's sense of self, and their performances and choices in college. This contributes to understandings of identity and disability in the literature from authors such as Shakespeare and Corker (2002). In these further education settings, it was found that self-perception as 'disabled' appeared to be at least partially replaced by a 'career identity', related to the college course and peer group of the student. The importance of social acceptance by peers cannot be underestimated. Supporting the findings of scholars such as Schillmeier (2008), all of the students participating in the study stated that social acceptance was the primary motivating factor in all decisions and actions



both within, and outside the classroom. Peer support was chosen in preference to the support of adults wherever possible, despite the shortcomings of the approach. Disruption to learning as a result of enacting behaviour deemed acceptable to others within the peer group was taken for granted by students. Finally the 'functional needs' of the student, that is the elements of organisation and pedagogy required for them to learn effectively, are a significant characteristics to be considered, and play a large role in the successful (or otherwise) experience of learning in further educational settings. Functional needs, such as mobility and orientation around the college environment, appropriate training in information access and communication (written, verbal, and social), independent living skills, and the use of technology and equipment, can be met by an appropriate additional curriculum and suitably adapted pedagogy. However, responsibilities for the provision of this specialist additional curriculum were blurred in the mainstream colleges, with some falling under the remit of social services or other statutory or voluntary agencies, even where such skills (as in the case of Tom's catering) were essential to the curriculum.

## **9.2 Policy Recommendations**

This study has shown that the biographical experiences and specific characteristics and needs of each visually impaired student are highly significant in interactions with tutors and support staff, and in the production of successful learning experiences in further education colleges. In addition, the research suggests that understandings of the theoretical and national policy principles of inclusive education are re-interpreted in the mainstream context, with pervasive enactment of the special educational needs model of provision at a college and classroom level. There are therefore a number of policy recommendations that emerge as a result of this study.

Firstly, additional curriculum provision for visually impaired students is central to educational success. At present only some elements of the additional curriculum, such as access to information, are being addressed. This is at the expense of a more holistic approach to education. This undermines

learning and results in reduced social and educational inclusion. There is currently a lack of coherent, consistent provision for these needs. A more structured multi-disciplinary and nationwide approach is required. These issues are beginning to be addressed by imminent changes to national policy (DfE 2013; WAG 2010a; WG 2014a). However it will be interesting to observe how this translates on a practice level, given the 're-calibrations' of policy observed during this study.

Secondly, for pedagogy to be truly inclusive, all learning experiences must be accessible to visually impaired learners. Some elements of teaching and learning cannot be deemed 'inclusive' when facilitated through the use of a support worker or technology. Tutors in further education colleges need to have knowledge and understanding of the practices required to provide inclusive learning experiences for visually impaired students. They need to learn how to adapt the tasks of teaching, and provide adequate differentiation for the visually impaired learners in their classrooms. There is a need to for services to appreciate the complex interactions between visually impaired students' sense of self, their willingness to use appropriate adaptations and support in learning situations, and their capacity to assert their often highly specialised and unique needs to the educational services involved in supporting their learning. It is acknowledged that the training of tutors in strategies for specific students is challenging, due to the low incidence and high complexity of visually impaired people's needs. However my research has found that inclusive education imperatives are seen to have a lower priority than other teaching requirements such as Citizenship Education or the Curriculum Cymraig. This contradicts SENDA (2001) and the Equality Act (2010), and results in a continued emphasis on the Special Educational Needs model. This model is still apparent in the recently published draft Code of Practice for England (DfE 2013), and to a lesser extent in the Welsh consultation document 'Forward in Partnership for Children and Young People with Additional Needs' (Welsh Government 2012a). However in the Welsh document, while inclusion is cited as the primary ideology, the need for specialist input as a result of deficiencies in mainstream provision is acknowledged: 'Since more complex needs often

require specialist support provided on an out-of-county or out-of-country basis, the Welsh Government proposes to assess the potential for central provision in a small number of specialist centres across Wales, utilising funding from within the existing post-16 budget' (Welsh Government 2012a: 35)

The solution may lie in a two-fold strategy. Firstly, there is a need for awareness training and practical advice on pedagogical strategies for visually impaired students to be incorporated into Initial Teacher Training for students enrolled on Post-compulsory Education training. This could be supplemented by a coherent nationwide strategy of CPD training for tutors, managers and support staff. Secondly, for practitioners likely to be working with visually impaired students enrolling on further education courses, individual-specific advisory sessions could be the solution. These sessions could identify the visual levels and sensory schemas of the students, and address the learning tasks involved in the potential course, therefore improving the interactions identified in the conclusion of Chapter Eight (Figure 8.10). The training could incorporate the specific needs of the students, and depending on the individual characteristics of the student, might include tutor strategies for the precise verbal descriptions of activities and tasks, kinaesthetic pedagogic delivery, embodied learning, and practical and diagrammatic teaching and learning, in addition to addressing the more traditional concerns in adequate access to text.

Any agency involved in this training would need to have depth-knowledge of both visual impairment and pedagogy for visually impaired students in further education. The skills required to provide this level of specialised training and advice are already available on a national basis, from statutory and third sector organisations and specialist colleges. While the third sector has a great deal to offer in terms of awareness training, this thesis has found that one of the most significant factors in successful teaching and learning is the intersection between the individual student and the highly skilled tasks of teaching. Thus, a specialist pedagogical organisation, such as a specialist college, would be the most appropriate organisation to provide such detailed assessment and training. However the combination of the mainstreaming

agenda, and austerity measures, has severely impacted upon specialist colleges for visually impaired people. These are sites of highly specialised pedagogical and pastoral knowledges, which may be lost if current policies of mainstreaming and austerity by national government and local authority departments continue. To avoid the loss of such high levels of pedagogical specialism, colleges could be funded to develop an outreach service providing the levels of training and individualised assessment needed by mainstream colleges to provide inclusive pedagogy and organisational practices. Alternatively, the specialist teacher system, currently employed in schools, could be expanded to the further education sector. In this model, a Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired (QTVI) and/or Mobility Officer visits the institution and provides teaching in specific additional curriculum areas, such as Braille, or the use of mobility aids and orientation techniques. They also provide specific advice to curriculum teachers and support staff in relation to functional needs. This role could easily be expanded to incorporate the differentiation of specific teaching tasks. The short-coming of this model is the current curriculum focus, as currently the QTVI role is not holistic, as it does not address areas such as independent living skills and social development in the home environment (RNIB 2014).

In addition to being sites of specialised pedagogical knowledge, however, this study found that specialist colleges continue to play a significant role for some young people, despite their segregative label and 'dated' status. These findings in relation to the specific group of visually impaired learners in further education thus sustain Lindsay's review of the literature in 2007, which suggested that there is no overall evidence that *either* inclusive *or* specialist education is more effective for disabled people. Further, the study also supports Runswick-Cole's assertion that because inclusion has yet to be fully implemented, 'it is important to recognise the value of separate spaces while at the same time advocating for a cultural shift to promote inclusion in education' (Runswick-Cole 2011: 117). Thus, while society persists in enacting oppressive social practices, there will continue to be a number of young people who require the opportunity to recover from their difficult mainstream compulsory educational experiences, in an environment in which

their visual impairment is taken for granted, accepted and addressed. In this environment, visually impaired students are able to focus on their learning and development, and on forging an identity outside of the 'blind kid in the class' label. Some visually impaired young people also need the opportunity to learn the skills they require to adjust to a recent, sudden or significant sight loss. This in-depth training is currently unavailable in mainstream colleges in Wales, where there are blurred responsibilities at a local authority level, and a lack of specialist knowledge. The holistic provision of academic, pastoral and living skills is still essential for some students, as it enables the development of young adults who can go forward into higher education and employment with the independence to avoid a lifetime of dependency on state support.

### **9.3 Theoretical Considerations**

In terms of theory and methodology, this thesis adds to debates on the nature of disability, and to understandings of the embodied, sensorial self, both in the educational environment, and as the subject of research.

Furthering Thomas' (1999) suggestion that disability can be viewed as the intersection between the self and society, the findings explored in the empirical chapters of this thesis suggested that individual aspects of impairment and identity cannot be ignored in conceptualisations of disability. In addition, the educational and personal narratives of the students identified a range of inter-related factors which impact upon the experience of disability in the educational environment, supporting Shakespeare and Corker's perception of disability as only one of a number of 'axes of oppression' (2002: 7). However, in addition, the study has found that given the levels of 'visual hegemony' (Ede 2009: 62) in modern society, and the lack of understanding of the varieties in vision and perception, visually impaired students are at particular risk of social oppression and discrimination as a result of their unique 'alternative sensory schemas'. While early conceptualisations of disability focussed on physical barriers to inclusion in society (UPIAS 1976), a more complex understanding of disability and forms

of oppression is required for people with a sensory impairment. For visually impaired people in particular, disability is formulated in the intersection between the aspects of their sensory impairment and the social world. Theorists need to consider the dynamic and varied nature of vision and perception, in terms of levels of visual impairment, its recency, and stability, and the intersection of these with embodied perception, movement, language and social interaction.

Further, this study highlights the significance of the psycho-emotional aspects of disability, as discussed by scholars such as Reeve (2002), Thomas (1999) and Watermeyer and Swartz (2008). In this study disability was perceived by the student participants to constitute an 'evocative anxiety-provoking phenomenon' (French 1993: 605) which resulted in a constant awareness of others' judgements. Social acceptance was found to be of primary importance to the students, and had a direct impact upon psycho-emotional stability. Levels of emotional stability and positive self-concept were perceived by student and professional participants to be significant factors in interactions with others, and impacted directly upon the individual's ability to engage in teaching and learning activities. Of particular note was the extent to which a new identity can be forged through the process of education, when the 'disabled' label was replaced by a career or course identity, which removed the 'outsider label' and enabled group belonging.

In terms of pedagogy, the thesis supports Shilling's assertion that schools and other educational institutions are involved in bodily control, and that 'cultures have specific "techniques of the body"' (2003: 23) which may result in exclusionary practices for certain sectors of the student population, such as those with a visual impairment. Goffman (1963) argued that management of the body is central to the management of social encounters, roles and relationships. In the pedagogical moments encountered in this study, 'shared vocabularies of body idiom' (Goffman 1963: 35) were found to be missing, due to contextual and conceptual differences in perception, resulting in social disjuncture and lost learning opportunities.

In a 'call to arms' to ethnographers, Atkinson et al. (2008: 203) argued:

There is, in other words, an abiding need for the sensual exploration of social worlds...Visual and sensory cultures are themselves among the most important *forms* of culture and *modes* of social action.

This thesis seeks in part to redress the underdeveloped systematic analysis of sensory phenomena (Atkinson et al. 2008: 203) in ethnographic texts. Drawing on methodological texts on sensory ethnography by Stoller (1997), Classen (2005), Ingold (2000) and Pink (2009; 2011c; 2011a), the fieldwork privileged attention to the sensory cultures and modes of embodied action of the visually impaired students in the college contexts. In the specialist college in particular, alternative forms of social interaction and actions were apparent, which demonstrated the mobilisation of a range of sensory fields in the accomplishment of everyday, mundane tasks. For the researcher, such attention to the affordances of the senses requires appreciation of the range of perceptual schemas and their application in the social environment. As Ede states, 'It requires an open mind, as well as the courage and will to turn one's own body into a research tool. This step outside the outlined methodologies of western science is necessary if we really seek to understand the Other' (2009: 70). While sensory ethnography could be viewed as an obvious step for an investigation of the experiences of sensory impaired people, the methods employed have broader implications for the research community, and for pedagogical practices. As was evident in Chapter Eight, attention to the sensory affordances of the classroom yielded valuable data on the sensorial practices of teaching and learning. The research design enabled me to pay close attention to the perceptual elements of tasks and interactions, and to the relationships between sensory and embodied modalities, whether visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or kinaesthetic. Further, the research led to an appreciation of the synaesthesia of the senses, and an awareness of the short-comings of Western definitions of knowledge of the sensory, perceived world. The 'hegemony of the Eye' (Ede 2009: 62) in much social science research fails to represent the complexity of sensory codes, modalities and orders in social organisation. As Burkitt (1999), drawing on Merleau-Ponty (1962), suggested, researchers, and their participants, 'can never attain "objective" knowledge of the world that exists separately from our own subjectivity... all knowledge is embodied

and situated, created within that fundamental unity between subjects and objects which is the product of having an active body' (Burkitt 1999: 76).

## **9.4 Suggestions for Future Research**

In this section I consider the implications of this study for visually impaired students. The study was undertaken drawing on particular theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and methods. These specificities were discussed in Chapter Four, but there are four key areas worthy of note. Firstly the interpretivist epistemological framework designates attention to the participants' opinions and narratives. While these were triangulated with documentary data and secondary quantitative study findings, these cannot be seen to represent a complete picture of the landscape of further education in Wales. The study illuminates the 'multiple realities' of the sector, enabling a rich appreciation of the complex psychological, social and interpersonal worlds of each individual, from their own perspective (Geertz 1993:10).

Secondly, the theoretical perspective which forms the basis of this thesis has been central to the design, fieldwork and analysis of data generation. Thomas' (1999) social relational model of disability could be seen to be dated, with more recent works, such as social psychoanalytic disability studies from authors such as Marks (2002), and Goodley (2011), becoming prominent in the literature. However, Thomas' perspective sits with the educational literature by authors such as Ball (1990; 1997), in its exploration of the intersection between the 'micro' worlds of individual participants and the 'macro' world of the educational context and policy landscape (Ozga 1990; Ball 1997; Braun et al. 2011).

Thirdly, the specificities of sensory ethnography can also be noted. While an appreciation of sensory modes and orders does enrich understanding of embodied action and interaction in the social world, such a methodological approach used in isolation can fail to adequately address issues of power relations, social structure and organisation (Burkitt 1999: 77). Thus in this study sensory ethnography was supplemented through more traditional forms of research, such as interviews, documentary analysis and



investigation of secondary quantitative data, as was discussed in Chapter Four. Sensory ethnography thus became part of the 'researcher's toolkit' which enabled depth-understanding of emplaced, embodied action, an element of the 'bricolage' of research 'grounded on an epistemology of complexity' (Kincheloe 2005: 324).

Finally, the qualitative design and case study approach was selected as the particular lens through which to investigate the issue. In Chapter Four I discussed in depth the need for a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973: 10) of the life-worlds of visually impaired students. This necessitated the small-scale nature of the project, leading to many exclusions, and restrictions as to the generalisability of the findings. The intrinsic nature of the case selection enabled an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of visually impaired students in further education, to enable a 'better understanding of this particular case' (Stake 2005: 445), but obviously there are a large number of 'unheard voices'. Future research could address these voices, for example, those of people with no vision, or those with additional conditions such as a physical impairment. Expansion of the study to a different range of colleges could also develop the findings. In addition, further work could explore of the views of families and parents, and of those who had rejected post-compulsory education. However, as Donmoyer (2000) suggests, this study expands the range of interpretations available, providing a richer schema of understanding, and develops a series of inter-related analytical conceptualisations of the practices, performances and opinions of actors in the field of visually impaired further education.

The unexplored areas of research and the unanswered questions raised by the study suggest a rich field for further research. Firstly, a more quantitative approach to the field is required; to investigate the choices made by visually impaired students at transition at sixteen, and to provide an overall picture of the destinations at this age. This could incorporate college selection, course choices, attainment and eventual destinations of further education students, and could map out a more complete landscape of the field. Further work is also needed to provide a comparative study of students in the full range of options in addition to further education, including the school-based and

NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) routes at sixteen. Future study could also investigate the impact of the additional curriculum for visually impaired students, in terms of educational attainment, employment and well-being in later years. In the study, all of the participants attending mainstream colleges had chosen to refuse support worker help in the classroom. Therefore Due to the rejection of support worker intervention by two of the mainstream students in this study, very little depth-analysis of the affordances of the enactment of this role was possible. Future work could target those accepting support workers in the classroom, and compare such interventions with alternative models, such as the use of peer support, in terms of interactions in the classroom, attainment and independence.

The study raises further questions concerning the relationship between teacher training, pedagogy and visually impaired students in further education, in particular in relation to the sensory affordances of teaching and learning. These issues have relevance for all teaching and learning, not simply for those with a visual impairment. There is a pressing need for additional work on the sensory features of the classroom, and the intersection of these with the embodied, emplaced and temporal dimensions of pedagogy.

Finally this study has explored the relationship between the individual experience of visual impairment, biographical narratives, issues of identity, and social belonging. Further investigation of the intersection between aspects of the self, social acceptance and identity, and their impact on educational attainment and future independence is required. There is a need, in particular, to further explore how educational institutions can help to shape the sense of identity of visually impaired students, and what impact this may have upon future achievements and well-being.

## Final Word

This thesis demonstrates that inclusion is only true inclusion if *tutors* are able to provide 'true' learning opportunities for disabled students, for all aspects of the course being taught. The 'SEN support worker with technology' model of support does not facilitate full inclusion, and in many cases distorts or dilutes the learning opportunities, and the potential for future independent performance in education and employment. The presence of support workers can negatively affect the social integration of students with a disability. In this study, students preferred to study without such support in order to enhance their social status. It is the interaction between the detail of the teaching materials and task, the specific needs of the student, and the subject tutor's knowledge of the material *and* the needs of the student that influence whether learning opportunities are successful or unsuccessful (Figure 8.10). The Special Educational Needs (SEN) support model is successful only where the student has the confidence, determination and understanding of their own eye condition and needs to make their own adaptations, and to challenge and request adjustments.

Many courses in further education emphasise practical skills, and thus attention is required to the embodied and sensory nature of the learning experience. The SEN focus on 'access to print' is at the expense of consideration of diagrams, demonstrations, and physical and practical activity. During course selection, students have been steered away from STEM subjects and some of the more practical courses on health and safety and practicality grounds. This appears to be due to a lack of understanding of the affordances of the use of alternative sensory schema in the successful accomplishment of diagrammatic and practical tasks. This has long-term implications for students in future employment, and will particularly impact on the less academic students as they plan their potential learning and vocational pathways.

Detailed specialist knowledge of appropriate teaching techniques and organisational considerations exists, but is located in the main in a very small number of specialist colleges across the UK. Due to market competition in

the further education sector and the emphasis on inclusive education on a political level, this knowledge is not shared with the mainstream sector, as it is the specialist knowledge that draws students and funding. Specialist facilities are viewed by mainstream professionals as 'dated and segregative institutions' as opposed to specialist centres of excellence. In contrast to the views of mainstream providers, incidences of true inclusion were viewed in the specialist facility, where students receive tailored learning opportunities, and teaching was provided using appropriate formats and techniques. However, due to the residential nature of the specialist college, students must be willing and able to relocate for extended periods of time. Notwithstanding the ever-shrinking possibility of funding, enrolment involves dislocation from the local community and an existence within the 'bubble' of an adapted community, requiring re-adjustment to the 'sighted world' upon transition out. While policy initiatives suggest a commitment to the sharing of specialist knowledge with mainstream providers, the danger remains that with increasingly reduced funding, such specialist pedagogical knowledges and practices will be lost. In addition, the thesis has identified two competing ideologies; commitment to the provision of inclusive learning environments as part of a broader inclusive society, and commitment to the provision of appropriate teaching to facilitate future inclusion in society.

# Appendices

## Appendix One: Literature Review

One of the things meant by being 'soaked in the literature' is being able to locate the opponents and the friends of every available viewpoint.

Wright Mills 1959

The literature review enables the researcher to consider, understand and synthesise current and historical knowledge on a topic, and to ensure that any empirical work is both original and founded upon a critical evaluation of ideas, methodologies and philosophical perspectives in the subject area (Hart 1998). It is acknowledged that the literature review was informed by the aims and research questions of the study, the situated knowledge of the researcher, and the 'socially, culturally, historically, politically and geographically situated' organisation of knowledge (Davis and Florian 2004: 144).

Books were identified using key terms in the Cardiff University Voyager search engine, and in the national COPAC database. Online journal searches were conducted using the SCOPUS, ERIC, BEI and IBSS databases. The literature search was supplemented by the use of Proquest, Zetoc and Base online databases for theses, conference papers and other open access academic material. Figure 4.1 (overleaf) illustrates the literature search plan. In the following sections, two of the key categories of the search will be discussed, in order to demonstrate the process undertaken. The categories of 'inclusion and special educational needs', and 'visual impairment' have been selected as they were two areas which posed particular contrasting difficulties in the search process, in terms of definitional understandings of concepts and cross-disciplinary considerations.

As noted by Evans et al (2003), terms for inclusion, special educational needs and disability in education are not standardised across databases, and 'disabled students' are frequently discussed as an homogenous category. Therefore a selective list of possible key terms was developed (as outlined in table below). In addition it became evident that literature is starkly categorised across educational phase, and the majority of the literature identified covered the compulsory phase. Echoing the findings of Davis and

Florian's 2004 literature review, it was evident that there were disparities of emphasis in relation to groups of students: primary age appeared more frequently than any other sector. Research appeared to concentrate on those with learning disabilities (also described as people with 'cognitive impairments'), however the results of these studies tended to be generalised across all disabilities and age groups, as applicable to 'students with SEN'.

The initial journal search identified 22,336 articles related to 'inclusion' and 4,275 related to 'special education\* needs' or 'SEN'. To narrow the search to those relevant to the present study, those specifically relating to people with learning disabilities were eliminated from the search, as the presenting needs are considerably different to those of people with sensory impairments as the primary disability. In addition the search was restricted to studies in English published after 1999. This resulted in a list of 109 articles that met the criteria for inclusion. Abstracts were then read and articles categorised into those addressing theoretical perspectives and those reporting evidence of research studies. Selections of cited articles which illuminated these themes were then made, based on critical engagement with the abstracts.

Book searches in Voyager and Copac proved fruitful, yielding 263 items, however the majority of those identified were published in the 1990s, during the development of the Disability Discrimination Act. A large proportion of these were 'How to..' manuals for education and health professionals. Recent articles on visual impairment were limited, with only 341 articles identified within the last twenty years published across psychology and social sciences, many of which were not pertinent to the study. 241 articles were identified when visual impairment and education were combined as search terms; however the majority again addressed issues for people with learning disabilities, and were excluded from the search.

## Literature Search Plan with Keywords

<p><b><u>Inclusion/SEN</u></b></p> <p>SEN  Special education* needs  Additional learning needs  ALN  Disability and education  Disab*  Disab* students  Integration  Equality</p>		<p><b><u>Visual Impairment</u></b></p> <p>VI  Blind  Partially Sighted  Low vision  Sight loss  Sight impaired  Severely sight impaired  VIP  Vision Impairment  Visual impairment  Loss of vision  Vis* Impair*</p>
<p><b><u>Teaching and Learning/Students</u></b></p> <p>Student          Training  Pedagogy        Lecturer  Learning  Teaching  Learner  Tutor  Teacher</p>		<p><b><u>Further Education</u></b></p> <p>Post-compulsory education  Post-16 education  Colleges  Incorporated colleges  Vocational learning</p>
	<p><b><u>VI and Education</u></b></p> <p><b><u>VI and Further Education</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Disability and Further Education in Wales</u></b></p> <p><b><u>VI and Further Education in Wales</u></b></p>	

While the literature search for disability and inclusion generated a large number of articles and necessitated a refinement of search parameters, the material was clearly located within the social science and education disciplines. However the literature search for visual impairment presented alternative challenges. Material was identified across a broad spectrum of academic disciplines, illuminating the diverse ways in which a disability category can be classified and understood. As Thomas (2012) suggests, understandings of disability have changed dramatically over time. Visual impairment is understood by many to be located within the medical framework of impairment, and within the sub-discipline of the sociology of chronic illness and disability. Due to the array of understandings, a broader search included material from optometry, psychology, and medicine, in addition to social sciences and education texts. This was completed



reflexively, with an awareness of the disciplinary conventions and constructions which influenced each study's methodology and research design.

Sociological studies on visual impairment were extremely limited (only 35 results since 1999), although exploration of the sensory aspects of social life have expanded (Pink 2009; Ingold 2000). However it appeared that visual impairment had been under-researched as a sociological phenomenon in recent years.

## **Appendix Two: Students' Interview Schedule**

### **Introduce timeline:**

I have got here a very simple (chart/tactile) timeline, and wondered if we could mark down important events in your life, focussing on your education.

So you were born in? Year? Place?

### **Primary:**

What year did you go to primary? (Mark on chart)

And what sort of primary school did you attend?

Did you like primary? How did you get on with schoolwork?

Did you have any additional support?

### **Secondary:**

And how about your secondary school? When did you go there? (mark on chart).  
Was it large?

Did you enjoy secondary school?

How did you get on with the school work?

Did you need any additional support from specialist teachers, LSAs or anyone else?

### **What happened next? :**

What happened at the end of year 11? Did you decide to come to college straightaway?

What made you choose this course? Did you consider any alternatives?

Were there any considerations in terms of your vision when you are choosing the course?

Did anyone give you advice when you were choosing?

### **Other issues**

Looking to the timeline again, are there any other important events, either related or unrelated to your education that you think we should mark?

### **Vision**

Turning to your vision:

Can you describe your vision for me?

- Does it affect you on a day-to-day basis?

Do you know what the medical diagnosis is?

- How would a doctor describe your vision?

If you had to describe your vision to a stranger, what would you say?

Do you consider yourself to be visually impaired?

- Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

Do you have any other conditions in addition to your visual impairment?

## **Support**

In terms of support in college:

How is the college organised to ensure you can learn, with your level of vision?

How do you feel about the way the college is organised to support visually impaired students?

Do they make any adjustments to the way they teach you?

- Providing information
- Where you sit in class
- How they describe things for you, for example in practical classes

Do you need any additional equipment or support to access print or the computer?

- What about reading from the board?

How do you find getting about in the College?

- Have you ever had orientation and mobility training?
- Are any areas of the college more difficult to get about than any others?
- How do you get to and from college?
- What about outside the college?

Do you have any additional training or support, on top of the subject teaching for your course?

I'm interested the comparisons between mainstream and specialist educational settings. Could you give me a positive and a negative for each setting?

- What would be a positive and a negative for going to mainstream?
- And what would be a positive and a negative for going to specialist?

## **Friendships**

Turning to friends:

How did you find making friends in primary and secondary school?

Did you have any problems?

What did you like to do outside school?

What about coming to college, how did you find making friends?

What do you like to do outside college hours?

Is there anything that affects your friendships or leisure activities?

Do you keep in touch with friends from home?

## **Demographic**

Just some basic questions now, about your background which will help me to compare with other students:

What is your age?

Do you consider yourself to have a religion? What religion do you follow?

How would you describe your ethnic status?

Can you tell me a little about your family?

- Who do you live with at home? Do you have any brothers and sisters? Are you part of a large family?

What do your mum and dad (or other parental figure) do? Are they working? What do they do?

How do you think your family feel about your visual impairment?

What do they see you doing in the future?

## **The Future**

On the timeline I have marked three possible futures for you. What do you think are your possible futures? What's your most optimistic future? What would be your most pessimistic future?

## Appendix Three: Scratch notes and Fieldnotes

Scratch notes 5/3/13:

Names  
 Masculinity  
 'fitting in' work done to achieve this  
 Rats with tutors - binder + mutual respect - when applicant  
 - when military  
 The description with the topic - sport - interactions/landtimes  
 dawn times.  
~~Physical~~ embodiment of the 'sportsman' - attitudes - conversation - posture  
 - language (what ide modelled) movement  
 Interactions in the sporting environment  
 Crossing between access to teaching - discusses its  
 his problem - selection of  
 a single - talent  
 Stretches +  
 sicknesses  
 all sports injury  
 related  
 badge of pride  
 + 'fitting in' - fitting in - wins each time  
 willing to sacrifice access + uses  
 methadone + surprise of support to  
 catch up. teaching  
 explicit about  
 VI

5/3/13 - Observations - 'forces day' - use waiting (start time 9:15 - started  
 10:15 - more hanging + chatting with water). <sup>eat that you are</sup>  
 going to be sick  
 2 tutors in watching red hoodies + army trousers lay out the  
 assault course in the hall - types + planks of wood, cones. <sup>we're</sup>  
<sup>gonna</sup>  
<sup>work you</sup>  
<sup>so hard.</sup>  
 60+ students wait along the side  
 voices increasingly loud + noisy - fights break out again - ignored by  
 trainer + lecturer.  
 2 with injuries sent out.

forces day - spending the day  
 with forces students  
 completing activities done  
 by them

5 tutors - watching - red hoodies army tr.  
 while 2 yrs cohort sports science st.  
 Still planning session - 15 min in - chose kan man - team sheet  
 paper handed to 1 st. - instant leader - all st - turn to them.  
 1 st. in background - at edge of the group  
 purposely moves to middle of the group - then walks forward.  
 but when instructions given moves to front -  
 but disrupted - put in repairs  
 looks nervous standing down,  
 when task begins - getting across area using type 1 +  
 planks wood without touching floor - group of 1  
 moves to back of group.

Walking as a team - 10 st having to communicate to walk across a 'swamp'  
 middle of the group location - blends totally with head of st  
 when other group does task moves to  
 front

Fieldnotes: 5/3/13 AM Sport Steven

I was informed by the lead lecturer that today was a 'Forces Day'. A forces fitness training consultant group was coming in to work with the sports students, getting them to attempt a range of activities used in the training of forces personnel. There was more waiting; the start time of 9.15 stretching to 10.15 with students again hanging out in the cafe chatting. A lecturer came in to the café where everyone was waiting, and approached those students who were eating; 'if you eat all that you are going to be sick, do you know what you can be doing today? We're gonna work you so hard you are going to be sick'.

Four lecturers in matching red T-shirts and army trousers laid out the assault course in the barn, using large tractor tyres and planks of wood, and multicoloured cones on the green floor. 60 to 70 students waited along the side of the barn and as the waiting continued the voices became increasingly loud, and 'play' fights broke out again, all ignored by the lecturers who were present. Two students who were injured were sent out from the barn, but they sneaked back in and were soon employed to time the activities.

The students were arranged into groups by the lecturers running the session. Each group was given a team sheet and asked to come up with a name. Steven remained in the background of his group, at the edge towards the back, looking nervous. When his team were asked to approach the assault course he moved purposely towards the middle of the group and then weaved forwards until he was at the front. He appeared to try to be in second position to attempt the assault course, but was disrupted when the students were placed into pairs. The students had to work together using planks of wood and tyres to get across a large space 'the swamp', without touching the floor. Once these instructions were given Steven moved towards the back of the group, and successfully completed the task.

## Appendix Four: Advice for Colleges

### Email Brinton 7/6/13

As you know I recently completed my PhD fieldwork at the college, observing two students closely for a few days each, as they completed the various elements of their course. As requested I enclose some feedback on the teaching and support provided. The following is a list of suggestions which I feel may help them in their future learning, based on my observations and on my professional experience as a Rehabilitation Officer for Visually Impaired people, and as a tutor in further education.

#### Sport

- In practical terms, some attention to the use of colour contrast of equipment may be of benefit, for example the use of dark coloured balls in the sports hall, and light coloured balls in the barn.
- Steven appeared to be photophobic, and may benefit from awareness of the problems raised when working into bright sunlight. Also related to lighting, Steven's vision may drop significantly when lights are turned off (when viewing videos on a power point, for example), so he may not be able to take notes when viewing a video in low lighting.
- When accessing theoretical lessons, Steven may benefit from use of an iPad, or similar, with which he could access the screen for text and video (as Alex does).
- When using power point or whiteboard the text needs to be large and clear, with good colour contrast (black/navy on white, without background images) and supported by verbal repetition of the text

#### Drama

- Alex uses his iPad to great effect, but it brings with it its own restrictions, in particular when combined with acting and when making cuts to scripts. When acting tutors need to be aware that his ability to use gesture is restricted due to the positioning of the iPad when reading. It would benefit Alex to have advance notice of cuts to scripts, and possibly to have some support to learn lines in advance, or to make the cuts, to reduce the time taken in lessons making script alterations, especially as there are no page numbers on the iPad.

Obviously my time with both students was short, and these suggestions may not prove useful, or there may be elements that are not appropriate given other requirements of teaching, but I hope they may prove of some benefit for teachers and students.

Thank you once again for all your support during my fieldwork visit, and as requested I will provide more detailed summaries of findings as the analysis progresses.

## Email Weatherwell 7/6/13

As you know I recently completed my PhD fieldwork at the college, observing Tom closely for three days, as he completed the various elements of the course. As requested I enclose some feedback on the teaching and support provided for Tom. The following is a list of suggestions which I feel may help Tom in his future learning, based on my observations and on my professional experience as a Rehabilitation Officer for Visually Impaired people, and as a tutor in further education.

- Tom needs to learn and be encouraged to apply systematic search technique, which can be used for a range of tasks, including buttering, cleaning and hovering. Systematic search involves mentally gridding an area and working up and down systematically, then side to side, moving across one section at a time. Alternatively it involves small circles moving outwards to bigger circles.
- The iPad appeared very useful in some situations, such as the classroom, but problematic in small busy spaces such as the still, where Tom seemed to avoid using it. An iPhone or similar device with magnification, which fits in the pocket, may be more useful in these environments, and when reading chitties for orders.
- Laminated menus and paperwork can be particularly problematic for people with a visual impairment, especially when using devices with lights. A non-laminated version may be beneficial for Tom. Similarly some of the paperwork is in quite small print (for example fridge temperatures), and larger versions may help Tom if an iPhone is not available.
- Good lighting can significantly improve access for visually impaired people, and a spotlight (for example next to the till) may be useful.
- Tom is yet to make adjustments to the tasks he is completing for himself. He appears to avoid tasks he struggles with (such as making toast), passing these activities to his friends. He needs to be sensitively prompted to think about tasks in advance, and how he might complete them safely. For example the use of systematic search for buttering, and the introduction of checking for texture and size via touch (for example when checking cutting or chopping), rather than through the use of vision.
- Similarly in theoretical lessons, Tom does not naturally ask for, or make adjustments, such as using large print paperwork (even when available, he seemed to forget to use it on occasion), or standing close to the board or using the computer monitor when Power points are used. He needs to be prompted to remember to think about these issues, as at times he seemed unaware he was missing out on detailed aspects of teaching.

Obviously my time with Tom was short, and these suggestions may not prove useful, or there may be elements that are not appropriate given other requirements of teaching, but I hope they may prove of some benefit as teachers plan Tom's learning experience next year.

Thank you once again for your support during my fieldwork visit, and as requested I will provide more detailed summaries of findings as the analysis progresses.



## Appendix Five: Coding Scheme

Individual Factors and Experiences	additional disabilities or illnesses		
	age		
	attitude	confidence	
		determination	
		personality	
	ethnicity and national identity experiences		
		acceptance by peers	being different
			importance of friendships and social activities
			VI with mainstream peers
			VI with other VI
		bad experiences	bullying
			isolation
			'monkeys in a zoo' being observed
			patronising
			public perceptions hate crime and benefit fraud
		dependence on others	
			friends as helpers
		the learning journey	
		transitions and decision making	Aspirations and attitudes of parents and family
			careers advice and employability
			from schools
			'out into the big bad world' after college
			returning to education after sight loss
	gender	Image and identity	
		Macho culture	
		Segregation between genders	
	religion		
	skills	concentration	
		memory	
		organisational skills	
		use of access equipment	
	Social class		
	Visual Impairment		
		advantages of visual impairment	
		eye conditions	congenital or aquired
			describing vision- medical or self-description
			level of vision blind or partially sighted
			stable improving or deteriorating
		functional needs of VI	

			access to information
			accessible environment
			concept development
			counselling
			daily living skills
			orientation and mobility training
			significance of the additional curriculum
			social skills
			technology and equipment
			transport
		interaction with education	extra work done by students with VI
			interaction course choice and vision
			making your own adjustments
			professionals need to ask
		'its not the disability, it's her' identity and disability	
		psycho-emotional responses	disability denial
			self-esteem
			transition to non-visual
		terminology disability and VI	
		visual and non-visual culture	alternative sensory schema
			cultural transmission of embodied norms - visual dominance
			eye contact and social interaction
			mobilities - visual and non-visual affordances
			VI culture and community
Institutional Factors and Organisation	Attitudes to VI	Aspirations of teachers	
		Surprisingly high achieving	
		sympathy and its impact	
		VI as 'impossible strain'	
	Courses	adaptations to course requirements	
		course options for VI	
		health and safety	
		hierarchy of courses	
		interaction with access equipment and technology	
		leaving courses after bad experiences	
		qualifications and vocation	
		topics	
	Funding		
	Inspection		

	Low incidence of VI		
	Mainstream vs specialist	additional curriculum	
		impact on independence	
		institutionalisation	
		leaving or staying at home	
		specialist as inclusive and mainstream as excluding	
		teaching methods	
		the 'bubble' of specialist	
		use of support	
	Management and organisational knowledge of VI and SEN	Understandings of inclusion	Understandings of Visual Impairment culture
		a 'two way street'	
		enactment of policy	
		organisation and planning of services	
		policy government and suspicion	
		training in disability and VI	
		understanding of needs of VI	
	Multi-disciplinary working		
	Pedagogy	accessible environment	
		adaptations to teaching methods	asking responses multiple students
			group work
			layered learning
			movement while teaching
			practical hands-on teaching physical and practical tasks
			precise elaborate explanations
			seating position placement in class
			the senses used in teaching
		additional time	
		assessment of needs	
		independent learning in FE	
		lecturers knowledge and training in VI	
		provision of information	access technology
			obsession access to print
			preferred format enhanced or alternative modalities
			use of visual tools
		relationships students and tutors	attendance rebellion and resistance
			being watched - observation and overview by staff

			formal and informal relations - power and authority
			perceptions of attention
			waiting
			'we are VI too' VI staff members
	Recording systems and statistics		
	Statutory duties for SEN		
	Support workers	day to day impact on students and peers	
		he's so good, he doesn't use support'	
		organisation training and planning	
		perceptions of learning needs	
		what is support..support provisions	

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