

Thesis  
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**SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES  
IN SCOTLAND AND GREECE:  
PERCEPTIONS AND PROVISION**

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Stirling

Department of Education

November 1997

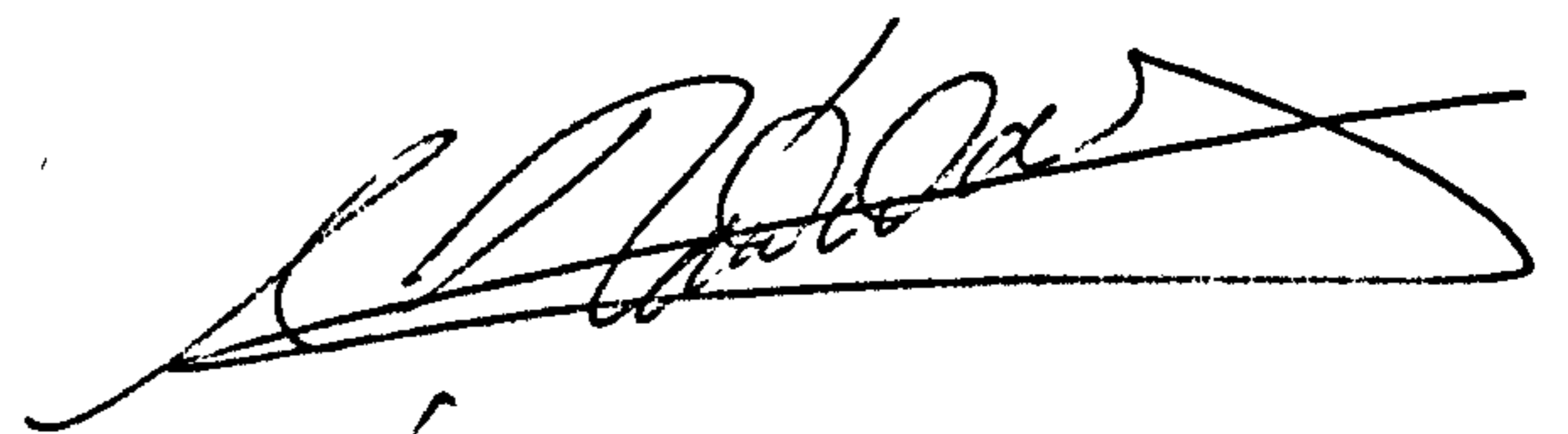
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Στην σύζυγό μου, Ευτυχία.

(To my wife, Eftichia.)

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that no portion of this thesis has been submitted for application for another degree in this or any other University. Small parts of this thesis, however, have been disseminated by myself in international conferences.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nikolaos Lappas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Nikolaos Lappas**

**November 1997**

## **Abstract**

In this thesis I set out to explore the area of specific learning difficulties, an area of conflicting theories, understandings, policies and provision. The purpose of this comparative research in such a heavily debated area was to illuminate the commonalities and differences which can be observed across countries. Comparative research in a policy related area has a long tradition. However, Greece and Scotland provided two different cultural and educational backgrounds which made the comparisons particularly interesting.

The nature of, as well as the provision for, specific learning difficulties is investigated in this research through the eyes of those involved. The perceptions of policy agents, head teachers, learning support teachers, mainstream teachers, parents and pupils, as well as the underlying constructs evident in policy documentation and literature in both countries, provided the data on which this thesis was based.

This thesis seeks to compare current policies and provision in Scotland and Greece, to investigate the discrepancies between policy and provision, to highlight the differences in perceptions about the nature of specific learning difficulties among the different groups within and between the countries, and to identify factors which might have influenced these perceptions and the current provision. In addition, as both countries are members of the European Union, the impact that the EU had in forming the current policies or provision is also examined.

The case-study schools were selected by policy agents in Scotland and from a list provided by the Ministry of Education in Greece. Case-study pupils were selected by the learning support teachers of the schools selected, or the head teachers using the learning

support teachers files. The aim was that no preconceptions held by the researcher about the nature of specific learning difficulties influenced the selection of the case-study schools and/or pupils, consistent with the ethnographic principles of investigation.

The data was gathered through semi-structured interview schedules which, although they maintained a structure, allowed the respondents to play the leading role. The interviews were supported by observation of the case-study pupils, from which examples were drawn to use as exemplification during the interviews. Relevant policy documents and literature, not only those explicitly about specific learning difficulties but also those rather more generally about special educational needs were also studied and compared with the constructs held by professionals and consumers.

The findings of this study indicated that culture, societal and educational context had influenced the perceptions of, and the provision for, specific learning difficulties. This was highlighted by the fact that the differences among the various groups within the same country were substantially less distinctive than those between Scotland and Greece. These differences highlighted the 'inclusive' Scottish society, supporting the notion of 'rights' of individuals, whilst in Greece the attitudes were focused on 'exclusion' and the 'protective' role of the family. The educational systems also played a significant role; the Greek system is heavily hierarchical, with a prescriptive curriculum based on knowledge and delivered by common-to-all books which focus on the 'average' child. In contrast, the Scottish system has been characterised as task-oriented and able to differentiate according to children's needs. In addition, the Scottish curriculum is designed for all pupils, and includes guidelines for 'support for learning' targeted at those with special educational needs.

The distinctiveness of the Greek and the Scottish societies and educational systems was reflected in the different understandings of special educational needs. In Scotland, they were seen as a continuum of needs including specific learning difficulties. In relation to specific learning difficulties the location of problems was perceived to be to a large extent within the learning environment and, in conjunction with the dominance of the 'rights' discourse, responsibilities were placed explicitly on mainstream and head teachers as well as learning support. The latter's role was perceived as co-operative teaching and consultancy.

In Greece, concerns were raised about the system itself and its limitations. Characteristics of this system were the lack of clear responsibility on the part of head teachers, and the lack of co-operation between learning support teachers (regarded as responsible for specific learning difficulties) and mainstream teachers. The construct of special educational needs as set of categories of impairment, the distinctive special and general education systems, the provision for specific learning difficulties in 'special classrooms' and the locus of the problem perceived to be within the child, all reflected the dominant position of the 'medical and charity' discourses in the society.

In conclusion, although the aim of the education systems has been stated as being 'inclusive' education in both Greece and Scotland, I argue that the two countries are at different points, closer or further apart, from their goal. However, the complexity of the various factors involved in the educational development of the two countries presented in this thesis makes a linear comparison a simplistic one, and hence unsuitable. Nevertheless, as both Greece and Scotland reiterate their objective towards "one school for all", a goal set also by the EU, the latter's impact in Greece is stronger. EU acts

through its role as 'expert' and co-ordinator of exchanges and by funding projects to support inclusive education.

This comparative research has indicated how studies of this kind can raise the awareness of the impact of characteristics of national societies on an area of education which has common rhetoric ('inclusion') across countries but where practice and provision can look very different 'on the ground'.

## **Acknowledgements**

First, I am grateful to my supervisor Professor Sally Brown for her continuous support and encouragement, especially in the difficult final stages of this thesis. I also wish to express my thanks to Professor Sheila Riddell, who gave me her guidance in the initial parts of this work.

Secondly, I express my appreciation to the 'Alexandros S. Onassis' Public Benefit Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Athens College Alumni Association for their financial support for almost the entire duration of my studies.

Thirdly, I have to express my gratitude to all those involved in this study, pupils, mainstream teachers, learning support teachers, head teachers, parents and policy agents in Scotland, Greece and the European Community, who not only gave their time but also trusted me with their ideas and thoughts.

Forthly, I am grateful to all my family for their support: my parents who supported me not only financially but emotionally; my parents in-law for their contribution and, last but not least, my wife and sons who were present whenever I needed their strength and liveliness to move forward.



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# Chapter 1

## Research Rationale, Methods and Research Aims

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I investigate various areas relevant to this research, exploring the significance of my research to the wider community as well as my personal motives for the particular project. Following that the research aims and questions are presented and the structure of the thesis is outlined.

### *Areas of Interest*

#### **Disability & Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

The area of special educational needs because of its complexity is one that embraces a wide range of disciplines, various approaches, different definitions and contradictory constructs. Doctors, psychologists, social workers, teachers, policy agents, parents, pupils, supervising assistants and nursery nurses may construe the idea of special educational needs in different ways. If one considers the different fields that the above professions or identities represent, then its composite nature is apparent.

The term 'special educational needs', to be discussed further in the section about the policy, was spread in the UK by the Warnock Report (1978) to replace the categories of handicap which characterised the earlier education acts. This change was supported by the introduction of a concept of a continuum of needs which ranged, for example, from profound learning difficulties to specific reading difficulties. However, the distinctive characteristic of the continuum was that it changed the emphasis in special education as a

whole, away from treating or remedying disabilities to providing for educational needs. This shift was encouraged by the widely expressed opinion during the 1960s that education should be for all, as

the idea of education as any planned and systematic intervention to facilitate learning gained ground. (Fish, 1989, p. 27)

As a result of the legislation of the 1970s the concept of ineducability lost its legal force. This started a chain reaction which brought forward, with the support of the comprehensive education which was being established at the same time, the desire to educate all pupils within mainstream education.

The emphasis was subsequently put on 'integration' which, as will be discussed further in the chapter about the provision, could be locational, social or functional. More recently, the concept of integration has been replaced in the literature with that of inclusion, indicating a progression towards more genuinely inclusive ideas.

In a parallel 'progression' (though over a longer period) the disciplines involved in dealing with what have been called the 'abnormal', 'feeble-minded', 'imbeciles', 'retarded', 'handicapped', 'disabled' or with 'special educational needs' have varied from the exorcist or the priest, to the doctor, psychologist and more recently the remedial teacher, learning support teacher and finally the mainstream teacher. In some cases, the involvement of social workers, or other professionals has also been apparent. More recently parents have also raised a strong voice. This is indicative of changing ideas and even power struggles between different fields of expertise for domination in an area where there are no clearly defined borders.

Over the recent decades, the changes have been dominated by the specialisms of doctors, psychologists and educationists, representing three different approaches to SEN that can be identified by the different discourses used. Gulliford (1985) argued that the change in

the language from the use of the term 'disability' to describe this area to the term of 'special educational needs'

may be seen as a significant shift from medical model focusing on deficiencies and definable conditions to an educational conception recognising the complex variety of individual, environmental and school factors giving rise to pupils' educational and personal needs. (p. 31)

Furthermore, Fulcher (1989) suggested the existence of medical, charity and rights discourses about disability and SEN; these discourses will be examined further in the chapter about the nature of specific learning difficulties.

Linked with the different discourses, there are the different views of disability. Oliver (1988) has argued that disability can be seen as an individual problem, as socially constructed or as socially created. These contradicting views indicate the heterogeneous approaches to disability and SEN, and the area remains interesting for research, because

disability is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon but this complexity derives, primarily, not from the intricacies of physical lesions but from the social and political use to which the construct of disability is put, independent of the presence, or intricacies, of an impairment. (Fulcher, 1989, p. 25)

Of particular interest in this thesis is the question of how two different cultures, the Greek and the Scottish, with two different educational systems construe areas like disability and SEN.

### **Specific Learning Difficulties**

The locus of interest of this dissertation is the area of specific learning difficulties. This particular term is rather modern, but similar terms have been observed in the English literature describing similar difficulties in the past. The history of the field goes back more than one hundred years. Among the terms used have been 'word blindness' in 1877, 'congenital word blindness' in 1895 and 'maturational lag' in 1896. Pringle-Morgan



and Kerr are now acknowledged as the first to use the term 'developmental dyslexia' in 1896 (see Pumfrey and Reason, 1991, p. 14). In the first three terms the medical involvement and orientation is more obvious than the fourth term which has survived until now.

The term 'specific learning difficulties' was introduced during the period when the field of special educational needs was removed from medical control to become an integral part of education. This was stressed by the British Medical Association (BMA, 1980) encouraging its members to consider assessment procedures as the rightful domain of educationists and psychologists.

However the debates regarding specific learning difficulties are not new. Reid (1972) highlighted the difficulties in defining specific learning difficulties, as well as the two major developed constructs, which still today dominate the literature: the medical and the social. Nevertheless, Reid argued that both of the models had limitations which could only be addressed with further research of an interdisciplinary nature. The vested interests in a narrowly defined professionalism, however, has ensured that this research has not yet been carried out. The difficulties in defining specific learning difficulties, in dealing with aetiology in any manner other than 'probabilistic', in the confusing 'variety of criteria' (Reid, 1972, p. 139) used in the identification, and finally in the fact that no specific symptoms could lead with certainty to the characterisation of a child as having specific learning difficulties (other than 'the clustering -the coincidence of several signs together', p. 136) has ensured that the area of specific learning difficulties has remained a divided and confused area, not only for academics, but for professionals as well.

This will be exemplified further as the thesis progresses, and it will become clear that the constructs of specific learning difficulties held by, for example, learning support teachers

are less than clear. Characteristic was that in Greece two of the ten cases identified as having 'specific learning difficulties' had what might better be classified as moderate or even severe learning difficulties. In the ethnographic tradition, researchers do not try to identify a consensus among the different understandings of the different groups (i.e., learning support teachers, mainstream teachers, head teachers, parents, policy agents and pupils) but rather to present their distinctive views. The reader should have in mind that the purpose of this research was to illuminate the perceptions of the variety of people involved in the provision for specific learning difficulties.

What Reid (1972) has highlighted is the fact that the different models in construing specific learning difficulties may be confusing, but are nevertheless useful in different circumstances. In this thesis the two prevailing models (i.e., the medical/psychological and the social/educational) should be seen within Reid's admonition that the models should be understood only as constructs of specific learning difficulties which are useful in the ad hoc understandings and circumstances of the people involved, and not as generalised conceptual models.

The Warnock Report saw children with specific learning difficulties as being along the continuum of special needs. Specific learning difficulties has been used as an umbrella term to incorporate difficulties previously defined with terms like reading and writing disorders, dyscalculia, dyslexia. However, Riddell et al. (1992) argued that there are three conflicting explanatory approaches to specific learning difficulties:

the psychological approach (which emphasises learning processes and products) the psycho-educational approach (which focuses on pedagogy) and the psycho-medical approach, which focuses on the treatment of disorder or disease (p. 8).

These approaches will be discussed further in the chapter 9 about the provision.

The use of the term dyslexia (a term with medical connotations of an impairment) interchangeably with specific learning difficulties has enhanced the confusion about the latter term, and hence its interest as a focus for research, especially when policy documents make references to both terms in conflicting ways.

It can be argued that specific learning difficulties is not a normative term as Tomlinson (1986) would define categories like blindness, deafness or epilepsy. The conflicting explanatory approaches, the different definitions (see Riddell et al., 1992) used in the field by different professionals and the lack of established criteria or clear causation of specific learning difficulties, indicate the need for more research in this area. There is no consensus of what specific learning difficulties are, the term has now become a polysemous one, where the different groups of people, policy agents, professionals and parents, all present their own understandings and their own recommendations for provision. This heterogeneity is one of the features which makes this research interesting.

### **Policy Research**

It has been argued that the education system is a reflection of the society in which it operates. And the society is strongly influenced by the political ideology of the different social actors. The dominant group of those actors is in a position to influence and, to a certain degree, establish the policies about education, and so the framework of the discussions and the debates, the prioritising and setting of the agenda and the imposing of values. Ball (1990) argued that education policy in particular, is not only

- reflecting the interests of one social class (commonly the industrial middle class), but (can be understood) as responding to a complex and heterogeneous configuration of elements (including ideologies that are residual or emergent, as well as currently dominant). (Ball, 1990, p. 3)

The analysis of these elements, the assumptions behind the policies, as well the understanding of the contradictions and the values that they carry, are important prerequisites in trying to explain education policy. And Barton (1988) argued that

critical analysis of existing policy and practice is an essential pre-condition for change. (Barton, 1988, p. 7)

It is important, therefore, to analyse the extant policies in order to understand their role in current practices, as well as to offer recommendations for amendments in cases where there is a belief that there has been injustice. In the case of policy research, John (1994) argued that although the academic research will find difficulties in making recommendations for future policy:

They should attempt to educate the policy maker. Consciousness raising is clearly an important responsibility for qualitative studies. (John, 1994, p. 10)

Although Epstein (1987) has emphasised that 'research findings rarely speak directly to policy' (p. 23), policy makers often seek research findings and this has been the reason that they commission research. One can argue that policy-makers use research to legitimise their policies or to initiate a debate which they think that might lead to petition for change (see Mavrogiorgos, 1987). Furthermore, they often seek for 'solutions' away from their own country. They want descriptive accounts of what happens in other countries, countries which in their view share a common problem. This is one reason why comparative research was initiated more than a century ago, and still has many advocates.

In addition, policy and research have in common an

element that links the two, the production of descriptive data. Policy-making and theory-building both rest on description (Shipman, 1985, p. 276).

However, the impact that social and educational research have on policy development is not direct and clear, as policy development and policy implementation is not a process 'without ambiguity' (Woods, 1988, p. 273). Lipsky's 'street-level bureaucracy' (Hudson, 1989, p. 43), described the public workers who interact directly with the public and who have discretion in the execution of their duties, carries with it the implication that policy making is neither logical nor linear. Policy makers and policy agents do not share clear ideas or objectives, and thus they do not interpret similarly the same research findings. Moreover, the way they legislate allows 'breathing space' to those who are responsible for the implementation of the policies. Those who deal with the latter, administrators and professionals, do not share the same views as the policy makers, nor among themselves. Moreover, the perceptions of those groups may be distinctively different from those of academics. And this is the reason why policy makers often may be unhappy about the results of the commissioned research, while researchers are dissatisfied by the ways policy makers use their findings or interpret their results.

For the policy researchers the most interesting element is the way that

policies are remade as they are implemented ... In education service, administrators, inspectors, advisors and teachers interpret, amend, supplement and excise the policies. (Woods, 1988, p. 274)

As Hammersley and Atkinson (1992) argue 'some powerful groups are able to impose their 'definitions of reality' on others' (p. 12).

Finally, Janet Finch (1984) provides four different reasons why research should be interested in policy:

The first is the somewhat cynical reason that this is where the money is. ... Second, ... a policy orientation brings positive benefits in the development of the knowledge through research and the disciplines within which it is rooted. ... The third ... is essentially a moral one, namely that social scientist has an obligation to use her or his skills, usually acquired at public expense, to contribute to public debate... The final reason ... is that it is

actually impossible to avoid it. Social scientists are de facto part of the social world... (pp. 2-3)

### **Comparative Research**

The research reported here was prompted also by two main ideas. First, in 1997, with the completion of unification of the European Union (EU), education became an area where the EU had legislative power. Furthermore, the European Union has shown a great deal of concern for people with special needs, committing itself in the social charter to equal rights for all disabled people. Increasing knowledge of member states' policy and practice in education, including special needs provision, can be perceived, therefore, as extremely important. Secondly, in the EU there was a consensus that the educational systems were in transitional stages, with the globalisation of the markets, the developments in new technologies and the introduction of market forces in education. The understanding of the views of teachers, parents and children, as 'customers' or stakeholders of the policies, had an important part to play in determining the direction of policy. It was therefore important to know more about their experience of particular educational policies.

As it will be elaborated further later, one distinctive element of this particular research in the area of specific learning difficulties is its comparative character. Comparative research has often, and traditionally, been used in policy research as means of investigating how other nations have tackled a problem perceived as common. This was the reason why Holmes (1981) noted that many of the issues of comparative investigation have been suggested by administrators. One must also remember, that Victor Cousin, one of the fathers of comparative education, had the aim to reshape schooling in France in the 19th century.

Comparative research which undertakes in-depth studies, using qualitative methods, can be seen as able to describe 'the whole cultural pattern', and thus to help to develop cross-cultural understanding in education. Hurst (1987) offered three different but complementary means of comparing educational cultures:

1. We may take a particular type of problem occurring across cultures to determine how various proposed solutions have been generated and have fared.
2. We may take a particular type of educational practice occurring across cultures to determine the various problems to which it has been seen as a possible solution and with what success.
3. We may take a particular educational culture and study its evolution as the sum of the problems, ideas, success and failures and consequent adaptations, internal and imported, that constitute its dynamics, and compare it with others. (p. 15)

In addition, Holmes (1981) has suggested, as an alternative mode to the positivist approach, 'the analysis and comparison of the ways in which policies are formulated, adopted and implemented' (Holmes, 1981, p. 15).

This project matches quite closely the kinds of research aims and questions implied by Holmes and reflects the first of the methodological approaches of Hurst. However, the other two approaches of Hurst also have relevance for this study, as it is not only 'the problem' which is under investigation, but also 'the practice' and the factors which influence both the practice and perceptions of the problem.

Moreover, John (1994) argued that such problems were characterised by complexity, involving cultural, social, economical and political factors, necessitating multivariate analysis. He argued in favour of an 'enlightenment model' of research rather than the traditional 'problem solving', although this

does not directly feed into an influence on policy but forward conceptions which challenge attitudes and raise awareness (John, 1994, p. 9).

### ***Personal Motives***

As Hammersley noted 'even personal experience may provide motive and opportunity for research' (Hammersley, 1984, p. 28), and certainly this has been one of the factors which prompted this research project. Throughout my schooling career, and to an extent throughout my life, I had been facing difficulties with language. Especially during my primary school years, I had to overcome, within a very competitive schooling environment, my difficulties in spelling and reading. I remember myself struggling to write an essay, and when the correction time was coming the comments of the teacher might have been lengthier than the essay itself, not to mention the numerous spelling mistakes that took me pages to do. Furthermore, the lack of sequential memory raised difficulties with calculations and tables, compounding with the difficulties in any effort to memorise the alphabet, rhymes or even to remember 'the lesson' I had for homework. In the secondary school there was an evident discrepancy between the language subjects and the rest, which was highlighted in the Panhellenic exams (equivalent of the Highers in Scotland) where in the three subjects (sociology, mathematics and history) I had an average of 97.5% and in the modern Greek language I managed only a 67.5%. These personal experiences are still strongly present in my mind.

When I had to decide about my career prospects I decided to become a primary teacher with the major intention of helping pupils who might face difficulties similar to mine. In addition, during my undergraduate studies I became further involved in the area of SEN showing interest in all the relevant modules, working in summer camps for autistic children, and working throughout my studies with an adolescent with Down syndrome. Moreover, I participated in research relevant to this area and assisted in the development



of a diagnostic test for specific learning difficulties. This interest continued during my postgraduate studies, with its conclusion in this Ph.D. thesis.

The reason for doing comparative research is that I believe strongly in the collaboration and communication among the different nations and cultures, something that was built up during my extensive travelling. Comparative research can illuminate factors which are unique in every nation and culture, or bring to surface common characteristics, which can assist in the thorough exploration of solutions to issues of common interest. In this respect, the European Union and the prospects of its further involvement in education influenced the decisions about my work. The adoption of well elaborated and debated solutions to common problems perceived from different view points and influenced by different cultures was an appealing idea. However, I believe that these solutions should not be expected to offer a panacea, but rather be seen as an awareness raising exercise which can help in the reflection on, and understanding of, the nation's attitudes and practices.

My involvement with policy research depended not only on the availability of funding for that type of work, but also on the feeling I had that, especially in the very centralised Greek system, I could have a greater impact if I could influence, or 'educate', the policy makers. This would bring me as close as I could ever be to engaging in influential advocacy on behalf of pupils with specific learning difficulties. John (1994) quoting Tizard, suggested, however, that the researchers are usually 'poor advocates' as they are aware of the limited influence that their research can have on policy and this has negative effects on the effectiveness of their advocacy.

These motives, however, raise a specific difficulty. One could argue that the motivation arising from these particular experiences and holding these views, will influence my 'objectivity'; this will be explored further in the section on the methodology.

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

Having outlined the areas of interest and the personal motives which underpinned this particular piece of research, its aims and questions are presented below. The research aims were:

- to describe and compare the current policies for children with specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece;
- to describe and compare the current provision for these children in both countries;
- to compare and to investigate the discrepancies of policy and provision within each country;
- to explore the perceptions of the nature of specific learning difficulties among the people involved (policy agents, teachers and other professionals, parents, and pupils);
- to identify factors influencing these perceptions as well as policies and provision;
- to explore the impact of the EU in the development of policy in both countries.

Analysis of documentation and other policy statements, were used to tackle the first research aim. The second and third aims, built on my experience during my Masters' thesis (Lappas, 1993), when I had the opportunity to see the diversification of provision in

Scotland and to understand the circumstances which led to a specific type of provision. From this I proceeded to see to what extent what is stated as policy was provided in practice and to explore the complex reasons, in each country, that led to that situation.

As policy is influenced by social actors, the perceptions of those who are involved are of great significance. People understand the world through their own minds and concepts, and to understand how people interact, the nature of their priorities, and the factors which influence their perceptions, it is necessary to explore how they make sense of the world. It is in this way that the fourth and fifth aims were addressed.

Finally, as the European Union expands, and includes within its aims (Maastricht Treaty) the need to 'contribute to the development of quality education', it is evident that its involvement in that area of human activity will increase. The effects, and the degree of this influence, was explored. It is not clear yet whether the influence will be the same for all the EU countries, and this research explored this issue in pursuing its final aim.

To tackle the above research aims the research addressed the following **research questions**. These are presented under each corresponding aim:

- *to describe and compare the current policies for children with specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece;*
  - What are the policies governing the provision of specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece?
  - What discourses are used in these policy documents?
  - What is the administrative framework of the provision?
  - What comparisons can be made between the policies?
- *to describe and compare the current provision for these children in both countries;*

- How are children with specific learning difficulties provided for in the state and private education environment?
- How do families care for their children with specific learning difficulties?
- What comparisons can be drawn on provision?
- *to compare and to investigate the discrepancies of policy and provision within each country;*
  - How are policies implemented in each country?
  - Can policies be clearly identified in the provision?
- *to explore the perceptions regarding specific learning difficulties among the people involved (policy agents, teachers and other professionals, parents, and pupils);*
  - How are specific learning difficulties construed?
  - How is the policy for specific learning difficulties perceived by the people involved?
  - How is the provision for specific learning difficulties perceived by the people involved?
  - What are the suggestions they make for a future policy and/or provision?
- *to identify factors influencing these perceptions as well policies and provision;*
  - What factors influence the policies?
  - What factors influence the provision?
  - What factors influence the implementation?
  - What factors influence the perceptions?
- *to explore the impact of the EU in the development of policy in both countries.*
  - What are the policies of EU for specific learning difficulties?

- How do policy agents in the two countries and the EU perceive the EU role in formulating policy?

### *The Structure of this Dissertation*

Chapter 1 has provided the rationale of the research and the research aims and questions.

This chapter has attempted to explain why this research is interesting to the researcher as well as to the wider community, and to identify the specific questions raised within the area of interest.

Chapter 2 will explore the methodological issues regarding this research project, looking at relevant approaches and methods, and establishing the specific stance adopted by this study.

Chapter 3 gives a brief account of the steps taken during the conduct of this research, from procedures for obtaining access to schools and individuals, to an outline of the interview schedules.

Chapter 4 investigates the political, cultural and educational contexts in the two countries, Scotland and Greece, emphasising the major attributes of the framework in which the research took place. It has to be noted, however, that only those distinctive cultural, political and educational elements of the compared contexts which are seen as relevant to this study have been elaborated; a full account of the contrasts of these two countries would exceed the scope of this dissertation.

Chapter 5 investigates the national, regional, EU and school policy framework regarding education, special educational needs and specific learning difficulties; however, it does not go into details about the provision or the nature of the difficulties since these are considered later. This chapter also elaborates on the perceptions which the respondents

involved in this study, with the exception of the pupils, had of the policy framework and the general policy principles governing special educational needs and specific learning difficulties.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on the nature of specific learning difficulties as perceived in Scotland, in Greece and in the EU. Perceptions reflected in the policy documentation, present in the literature and expressed by policy agents is the focus of the first of these chapters; the education providers' perceptions, i.e. mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers, are reported in chapter 7, and in chapter 8 the focus is on the consumers, i.e., parents and pupils.

Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 follow a similar structure to that of Chapters 6,7 and 8, but its focus is the provision for children with specific learning difficulties. Learning support teachers have taken a prominent view and so a whole chapter has been devoted to them; they were the key-providers for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Perceptions of the principles, organisation, curriculum, material and methods used, as well as strengths and weaknesses and the construed 'ideal' provision by all the interest parties is investigated in these chapters.

Finally, chapter 13 brings together the issues elaborated in the previous chapters, reviewing the findings and drawing the final conclusions of this study. The explanatory framework of the differences observed across Greece and Scotland will be highlighted.

## Chapter 2

### Explorations On Methodology

#### *Introduction*

This chapter aims to explore the various methodological implications relevant to this research, the assumptions behind each methodological turn, and the capabilities of the different, and indeed sometimes conflicting, philosophical schools relevant to methodology. Different approaches will be seen to have advantages and disadvantages in relation to the particular goals and aims of this research. The aim is to establish methodological coherence throughout the project.

#### *Philosophy of Methods*

The word 'methodology' (μεθοδολογία) comes from the Greek 'μέθοδος' (methodos) and 'λόγος' (logos). The latter is closely linked with thought as well as with speech. The Sophists used the word in a way which is similar to the modern meaning of the words 'logic' and 'logical'. The Stoics associated 'logos' with rational, as Heraclitus saw it, 'a kind of non-human intelligence that organises the discrete elements in the world into a coherent whole' (Flew, 1984). The word 'methodos' is a combined word consisting of the words 'μετά' (meta), which can be understood as 'about', hence, the word 'methodos' can be conceived as 'about the 'οδός' (odos)'. 'Odos' in Greek means the way, the route. Subsequently, the term 'methodology', in a research context, means to speak, think, or rationalise about the way or the process one follows in conducting research, aiming at 'a coherent whole'.

Thinking about methodology for a particular research study, implies taking into account debates that currently appear in the literature. These debates are not recent, as they are linked with the various philosophical stances, many of which were firstly elaborated in Greece, 2500 years ago. An example of this is the doctrine which takes as certain only those things which are independent of the perceptions or desires of anyone, *objectivism*. In contrast, is *subjectivism*, which supports that these are 'a matter of personal taste' (Popkin and Stroll, 1988). A second pair are *rationalism* and *empiricism*. Philosophers who are thought of as rationalists, believe that reason alone is sufficient to obtain knowledge about the natural world, and this knowledge can be put within one single system, which is deductive. On the other hand, those who are considered as empiricists, argue that knowledge of matters must be based on experience. *Realism* and *idealism* form yet another pair of polarities in philosophy, which has some influence on methodology. Realism in the most common sense, is 'the view that physical objects exists independently of being perceived' (Flew, 1984), whilst idealism argues that the external world is a product of the human mind.

Based on the above philosophical beliefs, in one way or another, *positivism* and *naturalism* are the two philosophical doctrines which still hold the two polar positions in that methodological debate. Positivism, as a philosophical view was developed initially by Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte in 19th century. The term implies that 'the external world' is not further explicable. Furthermore, it is closely associated with the optimism which was spread then in France and Britain, optimism which was based on the success of science. In terms of human knowledge, positivism believes that all is held within the boundaries of science. Thus, positivism is, even today, associated with the methods used in science. On the other hand, naturalism, in general, is the philosophical position that



man can study and explain whatever there is, without these explanations going 'beyond or outside the Universe' (Popkin and Stroll, 1988.). Moreover, naturalism 'reduces' moral and ethical matters to natural ones. In the methodological debate naturalism is not akin to positivism, despite the fact that in philosophy they seem to have some common properties. Within social science naturalism is associated with the belief that the understanding of the social world is a result of social interaction, whilst positivism argues that what is true is 'true across time and place' (Riddell, 1992).

Educational research, on the one hand, may deal with issues which can be considered as separate from perceptions, explicable by reason and independent of being observed, and as possibly 'true across time and place', such as school size, pupils/teacher ratios. On the other hand, educational research may be about matters which are perceived as problematic, like the issue of identity, and based on experiences which form personal constructs, in a context specific social world where individuals interact.

There remains a need to address the matter of whether the methodological approaches to data collection and analysis should emphasise the quantitative or qualitative. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1992, p. x) 'methods must be selected according to purposes'. They argue that statements which support the superiority of one methodological approach over its rivals are useless exercises, adding nothing to the research. In this study, the same argument is made and the selection of methods follows from the research problem and research questions.

### *Comparative Policy Research*

It is evident, even from the title of the project, that the distinctive characteristic of this research is its comparative nature. 'Compare' is defined as 'to examine in order to

observe resemblances or differences' (Collins, 1994) and comparative educational research has a long tradition. Marc Antoine Jullien de Paris and Victor Cousin (1792-1867) can be considered the fathers of comparative work in this field. In those days, they were travelling and staying in each country in order to observe the local educational system and practices. The purpose of this was ultimately to introduce good practices from the host country into the researcher's country of origin. The concept of 'cultural borrowing' was the first outcome of comparative studies. Holmes (1981) referred to Victor Cousin, who more than a century ago, wrote:

The experience of Germany ought not to be lost upon us. National rivalries and antipathies would be completely out of place. The true greatness of people does not consist in borrowing nothing from others, but in borrowing from whatever is good, and in perfecting whatever is appropriate. (p. 23)

Comparative research, even today, shares similar goals to those of Cousin. However, in practice there is great resistance whenever someone tries to introduce something which is perceived as 'foreign'. The reasons are not only nationalistic, but also have to do with the belief that every national educational system is unique. It can be argued that each nation has its distinctive national educational system, with its aims, its goals and its approaches.

This introduces the notion of the nation, which can be perceived as an organised state, or more commonly as 'a community of persons ... bound by common descent, language, history, etc.' (Collins 1994, p. 1039). This is closely linked with culture. As will be argued later, the word culture gained a wider meaning, from its roots in agriculture to the idea of a cultivated man and people. Hence, a culture became a characteristic of one nation, and clearly has a role to play in any comparative study.

Methodologically, the positivist paradigm of comparative education was reflected in the methodology of Marc Antoine Jullien de Paris. He strongly argued that education 'should become a positive science instead of being ruled by narrow and limited opinions' (Holmes, 1981, p. 39), and he proposed the following methodological process:

1. data gathering by means of objective observation;
  2. data classification;
  3. explanation by means of causal analysis;
  4. building hypotheses;
  5. further data gathering; and finally
  6. the statement of universal laws whose validity can be provided.
- (Holmes, 1981, p. 39)

This assumes an objectivity comparable with that of the natural sciences. Characteristic of the methodology of *natural* science is the emphasis on measurement, numbers, and testing of hypotheses. Hammersley and Atkinson (1992) have described this as 'the logic of the experiment', a paradigm in which there are objective methods enabling researchers to have a clear view of how natural or social phenomena happen.

In educational research, however, the criticism of the positivist paradigm has been intense and continuous. The assumptions behind a positivist analysis of an education system were seen as asserting that the relationships between

education and the socio-economic aspects of the society could be established and measured. (Holmes, 1981, p. 12)

Epstein (1987) argued that to aim at 'law-like generalisations ... is epistemologically incompatible' (p. 20) with the concept of education within a national culture. If culture is defined as

an adaptive zone which is an entirely learned one ... the man-made  
(Montagu, 1968, p. v),

one can see that a national education system is full of culture and nation-specific 'educative values' and 'special fruits' (Harris, 1891, quoted in Holmes, 1981). The

methodological implications of this are that the methods which one uses in comparative work must be in a position to illuminate these values, and if possible to explain differences among systems. The positivist approach has been criticised as inadequate for this particular purpose and, therefore, different methodologies should be sought.

Such an approach, according to Garrido (1987) could be the introduction of a methodology which takes into account

the great quantitative and qualitative richness of the variables which infuse educational phenomena. (p. 35)

A criterion for the selection of specific methods is, therefore, their usefulness for the study. He argued against the 'temptation of methodological monopoly' (Garrido, 1987, p. 37) and so for an eclectic combination of a variety of approaches. Holmes (1981) also provided support for the idea that 'progress will depend on a variety of research' (p. 37). Garrido, saw comparative methodology as divided, at least in the last 60 years, into two main tracks: one which has been concerned more about 'procedures', like that described earlier by Jullien, and the other which has been concerned more with 'substance'. The latter is linked with qualitative or humanistic approaches, and the former with quantitative or scientific.

During recent decades we have seen a shift from the comparative quantitative studies, such as those which compare test results, hours of teaching, class sizes, or educational expenditure per capita, towards some more descriptive accounts of educational systems. Although the descriptive work managed to throw more light on the 'geography of education' (Holmes, 1981, p. 31) these studies were insufficiently explanatory. Explanation seeks in greater depth the 'spiritual strength' of the education system within the specific culture. According to Hurst (1987) an educational system should be

conceived as a *cultural* phenomenon, influenced by its specific problems, ideas, practices and choices made in its particular physical context.

Hopkin (1992) has argued that as a 'cultural phenomenon' the researcher should be careful, to ensure that

a holistic standpoint is normally adopted and contextual understanding is sought. (p.133)

This will help in the understanding of education systems, an essential element in comparative education. Holmes (1981) supports that point of view by asserting

before applying any theory for predictive purposes, to analyse the specific initial conditions or unique national circumstances in as much detail as possible ... the whole cultural pattern. (p. 47)

Adopting this standpoint, this research study before tackling the perceived constructs of specific learning difficulties, policies and provision for children with these difficulties, elaborates on the different cultural stand points which have an impact on the key areas of this research. Values regarding education, attitudes towards the role of the family in education and the prevailing attitudes to disability in Greece and Scotland are explored so that the specific research aims can be understood within their cultural context. In addition, some aspects of the political and ideological background of the two countries are investigated, so that policies can be contextualised. This enables the reader to draw his/her own interpretations of the research findings, and emphasises the complexity of comparative research and the difficulty in forming 'universal laws' in educational settings.

### ***Theorising***

Adopting a more holistic approach which focuses on national culture has implications for the way that one is concerned with theorising, especially when such an account mainly implies an ethnographic approach to research. Ethnography is linked, in an ontological

sense, with the philosophical trends of idealism and naturalism. In the epistemological debate against the positivist 'hard, objective and tangible' knowledge (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 6), ethnography assumes that knowledge is socially constructed.

Ethnography has been criticised as untheoretical. The critics suggest that ethnographic accounts are 'descriptive narratives of events' (Burgess, 1984, p. 6), or 'endless description and a sequence of plausible stories' (Woods, 1988, p. 95). Other critics have characterised ethnography as being empirical and impinging on situationalism and idealism.

However, Woods (1988) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1992) argue that the major aim of ethnographic research is the development of theory. The ethnographic 'development of theory' is based on its ability to focus on the actions and perspectives of the social actors, something that matches the research aims of this study. These aims regard the perceptions of the nature of specific learning difficulties, its policies and provision among mainstream teachers, head teachers, learning support teachers, parents, pupils and policy agents as central to the study. Such an approach takes into account the fact that actions and perspectives occur within an existing setting and this

allows one to begin to develop theory in a way that provides much more evidence of the plausibility of different lines of analysis than is available to the 'armchair theorists', or even the survey researcher or experimentalist. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 23)

In this study, one can argue that its comparative nature enhances the richness of the evidence and makes the outcome of the analysis much more plausible. However, the 'setting' or the 'context' must not be treated as 'theoretically unproblematic' (Edwards and Furlong, 1985, p. 34). Historical development of such settings, contemporary factors, political and economic influences and the daily interactions among people (e.g. between teachers and pupils or between parents and education authorities) play an

important role. A more holistic approach, which focuses on the perceptions and on the setting, might well be the way to see ethnography as at least partially avoiding the criticism that sees it as a theory of the actor and not the society (the micro rather than the macro). The micro-macro spheres and the linkage of them is a common problem in sociological research. Some theories suit better one or the other, but very seldom can one find one single theory to make sustainable and supported connections between the two spheres.

One way to see this approach is as 'wider contextualisation' (Woods, 1988, p. 102), a concept which illustrates not only the context as we described it earlier, but also as avoiding some of the limitations of the 'snapshot frozen in time' (Woods, 1988, p. 102). The past as well as the present and the future, can illuminate different aspects of current phenomena, and can assist the researcher in generating plausible explanations of the social reality, as he or she tries to interpret the 'verbal accounts' (Riddell, 1992) of the social actors.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the fact that this research project is a comparative one and deals with perceptions of people in Scotland and in Greece, two countries with significantly different cultures, also supports the choice of ethnography as a major part of the methodology. Shimahara (1988) argues that the link between ethnography and culture(s) is the strongest feature of ethnography; he 'identified' what ethnography should study:

Culture or civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (p. 77)

This justifies the use of ethnography for understanding social complexity. This is further supported, especially in cases of comparative research, by Hammersley and Atkinson (1992), who explicitly stated that:

According to the naturalist account, the value of ethnography as a social research method is founded upon the existence of such variations in cultural patterns across and within societies, and their significance for understanding social processes. (p. 8)

'Across ... societies, and ... understanding social processes' illustrates the significant role that ethnography can play in comparative research, and along with that 'complex whole' emphasise the holistic character of ethnography.

The characteristics of ethnography are briefly presented in Sherman and Webb's (1988) work, where they argue that there are three distinctive traits of ethnographic research: the first, is *context*; the second, is *natural settings*; and the third, those who are studied *to speak for themselves*.

Shimahara (1988) referring to the context, argued that it

consists of 'value premises' -a 'configuration' that shapes individual cognitive orientation ... which I called 'cultural orientations'. (p. 79)

Edson makes the distinction with the physical sciences, where researchers are investigating physical phenomena 'in ways that are context-free or context-independent' (Edson 1988, p. 46), reflecting a process which has been characterised as 'context-stripping' (Shimahara, 1988, p. 80). Dewey (1910) also supported the assertion that context plays a significant role in the experience, and hence in the research inquiry as the former is 'bounded' in the world. Edson (1988), wrote:

Qualitative research is context-specific, that is, it posits that ideas, people, and events cannot be understood if isolated from their contexts. (p. 46)

Concerning the second characteristic of ethnography, the natural settings, Shimahara (1988) argues that 'events evolve in natural settings', where human experience is placed.



Edson (1988) compares this to the 'abstract or theoretical' settings of natural sciences. He argues that natural settings are complex and loaded with too many 'variables' to be understood in linear causational models of explanation.

Edson, Sherman, Webb, Shimahara, Ball, Woods, to mention just a few, see that 'social occasions' occur in natural settings and must be studied *holistically*. Lutz (1986), argues that there is

a critical need in educational research to broaden our perspectives not only beyond the usual psychostatistical research but also beyond the narrow focus of face-to-face interaction and micro-ethnography. ... beyond the usual scope of the classroom or the individual school, explaining educational processes in the broader context of the school district and the culture. (p. 119)

Dewey (1910) in particular relates experience with 'wholeness', as 'the meaning of the object for inquiry is controlled by continued reference to the total situation' (quoted in Sherman and Webb, 1988, p. 15). Ball (1991, p. 189) speaks for 'a social totality', a 'totality' which is complex, as society, culture, or people are. He continues to stress that

complexity and interrelatedness [rather] than simplicity are the end points. The law of parsimony -that that theory is best which explains in the simplest way- does not apply. (p. 189)

Edson expands this wholeness not only in the dimension of place or culture, but also in time, arguing that experience 'is studied as a whole, not in isolation from the past or the present' (Ball, 1991, p. 46).

Ethnography puts people themselves on top of its list of priorities. As Cohen and Manion (1994) put it, ethnography

is concerned with how people make sense of their everyday world. More especially, ... participants achieve and sustain interaction in a social encounter ... it is concerned to understand them from within. (p. 31)

The links between ethnography and people's perceptions, ethnography and culture and ethnography and context have been demonstrated above; these links support the choice of

a largely ethnographic approach to this particular research. Moreover, another link that shows the relevance of ethnography for this study is that it relates to policy. The connection between ethnography and policy-making has been supported by Woods, arguing that

ethnographic description ... penetrate beneath the surface appearances and reveal the harder realities there concealed. Such realities ... contrast sharply with official accounts of the schooling process. (Woods, 1988, p. 91)

Adopting an holistic approach could enhance the possibilities of explanations relating to the people, or the context, or even elements of which the people may not be conscious such as power relations. Using all the richness of the evidence that an ethnographic comparative study can produce, the explanations provided can be more valid, however complex and interrelated they are.

In doing this kind of research, however, one has to bear in mind the fact that the researcher, is a part of the totality that he/she studies, bringing to it values, specific attitudes, and particular intentions. This is the reason why the researcher should be reflexive and involve him/herself in the accounts reported. Hammersley and Atkinson (1992), argued that:

we take [reflexivity] to be the most important feature of social research.  
(p. x)

The importance of reflexivity, was identified more than a century ago, when Leibniz in 1887 (Vol. III, p. 568) wrote:

(I) wish that authors would give us the history of their discoveries and the steps by which they have arrived at them. (quoted in Hammersley, 1984, p. 40)

In more recent years, sociology and social research in general, have been more reflexive, and the publication of many books (e.g. Burgess, 1984) have illuminated the importance of reflexive accounts by the researcher. Hammersley argued that reflexivity assists not

only by describing the research process, but rather through bringing onto the surface 'the interpretative methods by which it is itself accomplished.' (Hammersley, 1984, p. 41)

Ross Doerre Dorene (1988), despite the fact that many ethnographers argue that researchers should avoid 'familiar settings', advocates the position that

the educational critic believes the researcher must draw on his or her background of educational knowledge and experience in order to make sense of what is happening, to determine what is unique about each setting, and to make valid critical judgements. (p. 165).

This, it is suggested, is a more honest approach, than claiming objectivity, or that the research has been conducted in a 'vacuum' isolated from the researcher's values, beliefs, cultural orientations, political or ideological influences. Moreover, Hammersley and Atkinson argue that reflexivity has its implications for methodology. Admitting its importance implies that one adopts the idea that the foundation of social knowledge is based upon 'common-sense knowledge' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 17), which links the method with its philosophical background. In practical terms, reflexivity has also implications as the researcher (a 'research instrument *par excellence*' p. 18) has to understand him/herself, instead of trying to eliminate his/her influence. The researcher has

to recognise that we are part of the social world we study... This is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact. There is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it; nor, fortunately, is that necessary. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, pp. 14-15)

This is particularly true in this research as the researcher has admitted that he adopts an advocate point of view, as he has suffered from specific learning difficulties himself.

Finally, the reader should note that this research should not be characterised as ethnographic in the traditional sense. Traditionally, the questions asked by ethnographers have been broader than the research questions asked in this study and the research instruments have been using more open-ended techniques than those which will be

described in the next chapter. Nevertheless, the aim was to be as broad as possible within these limitations and to adopt as open ended interview schedules as possible, advocating the principles of ethnographic research.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Design**

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter will provide an outline of the research design, describing the strategies and the techniques applied during the conduct of this research project. An account of my actions in negotiating access to schools, teachers, parents and pupils, the process of identification of the case studies, the selection of schools, the interview aims and the observation technique will be briefly described. The intention is to give the reader the opportunity to understand better the limitations and the strength of the claims made by this research.

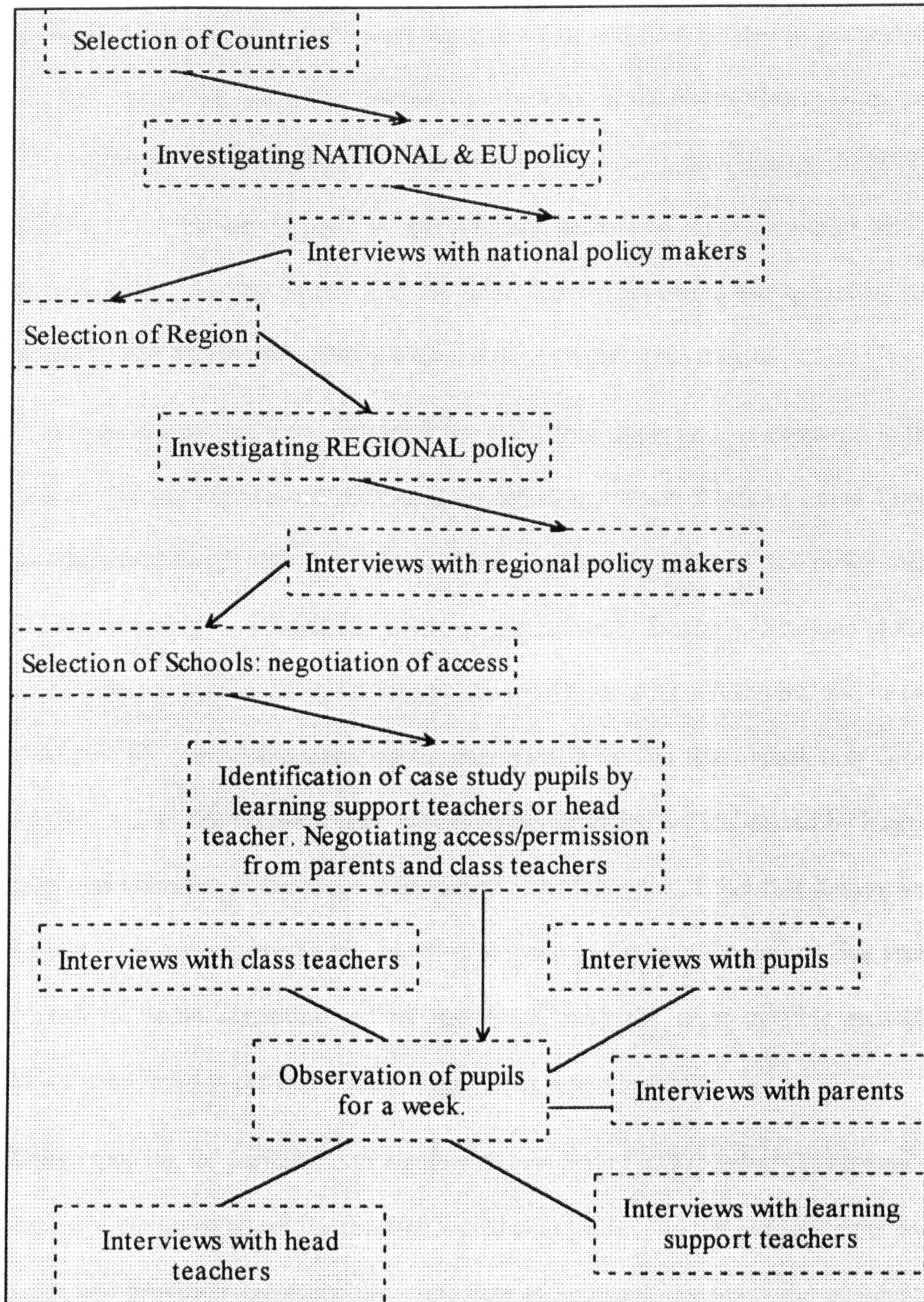
#### ***Research Outline***

An analysis of official policy in Greece and Scotland in relation to specific learning difficulties within the context of special educational needs and education in general was the starting point of this research. Documents analysed included Acts of Parliament, Presidential decrees and circulars or HMIs' reports. Interviews with key informants were conducted to investigate factors affecting the shaping of policy and the respondents' perceptions of the nature of the difficulties, the meanings of the policies and the effectiveness of the provision at a national and/or regional level. These informants included the Director of Special Education in Greece, the HMI responsible for special educational needs in Scotland, and one regional advisor for special education in each country. All were involved in the drafting of national legislation or regional policies, and

had administrative duties in the provision for specific learning difficulties. At the EU level, the individual responsible for education within the Handicapped in Europe Living an Independently in an Open Society (HELIOS) programme was also interviewed.

In each country, ten case studies of children with specific learning difficulties in primary schools were conducted (twenty case studies in all) to investigate the implementation of policy, as well as the understanding of these difficulties by those who were involved in the provision (i.e. pupils, parents, mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers). The ten case studies in each country were located in five schools. The individualities of each case could be illuminated, therefore, against the context of the educational provision which was shared by another child within the same school. In each case study, all those involved in the provision (see above) were interviewed to investigate their understanding of specific learning difficulties, their views of what (ideal) educational provision would have been, their perceptions of the current provision and of the extent to which this was helping the child to make progress. Each child was observed for a week in the school in order to investigate the nature of the curriculum and assessment which was used, the support which was provided by the mainstream and learning support teachers, and the administrative elements of this support such as resources or communication. After the observation of a number of lessons, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to gain insight into their understanding of the teaching and learning which had taken place; pupils' views of their school experience were also gathered. Parents and head teachers gave their own views about the policy, provision and the nature of their children's difficulties. The following figure (3.1) represents the research design.

Figure 3.1: Outline of the Research Design



## **Selection of Countries and Regions**

Greece and Scotland are both countries in the EU, and both located in the periphery of the EU; one on the South East border, and the latter in the North West. Both countries have common political systems (Parliamentary Democracy), are members of NATO, the OECD, the UN and Council of Europe, are considered small countries with small populations, and some areas which are quite densely populated and others much more sparsely, with access difficulties like the island or mountainous regions.

Most significantly, however, Greece is my country of origin and, as explained in the first chapter, having experienced difficulties in schooling, which I believe could have been avoided in a different education system, I was motivated to 'educate' the policy makers in Greece, adopting an advocate position as researcher. Similarly, Scotland is the host country for my studies, being selected by the reputation of its universities, and its location within the EU. In addition, and equally important, is the fact that I speak only Greek and English, and as this research deals with perceptions which are elaborated by language, a deep understanding of language is necessary. At this point, I feel that despite learning English since my primary 3 year, and despite living in Scotland for the last five years, my English on some occasions has let me down, with the most tangible example the difficulties I faced in the transcribing stage of this research study.

Before applying for permission to conduct this research I had to select the regions within these two countries where the research would take place. As the research aims involved policy and provision and especially in the case of Scotland, there was the possibility that different regions could have different policies, I decided to confine the research to one region in each country. The comparisons between the two countries would have been much more complicated and unmanageable if had worked in more than one region.



Working in only one region, however, inevitably limits the generalisability of any claims which can be made from the findings of this research.

For practical reasons, I chose regions which were close to my area of origin and of study, so that I could minimise the field expenses. This, however, resulted in differences in the characteristics of the regions selected, as the one in Scotland had a mixture of rural and urban schools, whilst the Greek served only urban areas. Both, however, had a mixture of catchment areas which could map the whole socio-economic spectrum.

### **Negotiating Access to Schools**

Having selected the regions, I had to apply to gain access to schools. This proved to be a very interesting experience, indicative of the endemic advantages and disadvantages of the two education systems in terms of organisation (to be further explored in the next chapter).

In Scotland, responsibility for issuing permission to access schools rested with the regional authorities. The process was quite simple: the researcher had to fill an application form, explaining the research aims and approach, including a detailed account of the burden that the research project would put on teachers' or pupils' time, enclosing also the proposed interview schedules. Within a week I had a positive response.

The Greek experience, however, was completely different. After preparing for more than a month all the necessary certificates, proposals and applications I sent the file to the Director of the Research Section of the Pedagogic Institute, which was responsible for issuing these permissions. I knew from a Greek colleague that the whole process could take about two to three months so I acted well in advance to avoid disappointment. Despite the ample time, after two months I had no news, so I was forced to ask someone

in Greece to make inquiries. He was told that the application should have been addressed to the Ministry of Education, to the Directorate of Special Education, and that the Director of Special Education would forward internally the file to them. The file reached the Ministry on the 6 September 1995, three months after my first submission.

The process was slow, because the Council of the Pedagogic Institute has to convene to discuss the matter, the first meeting is devoted just to the delegation of my application to one of the advisors, that advisor then recommends to the Council whether the application should be approved or rejected at another meeting.

A member of my family, who as an educationist himself had the 'right connections'; phoned a friend of his who was working at the Pedagogic Institute. He informed me that the application had been granted access, but that I had to go personally to the Pedagogic Institute to see the advisor to push the matter forward. After certifying that I had carried out the changes required by the advisor (spelling and syntax errors), I had to appear the next day when everything would be typed and ready for the signatures.

The following day I attended as required, the papers were ready but the person who had to sign it was away at a conference and was expected back the following week. Ten days after that I was told that he had signed, but the head of the Research Section had not, and he was due back in five days. Eight days later he had signed, but the head of the Pedagogic Institute had not, and he was abroad at yet another conference. I could not understand how an application which had been considered by an important committee and approved unanimously needed three different signatures.

As I was really pressed for time and waiting to get into the schools, I tried to gain access to one of the sub-regions (education offices) of the region without the written approval but with an oral verification of the above story by the secretary of the committee

involved. This was granted, and after a month's waiting I accessed the first school. A week later, however, when I tried the same approach in another office I was told that the responsibility to grant me access rested not with the Pedagogic Institute, nor with the Directorate of Special Education but with the Directorate of Primary Studies within the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNERA). This problem occurred, as explained in the next chapter, because although the provision for children with specific learning difficulties was held within units of special education, these units were located within mainstream schools, hence there was a duality of responsibility. To cut a very long story short, a process that started in May 1995 finished on the 10 November 1995, and the problems arose from two of the characteristics of the Greek education system: centralisation and bureaucracy.

### **Selection of Schools**

Having selected the region, and negotiated permission to access the schools, schools had to be selected. In Greece, the selection of schools was based on the criterion that they had provision for specific learning difficulties. And since this consisted of, according to the national policy, the presence of a 'special classroom' the schools were selected from the list published by the MNERA of all those primary mainstream schools having a 'special classroom'. The researcher selected the five schools bearing in mind the socio-economic factor of the catchment areas and the aim to try to cover the whole social spectrum. However, one of the schools when visited argued that there were no children with specific learning difficulties and that the 'special classroom' was used only as a support room for the children whose native language was other than Greek. Subsequently, I had to find another (fifth) school, and knowing the bureaucratic labyrinth that a new permission would require, I opted for a private school, to which I knew I could

gain direct access. This move also helped with the mapping of all the socio-economic groups.

In Scotland, the researcher did not set any criteria for the selection, other than the catchment area. The regional authorities were asked to identify a number of schools providing a sample matching the diversity of rural and urban communities of the region, as well as the social spectrum of the catchment areas. From a list of eight schools given by the senior learning support advisor of the region the researcher contacted five, of which only one declined to allow access, because of the load of research already being conducted in the school. The selection of another school to make up the sample was a private school, ensuring that the pattern of the sample was similar in the two countries.

#### **Identification of the Case-Studies**

The research approach and design was determined by the research aims and questions, as well as the research methods discussed in the previous chapters. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the major aims of this research was to investigate the perceptions of specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece as held by mainstream teachers, learning support teachers, head teachers, parents, pupils and policy makers.

Fundamental to an ethnographic approach to research, was to minimise the influence that the researcher had on the subjects of the study, and to put *their* perceptions at the top of his/her priorities. Hence, in trying to establish this, it was essential to minimise, and when possible to cut out, any references to the researcher's understandings of specific learning difficulties. The whole approach of the research was based on this fundamental principle. This had some serious consequences for the selection of the research case-studies and, therefore, for the research findings. These consequences were exacerbated

by this study falling within the field of special educational needs, which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, is a very complex area.

From the start of negotiations for access schools, the term 'specific learning difficulties' was used with no communication of any preconceptions or predetermined definitions or understandings of what it should mean. Hence, the researcher was looking for children with 'specific learning difficulties', but the understandings of that term were those of the individuals working in the educational context. In other words, when I asked permission for this research I referred to 'specific learning difficulties', without giving any definitions or criteria as prerequisites for the categorisation of a child as having such difficulties.

Putting the responsibility of defining 'specific learning difficulties' on the respondents in this research meant that the person who would do the identification had a key role to play in the research outcome. As will become clear later, in the chapter about the provision, identification was also perceived as an important element of policy and provision, and consequently, this person would normally be in a position to formulate or influence the policy and the provision within the schools. In most cases, it was the learning support teachers who identified the cases of pupils with 'specific learning difficulties', with the exception of two schools where the head teachers undertook the identification (based, however, on the school records rather than their own experience of the children).

From a number of possible case study pupils, the researcher wrote to the parents to ask their permission for the research, requesting that they not discuss the matter with their children, to avoid influencing their behaviour in relation to the research. This letter was followed by a telephone discussion to resolve any questions that parents might have. The first two parents who agreed to their children being involved formed the case studies for the particular school.

## **Interviewing**

The aim of this research was to investigate the perceptions that people have about the nature, as well as certain policy and provision aspects, of specific learning difficulties. Conducting an ethnographic inquiry, means to 'enter into relationships with their informants' (Burgess, 1984, p. 261). This is especially important when interviewing takes place after observation, as planned in this study.

Interviews [which] permit researchers to verify, clarify, or alter what they thought happened, to achieve a full understanding of an incident, and to take into account the 'lived' experience of participants. (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 125)

Taking account of teachers' limited time, and my lack of confidence in my English, a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared which, however, allowed the respondents as much freedom as possible. Prompting was minimised and used only when the information provided by the respondent appeared not to cover the scope of the question, or the question seemed not to have been understood. In addition, the gathered data from the observation period were used to make the interview more relevant to the specific case.

The people that I was interested in interviewing and the information that I gathered from them were:

**The pupils:** They provided information about the provision as they experienced it, and gave their own accounts of how policy was implemented into practice. The perceptions of the pupils with specific learning difficulties about the different kinds of provisions were also explored. All the above were investigated with the comparative character of the research in mind.

**The teachers of these children:** Both learning support ('special' as they were called in Greece) and mainstream teachers were interviewed to give their own accounts of their role in the provision for children with specific learning difficulties. In addition, their perceptions of the adequacy and the efficiency of policy and provision as currently experienced by them, and their views on their pupils' experiences and problems, as well as their relationships with parents and authorities within the school and other services were explored.

**Head teachers:** In schools where the case-study children were, the head teachers were interviewed, to give their own perceptions on the provision that their school offered, their view of the school's policy for children with specific learning difficulties, their perceptions of the children's difficulties, the school-parents and the school-regional authority relationships, and finally, their accounts of national and regional policy matters.

**Parents:** Their role in identification, assessment process, and provision were explored through in-depth interviews. The perceived role of the family, as an institution, in the education of children with specific learning difficulties, the perceptions of the parents of their child's difficulties, their own accounts of the national, regional and school policies, their experience of provision and, finally, any initiatives they had taken to provide for their child with specific learning difficulties were investigated.

**Policy agents:** At the regional and national level these individuals elaborated their perceptions of the nature of specific learning difficulties, their accounts of the national and regional policies and of the relationship they had with the other parties, like parents and teachers. Their views on the provision were also explored.

The reader, at this point, should be cautioned of the possibility of the following issues due to the nature of the comparative research and the nationality and status of the researcher.

As the researcher was Greek there was a chance that the Scottish teachers would like to present an idealised picture of the current provision for specific learning difficulties, whilst their Greek counterparts would be more opinionated and critical towards their own educational system as they had common experience of it. In other words the researcher in Scotland could be seen as an 'outsider' and hence the system should be protected. On the other hand, the fact that the researcher was Ph.D. student and an HMI or other education officer might also have influenced the language and the statements given by the respondents. They might well have been more 'open' in this context where they were not officially accountable. There was also a possibility that teachers, parents and pupils in the two countries reacted differently according to their perception of the usefulness of this particular research. One could argue, therefore, that the fact that this piece of research was 'academic' allowed more freedom of speech as teachers in particular had nothing to lose by speaking freely to the researcher.

### **Observation**

Observation was used to obtain a deeper understanding of the current provision for children with specific learning difficulties and to form my own ideas about the interactions between pupils and teachers. The aim was to enhance further the effectiveness of the interviews by using examples from the experiences of the case studies as observed in their classrooms.

Ethical considerations were raised on this point. First, I was concerned about what I should tell the teachers about my work: should I tell them that I was forming my own ideas about the interaction in the classroom or just that I was looking at the provision for children with specific learning difficulties? I decided to say the latter which made the observation partially covert, and partially open. Secondly, the case study children were



not informed that they were being 'investigated' by me; the classes were told that I was observing the whole group. The case study pupil was drawn aside at the end of the observation period to be interviewed about his/her experiences in the school, along with a couple more children so that stigmatisation was avoided. Hence, from the pupils' perspective, the observation was completely covert, and any sense of the true nature of the study was made apparent only when the children noticed the researcher at their home speaking to their parents.

The actual observation was unstructured. Although in the pilot study I experimented with an observation schedule, focusing mainly on the interaction, I found that the field notes gave a better and richer picture of what was going on in the class. I also noted the furniture position of the class, the resources available, the movement of the teachers or the targeted pupils, and any interactions that the targeted child with specific learning difficulties had with the teachers or peers. The fact that the observation was unstructured but focused on the targeted pupil in his or her class minimised the opportunities of distraction as much as possible. The main aim of the observation data was to be used during the interviews to illuminate further the concepts of the respondents, and to make the interview as context specific as possible.

One difficulty, however, I faced was with my status in the classroom. I was prepared to be a non-participant observer, but when I dealt with children during my pilot study I found it was very hard not to 'look' at them, and sometimes, I felt that I was part of their game and I participated in it. To overcome this difficulty, I decided when the children were entering the classroom, I would be already in and to pretend that I was reading in order not to initiate any eye contact at the beginning of the lessons. During the observation I appeared to be busy writing something, in order to avoid any interaction.

In order to have as much information as possible about the targeted pupil I sat as near as possible to him/her. To avoid, however, stigmatisation of the targeted pupil, I made deliberate efforts not to focus openly to the specific child, but rather to browse through the classroom.

Between the positivist paradigm, which asserts that the observer's version is 'true' and the naturalistic paradigm, which asserts that only the participant's version is 'true', there is a great debate illustrated in a previous chapter. For this study critical point was to find the balance between the two. In adopting a combined approach in my research I used observation to gain the advantages of the first approach and interviews to gain the advantages of the second.

### *Analysis of Data Gathered*

The analysis of the interviews was based on the process described by Ball (1981) in 'Beachside Comprehensive'. This process could also be described as summing the responses of the interviews, forming categories based on the previous stage, and looking for similarities and differences across groups and between the two countries. The coding process was based on Hutchinson concepts of Levels (1988, pp. 133-135). The codes, at the first instance, derived directly from the data, forming

Level I coding (which) begins with words that describe the action in the setting. Such codes are *in vivo* or substantive codes and may use the exact words that the actors use.

Hence, the first aim was to read through the data and place the different statements in the corresponding categories. After the completion of this initial stage, personal comments, adding relevant information to the statements taken out of the interviews, proved helpful. At this point, some of the observation notes were used, when I felt that there was a clear discrepancy between what I was told and what I had seen; usually these occurred in the

children's accounts. The goal of this process was to move towards a later position where the data could be further coded, according to more general categories showing the relationships among categories. After I had completed the coding of the interviews from Greece, Scotland, and where applicable, the EU, I moved to Level III codes, combining academic and research based knowledge, where:

theoretical constructs conceptualise the relationship among the three levels of codes, 'weaving the fractured data back together again' (Glaser and Strauss, 1968, p. 116)

However, this model of Levels was not a panacea, solving all the methodological problems. It was obviously based on 'grounded theory' approaches, which have certain limitations. These limitations have been identified in criticisms of grounded theory as too context specific, losing 'a broader perspective' (e.g. Woods, 1988). This lack of perspective makes more difficult the connection of micro to macro level of analysis, where other methodological approaches might be more useful. Adopting an holistic approach, as argued in the previous chapter, one could see the relationship between the data derived from the interviews and the context in which these were drawn. Taking into account the 'wider contextualisation' (Woods, 1988) the explanatory attempts of Level III analysis were made more solid.

The conclusions drawn from the data gathered should be regarded as having an illuminative or enlightening character, it cannot be regarded as offering large scale generalisations. Throughout this thesis the statements, arguments and conclusions drawn from a set of case-studies are hypotheses for the next set of case studies; the major strength of the use of cases in that it offers of understanding, which can subsequently be tested in future work which aims to extend the generalisability of the knowledge gained.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Educational, Political and Cultural Context**

#### ***Introduction***

In this chapter I will examine the educational, political and cultural context in which the research took place. In order to illuminate the differences in the education systems between Scotland and Greece, one has to investigate the underlying cultural and political contrasts. The political context and its development, the educational systems, the cultural differences and especially the attitudinal differences will be included. It has to be noted, however, that the matters relating to these national features which will be examined in this chapter include only those which are relevant to the general aim of this study: the provision for children with specific learning difficulties, especially in the primary schools.

#### ***Political context***

An educational system in terms of organisation and administration is often a reflection of the government context in which it operates. Government here is not taken to be, in a narrow sense, the specific government that has the power at a given time, but rather in a broader sense, the political administration functioning within a state. It can be argued that the style of government as a system influences the educational system. Hence, one has to comprehend the political conditions and how they developed to get a deeper understanding of why the educational systems operate in one way rather than another.

## **Greece**

Looking initially at Greece, one can see as its predominant characteristic, the centralisation of the system, which is a direct result of the political framework in which it operates. In contrast, the Scottish system is much more decentralised, which again reflects the governing framework.

Trying to understand why these differences occur one has to investigate thoroughly the development of government in Scotland and Greece, something that exceeds the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the Greek authoritarian and centralised structure of the educational administrative framework has its roots in the birth of the Greek State in 1830s, where the political, economic and, of course, educational foundations were set. In a state which became independent only with the support of foreign powers, the French, British and Russian influences were significant. Characteristic of this was that the parties of the first Greek Parliament were called the French, the British and the Russian (Papandreou, 1986, p. 175). Furthermore, these three powers also imposed a German Prince from the House of Wittelsbach as the head of the state, and he subsequently imported 'the introduction of Western legal norms, [and] the establishment of a centralised bureaucracy' (Kohler, 1982, p. 96). This establishment was required to create an educational system in a state where all schools for four centuries had been closed and only the illegal Church schools operated in secrecy.

An interesting anecdote illustrates the contrasts between the two countries. On the 9th of April 1825, in the George Street Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh, a public meeting was held which

resulted in the formation of a Society among the Ladies of Edinburgh, in behalf of GENERAL, and ESPECIALLY of FEMALE EDUCATION IN GREECE. (original emphasis, Haldane, 1825, p. 3)

This offers a comparison of the state of the two education systems, one being on the point of its creation and the other being a developed and, to a degree, a successful system, which was looking to become a model system for other countries. In this report, behind the rationale one could find a colonial discourse in the concern to 'repay -what can never be fully repaid' (Haldane, 1825, p. 2) an old debt to the nation which has been the birthplace of the philosophical and scientific models that the 'the great British public' (Haldane, 1825, p. 1) and the people of Edinburgh were studying. It was stated:

To Britain, where Education is best understood, and most widely diffused among all the nations of the earth, they are looking for direction and aid. (Haldane, 1825, p. 2)

The meeting continued by describing the conditions in Greece as she 'has been for ages groaning under a most cruel despotism' (Haldane, 1825, p. 4).

Greece was a country which at that time had missed the process of industrialisation of the Western Europe and the attempts of the foreign administration were focused on pushing the country to become trade-dependent on these three 'big powers'. Even today Greece still has the highest percentage of its workers in agricultural employment in the European Union, 20.8% of the total labour force (National Statistical Service of Greece, 1995, p. 3) compared to the 2.3% in Scotland (Foster, 1994, p. 201). Its economy is still based on tourism and services, shipping and agricultural exports, rather than on its industrial output (National Statistical Service of Greece, 1995, p. 3). It could be argued that a century and a half ago, a top down, centralised and bureaucratic approach was necessary to bring about all the changes desired by her foreign 'benefactors'. However, Kohler believed that the structures imposed on Greece at that time were 'ill-suited' to the Greek context, and this 'led to a hardening of power positions and contributed to the rigidity of the system' (Kohler 1982, p. 96). In addition, this centralised system took power away from

the local communities, where the traditional power bases had rested with the 'proestous', the local representatives who also had some ownership of land and were even recognised by the Ottoman administration. Mouzelis argued that these individuals accepted the deprivation of their power at a local level, as most of them found a place within the powerful state hierarchy (Mouzelis, 1978, p. 14). Nevertheless, the colonial administration at the genesis of the Greek state, along with the urbanisation and the depopulation of the rural areas, led to, as Papandreou argued, an 'overcentralised, bureaucratic and powerful state machinery' (Papandreou, 1986, p. 175). Bouzakis, furthermore, stated:

The Greek state was organised by the Bavarians according to the German authoritarian, bureaucratic and centralised model ... Generally, all were determined and controlled by the central government (centralisation). There was a rigid concentration on homomorphism. (Bouzakis, 1991, p. 40)

Since the genesis of the Greek educational system in the 1830s very few changes have been attempted over the years. The first endeavour was by the primeminister Deligiannis in 1895, but as soon as the government lost the elections the changes towards a more democratic school system were abandoned. The next serious attempt for a radical change of education in Greece was made in 1929, but once again, in the polarised political system, the governments were interchanging in power and the educational changes remained only on paper. The third major attempt was made by the government of George Papandreou in 1964, but once more the implementation of the change failed. Characteristic of this dichotomy of the two poles in the Greek politics was that whenever the "left" was taking power there were violent changes: in 1934 the dictatorship of Metaxas, and in 1967 the dictatorship of Papadopoulos. Demaras (1978) argued:

since the first legal organisation of the education system no reform had been made; most remained as plans, and the one which finally reached the stage of implementation, was never completed. Except for the

organisational alterations, the system remained invariable, monolithic, centralised, theoretical, ... (Demaras, 1978, v. 15, p. 494)

The first real change in the Greek educational system, since its establishment almost 150 years earlier was made in 1976 after the re-election of a democratic government. The “right” wing government proposed measures of the “left”, expressed in the white papers of 1929 and 1964, as the system was so

static that it was totally cut off, not only from the people’s expectations, but also from its won initial aims. (Bouzakis, 1991, p. 104)

However, the degree of centralisation was also present in the accounts of the Director of Special Education within the Greek Ministry of Education when he gave his perceptions about the administrative framework during an interview for this research in December 1994:

The central administrative body lies within the Ministry of Education, the Directorate of Special Education, which is responsible for the co-ordination and co-operation with the other central services (financial, building) and the Regional ones, at the level of region and school.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the influence of foreign education systems and foreign policies remains a characteristic of the Greek education system; the past and current lack of development of educational research has done nothing to promote resistance to an external influence. Xeromerity- Tsaklaganu (1984, p. 13) argued that Greece, in the 1980s, was more than ready to adopt changes proposed by the EU regarding special education, without any backing of research within the Greek context which might have provided understanding about the prevailing attitudes and problems endemic to Greece. In the next chapter the perceptions of the people involved in this study regarding the role of the EU in the national education will be investigated.



## **Scotland**

In contrast, Scotland's education system has evolved more progressively to the current system. Myers suggested that by the second half of the eighteenth century, well before the Greek revolution for independence,

the Scottish national education system consisted of about 900 parochial schools and 80 to 90 burgh schools (Myers, 1983, p. 76).

Although these schools were under the control of the Church of Scotland they were also maintained, and to some extent controlled, by those who paid taxes towards their support, i.e. in the rural areas to the landlords and in the cities to the burgh councils. This was indicative of the role that the local authorities played in education in the early nineteenth century, something that was distinctively different from Greece. In addition, with the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act the schools passed into state control, but, as Corr argued,

the Scottish legislation achieved a more unequivocal transfer to public authorities. ... Almost a thousand school boards were created in towns and parishes throughout Scotland, a pattern that survived until 1918. (Corr, 1990, p. 295.)

It can be argued that the power of the local authorities, in different forms over the years, has remained an intrinsic characteristic of the Scottish educational system, and local authorities and even the school boards still retain that power.

### ***The National Educational Policy Framework***

In the previous section the political context was examined in both countries, in order to understand some of the reasons for their distinct differences: in the degree of their centralisation. In this section, more detailed features of the context at the time when national policies on specific learning difficulties were developing will be explored. In Greece, this is concerned with the entrance of Greece to the EU and the influence of the

Panhellenic Socialist Movement (P.A.S.O.K.), and in Scotland with the impact of the Conservative party during the 1980s and 1990s on educational policies.

## **Greece**

In Greece, 1974 was the year that the first democratic government was elected after the seven years of dictatorship, and as early as 1976 an 'educational reform' was put in place: the abolition of the katharevousa (archaic form of modern Greek) language from education and its replacement with the demotic (from: demos = municipality, i.e., people's) language. The next decade opened with Greece joining the then European Economic Community (EEC), and now the European Union (EU), in 1981. In the same year, the first law regarding special education was passed (N. 1143/1981, MNERA, 1981); before that special education was not represented within educational legislation.

In October of 1981, the general elections brought for the first time the P.A.S.O.K. in government, with great expectations for change towards a more egalitarian educational system. The expectations were raised because of the Socialist label of the party, but this remained in the rhetoric only during the pre-election period. Although the passing through the parliament of the first Education Act (1566/85) seemed to fulfil these expectations, the ideas were never implemented in practice. The main emphasis of the Act was to democratise and decentralise the education system, through the involvement in all three levels, school, regional and national, of pupils, teachers, professionals and community representatives, including representative of pressure groups and academics. The proposals construed at school level the setting of pupils' committees, of school boards and school committees, parent's and teachers' unions which would all have a say in the running of the school. At regional level, members of the school committees would form the Municipal committees, which would co-operate with the regional educational

committees, where the regional elected representatives would have a strong position. At the national level, representatives of the regional committees, of the municipalities and the regional administrations, along with professionals, academics, pressure groups and policy agents from the MNERA would form the Central Educational Councils for elementary, secondary and special education. In addition, a national educational council would have had a consultative role to the ministry.

In reality, however, none of these councils, at any of the levels has ever operated. Because of some lack of commitment, pressure from teachers (who wanted to remain civil servants), and a series of changes in the Ministry of Education, the necessary Presidential Decrees to implement the proposals were never published. The reality, therefore, is outlined in the diagram (Figure 1, p. 78), which reflects the Greek educational system in terms of administrative and pedagogic hierarchies.

The only progressive step of the 1985 Act was to incorporate special education within the general education legislation. In terms of more egalitarian education, the changes introduced reduced the differences between state and private schools, by abolishing the rights of the private schools to choose their books, structure and curriculum, rather than by enhancing the provision of the state schools. They also introduced a new comprehensive secondary school; unfortunately, because of various attitudes that will be described in the following section, and the lack of resources, these schools have had serious operational difficulties, and low numbers of enrolment. In addition, the reshaping of the Panhellenic exams, the entry exams to universities, did not re-balance those inequalities (see: Fragoudaki, 1985, p. 181-201), but changed the locus of education from the lyceum (the last three years of the secondary school) to the cramming centres,

reducing the last three years of education to no more than a preparation for the final exams.

The implications for pupils with specific learning difficulties were mixed. Despite the fact that for the first time in 1985 Act they had legal recognition, explicitly identified as a category within special educational needs which made them eligible for special provision within the 'units of special education', the system adopted did not take into account the cultural characteristics of the Greek education system, and definitely, by retaining the emphasis on book knowledge, did not help those young people. The stress on the final exams, and the homomorphism also had negative effects on children who needed educational material and approaches tailored to their individual needs and experiences.

## **Scotland**

In Scotland, the Conservative ideology placed value on a libertarian notion the individual and competition within the market, something that Riddell and Brown (1994, p. 17) called 'marketisation of education'. The HMI responsible for special educational needs within the SOEID perceived that this was within the general governmental policy, where

there is a general governmental policy which is it to do with giving consumers more say in the services that they receive. And it is the same in education: parents and children are consumers. ... And I think to be fair, most people in education have welcomed it. (My emphasis, quotation from interview, March 1995)

This was a clear indication of the Conservative government's philosophy of the 'marketisation' of public services, with the Parent's Charter and many exercises stressing accountability to consumers.

Interesting, however, despite central UK government's intentions of diminishing the regional authority influence by the introduction of Devolved School Management, in

Scotland the local government power has remained more or less intact. The regional planning officer for special educational needs acknowledged, however, that the regional policy generally followed the

**large picture [which] is the national policy, [and] is suggesting that education is one. And it is promoting support for learning at whatever level. All children have the same requirements for support, and entitlement for support. And it is trying to say that the historical stand that mainstream and special are two types of education should be re-looked at and it should be seen as one. (My emphasis, quotation from interview, May 1995)**

### **Reductions in Resources**

In addition, despite the rhetoric that greater parental power will bring greater parental choice and freedom to all, it seems that only the few made use of appeals committees or even placement requests. Watt (1995) argued that only the

**articulate parents will ensure that resources are gathered around their child's needs. (Watt, 1995)**

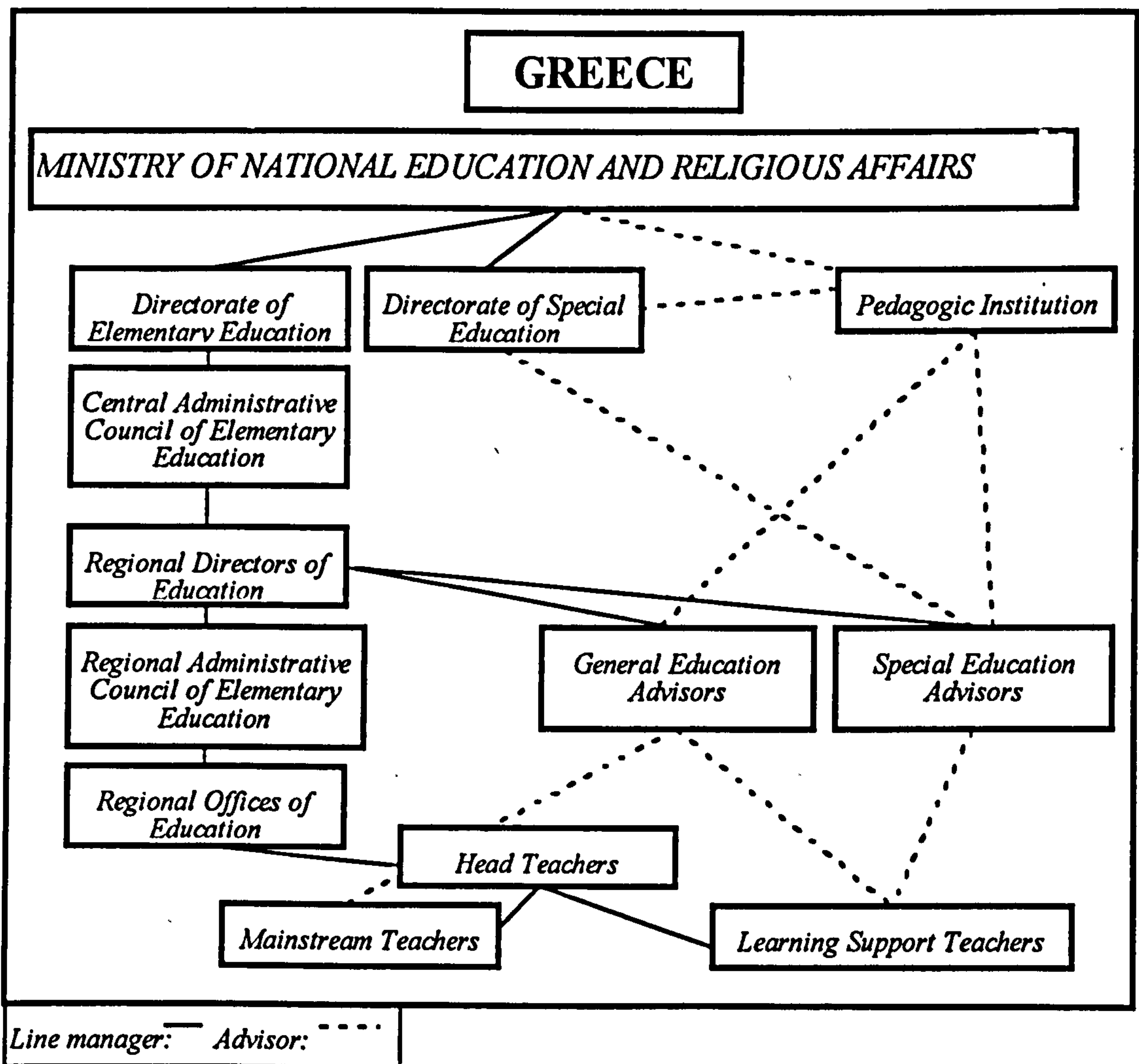
The significance of the marketisation of education in relation to provision for specific learning difficulties becomes clear when one considers the competition among the different 'social actors' in a tightly funded educational system. The allocation of resources is prioritised in the circumstances and fundamental choices have to be made, especially when special provision is expensive and Conservative ideology consistently push for a smaller contribution from the state.

In both countries, but especially in Scotland, there was a tendency to reduce the public spending which led to reductions in real terms in the education expenditure. Characteristic of this was the statement of Margaret Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education and Science in the UK government, suggesting the purpose of setting up the Warnock committee:

to review educational provision ... to consider the most effective use of resources for these purposes. (Warnock, 1978, p. 1)

This, combined with the expansion in both countries of the provision for special educational needs, the increased numbers of pupils who had been identified as having special educational needs and the 'marketisation of education', resulted in greatly

**Figure 4.1: The Greek Educational System**



increased competition for resources. A detailed analysis of the policies regarding specific learning difficulties, however, will be explored in the following chapter.

### *The Educational Systems*

#### **The Greek educational system**

At the time of this research, the provision in Greece for children with special educational needs, including those with specific learning difficulties, was based in 'resource model' approach with the introduction of the special classroom and the learning support teacher. This approach had a distinctively different organisational structure to that in Scotland. The Figure 4.1, on the previous page, outlines the Greek educational system.

At the top of the hierarchy was the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNERA) to which the professionals (all civil servants) were accountable. Within the MNERA were the Directorate of Special Education and the Directorate of Elementary Education. The Director of Elementary Education was the chair of the Central Administrative Council of Elementary Education; the five members council consisted of the Director as head of the Regional Directors, two Regional Directors and two members elected by the teachers. Although the special classrooms were considered units of special education according to the legislation, the administrative responsibility remained with the Director of Elementary Education, as these classes belonged to the primary schools. This created administrative difficulties, as in practice, although the permission for the establishment of 'special classrooms' was granted by the Directorate of Special Education, the staffing was a responsibility of the Directorate of Elementary Education, despite the fact that the learning support teachers had to follow guidelines from the Directorate of Special Education. This duality in the administrative hierarchy caused

bureaucratic confusion when the researcher applied for permission to access the schools (as described in the research design chapter).

The Regional Directors of Primary Education, who had the administrative responsibility for schools, and hence the 'special classrooms', within their area, were the chairs of five member councils, called Regional Administrative Councils of Elementary Education. These Councils consisted of the Director himself (in the region where the research was undertaken, over the last decade all the directors were male and the researcher has not read or heard of any female Director anywhere in Greece; there are no official records), the most senior of the rest of the Officers of Elementary Education, two members elected by the teachers of the region, and finally one member of the local authority who had no voting rights. These regions were sub-divided into Offices. Neither the Regional nor the Office Directors had any policy making power, however. Their responsibilities included the dissemination and implementation of the national policies as they were described in the various circulars issued by the MNERA.

The administrative framework concluded with the School Heads. The only criterion on which the appointments of Regional, Office and School Heads was based was seniority, but as we will see their political stand points were also important. For example, when a new minister of education was appointed to the MNERA, he would normally call for a committee to 'assess' and appoint new officers to the various posts. This committee would be formed by people of close political proximity to the minister who had absolute power to terminate or renew placements in these posts.

The dualism in relation to the Greek special classrooms was not only apparent in the administrative hierarchy, where the polarisation between the Directorates of Special and Elementary Education was evident. In the pedagogic hierarchy, the Pedagogic



Institution, which had a consultative role to the Ministry of Education and was responsible also for the educational research, dominated the national scene. In relation to special education, the Directorate of Special Education had educational influence over the staff (the learning support teachers in the case of specific learning difficulties) through the publication of circulars which disseminated guidelines. At Regional Level, there were the School Advisors who also had only a consultative role in relation to the Regional Directors and a supportive one in relation to the teachers. For special education, however, sixteen Special School Advisors had been appointed for the whole of Greece (the geographical borders of their area of responsibility exceeded the regional borders), and were responsible for supporting the learning support teachers operating in special classrooms within mainstream schools. This was perceived by both the Director of Special Education and the learning support teachers interviewed to be an insufficient number of Advisers given the size of the geographical area. Characteristic of the seriousness of the circumstances was the following statement of one of the advisors of special education:

the issue that concerns me is that in the Greek education there is dualism. Some have the administrative responsibility while others the pure educational, supervising. Things get confused, however, because there are issues that belong to both authorities. We don't have any easy, adaptable and flexible policy regarding these issues. We are inflexible. (interviewed in December 1996)

Another problem arose from the fact that while political proximity to the government together with seniority were the most important criteria for promotion, these criteria did not necessarily imply competence in the assessment of the teachers. The fact that the Education Advisors replaced the Education Inspectors, but without the powers of their predecessors to assess teachers, was related to a current lack of appraisal. Furthermore, in the dual hierarchical system described above, the advisors who gave educational and

pedagogic guidance to mainstream teachers were not the same as those advising the learning support teachers, despite the fact children with specific learning difficulties were taught by both groups of teachers.

The OECD report disseminated in Paris on the 1 and 2 April 1996 noted the common belief that the education system was 'incapable' (OECD, 1996, p. 3) of meeting the hopes and delivering the service that all the stakeholders had aspired to. In this report it was noted:

education is still linked with one extremely legislative, centralised and politicised system based on favouritism, which suppresses any creativity and initiative. ... [seen as] tyranny that goes through all levels of the system in a form of legislative, administrative, structural and pedagogic rigidity. (OECD, 1996, p. 1)

This can be directly linked with the political context described in the previous section. In addition, in the last fifteen years Greece has had, on average, two new Ministers of Education every year, and every change at the top has led to other changes on lower levels. This was indicative of the politicisation of the system, and the lack of a stable national educational policy. Characterising this condition the editor of one of the most respected Sunday papers wrote:

as this newspaper has already noticed on a number of occasions, not only every government of the one or the other party, but every minister has his own plans, so that the country lives in a state of a continuous educational reform. ('To Bema', 1997, p. A2)

The OECD reported that this was considered 'a major obstacle to the operation of the educational system' (OECD, 1996, p. 24) as even at the level of head teacher large numbers were changing every time a governmental change was made.

As will be discussed later in the next chapter, the current Greek education Act (1566/85) incorporated for the first time special education within the mainstream education legislation. Before 1985, the laws ruling special education were separate from

mainstream education. Although, the 1566/85 Act, which introduced the special classrooms, has been characterised as a revolutionary law, the integration of special education within mainstream education in an organisational-structural sense stopped at the legislative level. The administrative and the pedagogic hierarchies, discussed earlier, had two different sub-structures for special and general education, which complicated the system further, and in relation to special classrooms made issues like accountability and assessment more difficult to determine.

The education system in general had not undergone major changes since 1976, other than the adoption of the demotic language as the official language of education. Analytical programmes have been issued by the MNERA, as well as the books which have been common throughout Greece, and published by the Publishing Organisation of Didactic Books (OEDB) in 1982-3 (although subsequent amendments have been made). The OECD report characterised the result of the current degree of centralisation as 'asphyxiating homomorphism' (OECD, 1996, p. 13). It was not surprising, therefore, that all groups of people involved in the provision for children with specific learning difficulties in Greece referred to problems in the curriculum.

### **The Scottish educational system**

In Scotland, the structure of the educational system was different. At a national level, was the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID), formerly known as SOED and SED. However, the power has been divided between central and local government. McPherson and Raab (1988) in their book about educational policy in Scotland, argued that although officially 'public sector education in Scotland is a partnership between central and local government' (Scottish Information Office [SIO], 1984, p. 2), Scottish education is more centralised than a partnership implies.

McPherson and Raab (1988) argued that historically, before the development of the nine Regional authorities (these have now undergone recent, 1996, re-organisation to smaller single tier authorities), the Scottish Office had in place the necessary tools, and had created the subsequent culture that allowed a higher degree of centralisation. Although others had suggested that the power lay fully in the centre, McPherson and Raab contested that in Scotland, being a small country which valued education,

a policy community still functions, in some shape or form, and to some purpose or other. (McPherson and Raab, 1988, p. 493)

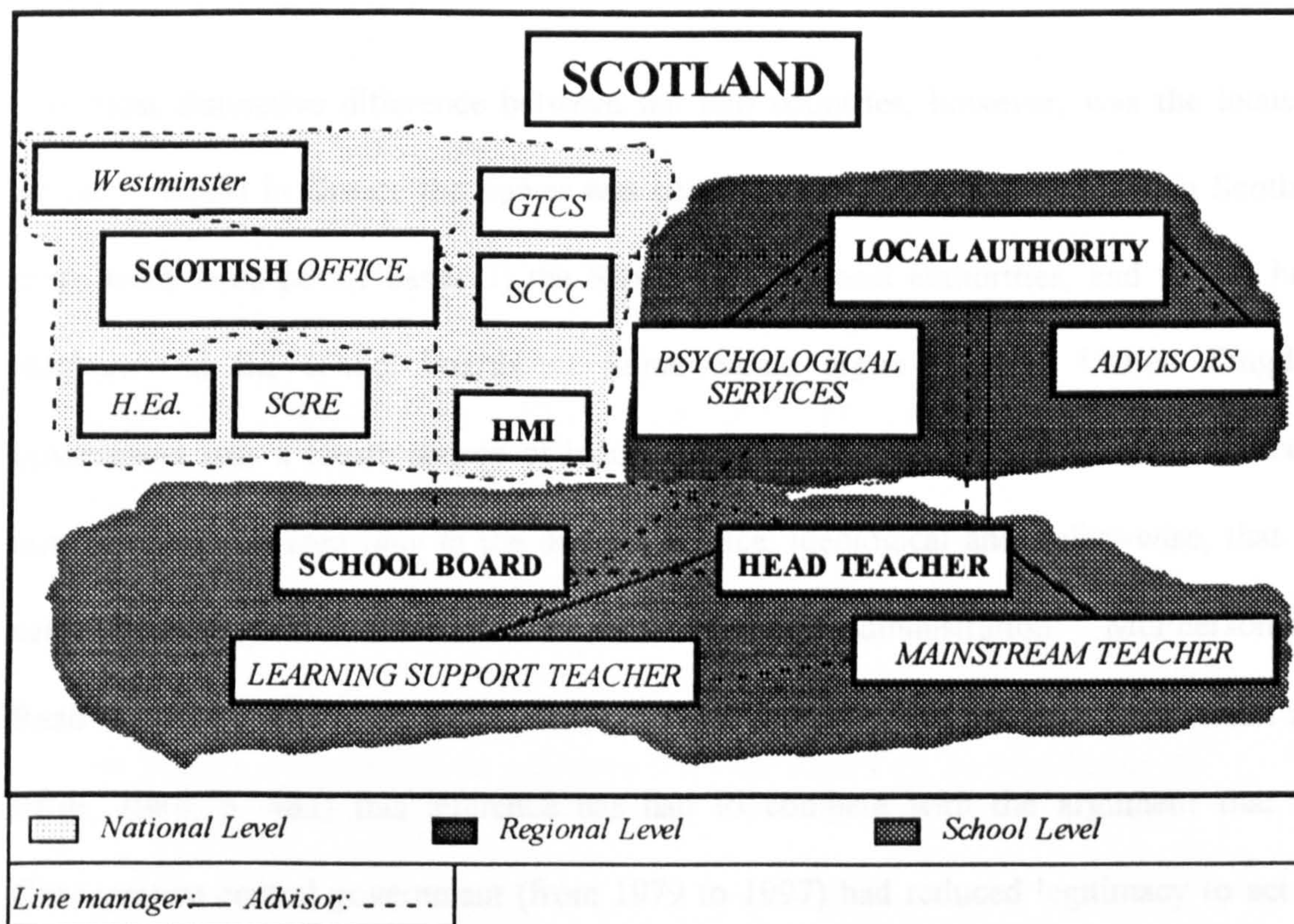
This Scottish policy community has consisted of HMIs, administrators, regional education heads, academics and representatives of pressure groups, which have built a 'familiarity' among themselves, and which have remained relatively autonomous from external influences. This is one of the distinctive characteristics of the Scottish education system, and it is something that has no parallel in Greece.

In Scotland, the local authorities have had responsibility for the schools, and the teachers and head teachers are employed by the local council. The central administration (Scottish Office) has retained the power to give guidance over the curriculum and the standards that the schools should meet, through the agency of the HMIs. Although the central government were providing (rate support) funding to the local authorities, local government has the responsibility for how these funds, and those collected from the Council Tax, were spent.

In addition, there were a number of bodies working in a consultative or advisory role to the SOEID. Of those, the most relevant to primary education were: the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC), the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) and the Scottish Council for Educational Technology (SCET). The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), which has responsibility for

accreditation of teacher education programmes and more generally for teaching standards, is an autonomous body but, in practice, works closely with central and local government. In relation to research, institutions of higher education have played an active role in the generation of educational research ideas. Her Majesty's

**Figure 4.2: The Scottish Educational System**



Inspectorate have the function of inspecting schools; this has constituted a significant role in the accountability of the system. In Greece, the equivalent of this network of agencies was the Pedagogic Institution, apart from the inspection role of the HMIs, a process which has been decreasing in Greece. Figure 4.2 (p. 85) outlines the Scottish education system when this research was conducted (but not applied since April 1996).

The most distinctive difference between the two countries, however, was the locus of power. Whilst in Greece the power was concentrated within the MNERA, in Scotland there were three power bases: i) the SOEID, ii) the local authorities, and iii) the head teachers and the school boards. Some would argue that the United Kingdom government was a fourth source of influence on the educational processes in Scotland, but this could be seen only in the direct influence, ideological and policy-wise, that the central British government has on the central Scottish administration. McPherson and Raab would argue that since the 1970s with the 'nationalist resurgence' (McPherson and Raab, 1988, p. 483) this influence has had to compete with the argument that the Conservative central government (from 1979 to 1997) had reduced legitimacy to act on Scottish educational policy as the number of Conservative MPs and the representation within Scotland was limited (at the most recent UK general election the Conservative government was not re-elected and no Conservative Members of Parliament were returned in Scotland). Hence, the 'relative autonomy of the Scottish policy process' (McPherson and Raab, 1988, p. 483) was left intact, despite the majority in the British Parliament of the Conservative party, throughout the period of most of the research reported here.

During this period the central UK government in Scotland had difficulties with local government, which often led to conflicts; there was a movement to shift power away from the local authorities, towards the centre, which resulted in the delegation of more power to schools. During the last four Conservative governmental periods, the Labour controlled regional authorities (a majority of those in Scotland, none were Conservative controlled) often found themselves opposed to SOEID recommendations. There were two important kinds of innovation, however, with which they had to conform: first, more direct involvement of the central government in the curriculum was achieved through the introduction of initiatives like the 5-14 Programme, and secondly, more devolved power was given to schools and parents by initiatives like the Parents' Charter, School Boards (which had been abolished in 1918 by the local authorities) and Devolved School Management. McPherson and Raab (1988) argued that:

the new and assertive stance of central government can be seen as a move away, not only from the pluralism of partnership, but also from incipiently corporatist attempts to shape the partners' spending priorities to its own ends. These strategies have been replaced by increased central direction of finance, by attempts to constrain the local authority by broadening its accountability locally, and by increasing local 'consumer' choice. (p. 484)

### *Cultural differences*

#### **Culture**

Education is closely linked with culture. Erich Kahler (1965, quoted in Holmes, 1981), doing a lexicological analysis of the word, goes back to the Latin *cultura* and *cultus*, which means cultivation, but carrying more weight than in agriculture. He argued that culture, as the opposite of barbarism ('All non Greek, Barbarous'), implies a 'cultivated man'. Moreover, there was a substantial distinction in the:

turn from the representation of *cultura*, cultivation, as an *activity* (cultivating something, cultivating oneself -*cultivare se ipsum*) to the

concept of *culture as an established condition*, a state of being cultivated.  
(Kahler, 1965, in Holmes, 1981, p. 3)

This was the first turn in the conceptual meaning of the word; the second was the turn from the conception of 'cultivated' condition to the notion of culture as a life style related to one particular nation, and the arguments of the current comparative research is that education should be studied within its culture. Sadler (1902) argued that

the ethos of a nation informed its education system. (in Holmes, 1981, p. 25)

In relation to the specific study described here, two broad cultural issues related to attitudes were relevant to comparisons between Greece and Scotland: first, the attitudes towards disability; secondly, the attitudes towards education and the role of the family. In the following sections these will be explored.

### **The attitudes towards disability**

Xeromerity-Tsaklaganu (1984) referred to 'stigmatisation' as a central problem of the Greek special education. Chronopoulou and Giannopoulos (1989) asked questions concerning

the stance and perceptions of the social whole towards people with physical differences from the 'normal' (Chronopoulou and Giannopoulos, 1989, p. 54).

This basic cultural feature can be explained historically if one investigates thoroughly the development of special education and the attitudes that prevailed during this development. However, at this point I will simply outline the major characteristics of this historical development. Although we do not have any historical evidence in Scotland dating back 2500 years ago, so a comparison is impossible, we know that in ancient Greece, in particular in the case of Sparta, the handicapped babies were thrown to Ceadas gorge. Furthermore, Plato, in *'The Republic'*, wrote about the rightness of the family who hides



and sends away any 'disabled' child (see also, Mastrogiannis, 1957, Panoutsopoulou, 1977, Ajir-Fameli, 1995).

Later in the Greek history, and going towards the Byzantine era, the pattern of equality and support within the communities of the early Christians, changed under the influence of the belief that those who deviated from the 'normal' were the result of Devil forces, and the communal welfare practice turned to philanthropic and charitable actions. With the expansion of the Christianity and the establishment of the Byzantine empire, where the links between Church and State were evident since the head of the Church was the head of the State, the provision for the poor and the 'disabled' moved to a more organised form within monasteries (see Koukoule, 1948). However, the attitudes were very negative and 'disabled' people were not accepted in the society. During the Ottoman occupation, disabled people were seen as means of God testing the faith of their carers, and no change to the attitude as 'second class citizens' occurred (see: Skandalis, 1980).

In 1827, when Greece became an independent state, the priorities were to educate the nation and the provision for disabled children rested within the family. In relation to special provision, Stasinos argued that the first steps were to introduce and create a school-hygiene directorate within the MNERA, to promote health, and to enable 'poor mothers to have their babies delivered without paying fees' (Stasinos, 1991, p. 24).

Only at the beginning of this century did some private initiatives start, driven from 'philanthropic' (Stasinos, 1991, p. 41) and Christian emotions, to care for people with disabilities. Indeed, the role of the Church is still important through its institutions in the provision for disabled people. With the introduction of the Bavarian administration there was a concurrent introduction of the Western European attitudes, and some transfer of power from the family and the church to the medical profession. Ploubidis argued that

the beginning of a middle class concentration in cities, allowed the realisation of innovations by a *medical elite* (Ploubidis, 1987, p. 125). Stasinou noted that on the 7 June 1840 the medical committee decided to carry out a census of the population in order to assess the needs for provision of the 'feeble-minded' (best translation of φρενοβλαβών, which is a derogatory term), but this was not introduced until more than two decades later (Stasinou, 1991, p. 21). However, despite the first steps by the state to provide for people with disabilities, Ploubidis argued that the majority of people with special needs were in their families' care; in addition, there were no children under the age of ten in any state institution, which was indicative of the Greek society of the time which 'did not perceive that children with serious disorders and mental retardation were to be sent to institutions' (Ploubidis, 1987, p. 193). This tendency to 'protect' children with special needs in closed family environment has to be understood in the context of the feeling of guilt and shame in a society where children were perceived as God's gifts, and hence when they were not normal they were some kind of punishment for a sin.

With the introduction of the foreign administration and the enhancement of the trade relationships with the Western Europe, a change of attitudes in Greece has been apparent, despite tragic exceptional cases such as the state in which the 'mental hospital' of Leros island was found only a decade ago. This change was further encouraged by Greek scholars who had studied abroad, something that still happens today. (Indicative is the fact that Greek postgraduates students in the UK ranked first in number with 3.1%, source: Department of Education and Employment, 1995). Among these people were the founders of special education in Greece, like Laskaridou who was trained in the Fröbel method in Germany. However, the attitudes towards disability were very strong

among the people who did not encounter the new ideas. Imvrioti argued in 1939 that in the first special school were pupils who were:

rejected by almost all the schools in which they tried to study, ... [and experienced] the contempt of their classmates and the continuous rejection of their teachers. (Imvrioti, 1939, p. 213)

It can be argued that Greece seemed to follow the same development pattern as Scotland in relation to special education, but with a delay which can be measured in decades. In the following table there is an indication of this pattern by comparing the dates of similar Acts and/or significant milestones.

<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Acts with similar/equivalent content</b>	<b>Greece</b>
1696	Act of settling of Schools	1834
1854	Reformatory and Industrial Schools	1919
1863	Institution for the Education of the Imbecile*	1937
1890	Education of Blind and Deaf-mute Children	1937
1902	Special Class within Mainstream Education*	1984
1906	Education of Defective Children	1937

\*: Indicating a mile-stone, not an Act.

(Data gathered from: i) Stasinou, 1991, p. 294-6; ii) Holmes, 1996, p. 5-12; iii) Royal Commission on Physical Training (Scotland) 1904; and iv) Stirling Observer, 1863, p. 1: col. 2).

In Scotland, during the 19th century there was the first recognition of special education with the opening of the school in Larbert (see Stirling Observer, 1863a, p. 7), seventy four years before the first special school in Greece. Furthermore, at the turn of the century, 'the Christian public of Scotland' (Stirling Observer, 1863), with their 'philanthropic' (Stirling Observer, 1863a) emotions, came under the influential presence of Miss Lilly Montague (Royal Commission on Physical Training, Scotland, 1904) and we see a dramatic change in attitudes with the first class for 'feeble-minded' in a mainstream school. In 1906 we find that almost five percent of the pupils of these special

classes subsequently returned to mainstream classes. Although this percentage was rather small, it gives an indication that integration of children with special needs into mainstream education has a history of 90 years in Scotland. In contrast, the first special classroom within a mainstream school in Greece was founded in the academic year 1983-84. (MNERA, 1994, p. 12.)

### **Current attitudes**

The attitude, and the consequent practices, described above can be still found in rural Greek villages. In 1989 the researcher walking in a narrow lane at a remote village, through semi-closed shutters of an open window, saw an adult with Down's Syndrome hidden from everybody, looking outside through the narrow gap in-between the shutters. Moreover, during the conduct of this research a class teacher said that she had suggested to the mother of a boy with stammering that he should go to the church for help, and the boy was consequently cured.

Greek parents, most strongly but not exclusively, raised during the interviews for this research the issue of attitudes regarding children with specific learning difficulties and others with disability in general. As we will see later, in the chapter about the nature of the difficulties, attitudes was an issue that parents considered important within the Greek context. Parents were concerned about general prejudice towards people with special educational needs as well as the way that these people were perceived and treated by the majority.

These concerns were consistent with remarks made in Scotland by Greeks, usually by students at postgraduate level or their families, asking the researcher 'whether there are more handicapped people in Scotland than in Greece?' They were astonished by the fact

that people in wheel chairs, or those with Down's syndrome, or epileptics, were very often seen in shopping centres, or in restaurants, indicating a higher level of acceptance in the society. In addition to this, they were also surprised when they listened to the signal in pedestrian crossings for the visually impaired, or observed the ramps for the physically handicapped. Again, this demonstrated to them the provision of the state for the disabled, a state which has partially recognised that disability is a social and an environmental issue rather than simply a genetic/medical condition.

The most recent development in the policies as well as the rise of awareness and the abundance of information could be explained by the membership of Greece in the European Community in 1981, and the consequent enhanced levels of communication among ministers and non-governmental officers in all aspects of social and educational sphere. This influence will be examined in the section about policy.

#### **Attitudes towards education and the role of the family**

In Greece, education for generations was seen as the only means of social mobility. The fact that from its foundations the educational system had been influenced by German and other foreign models, had dramatic effects on the ideology, aims and ideals: classicism and the adoption for education of a language that was spoken only by those who had classic education (catharevousa, from catharos meaning clean, pure, same root as in catharsis) were the two most dominant effects. The former, classicism, was evident also at the public meeting in Edinburgh in 1825, where the Scottish people perceived that they must help Greece to develop her education system 'to enable them to regain the knowledge of their forefathers ... be the means of reviving in the Greeks the knowledge of Ancient Greece' (Haldane, 1825, p. 7).

These two elements, along with the examinations at the end of the obligatory education, produced a system with rigid barriers for children from lower social levels; only the upper, and to an extent the middle, class homes could speak the language that had been adopted by the education system. And it was only through education that children of lower classes could learn to speak the language of the aristocracy (land owners) and the gradually developing middle class (evolved around trade). Tsoukalas (1977) argued that since the 1830s in Greek society a strong valuing of education has been observed. This was evident throughout the social classes and still remains a characteristic of the Greece today. For example, the research conducted by Nasiakou in 1977 demonstrated that even mothers in a rural village expected their children to study and to become doctors, solicitors or other professionals. Furthermore, the president of the Pedagogic Institute in a recent interview, revealed, that according to OECD figures,

90% of fathers and 96% of mothers stated that they are willing to sustain whatever sacrifice in order to help their children to study in higher education. (Rouggeri, 1997, p. A48)

In addition, Nasiakou argued that in Greece there was a higher proportion of students in higher education from lower socio-economic groups compared with other countries of similar economic standing, such as Spain. Furthermore, Gizelis et. al. (1990), argued that:

The Greek society gets involved a lot with the educational problems of their children, because education is considered to a great extent the most important means to gain social status and economic prosperity. (Gizelis, et. al., 1990, p. 28)

However, in a society that values education as much as the Greeks do, school failure is considered to be extremely shameful. McPherson and Raab (1988) would have characterised the Greek educational system as 'contest-mobility systems' (p. 42) suggesting that selection is postponed until the final competition, i.e. Panhellenic exams,

at the end of the lyceum. This, together with a belief that the Greek education system provides equal opportunities to all (all of Greece uses the same books, programmes, exercises, exams) and with the current attitudes which prevail about disability, leads to the conclusion that if a child is failing there is an inherent problem within the child. And given the attitudes towards disabilities described above, there is subsequent stigmatisation not only of the child but of the family as a whole. Cases where a child is accepted to a university are celebrated and the family is considered as successful and 'good'; but in cases where the child fails in school the family has to defend its conduct to social scrutiny. These are some of the reasons why Teperoglou (1990) argued that the contemporary Greek family invests solely, emotionally and financially, in education. Katsikas (1994) stated that although the percentage of pupils in private schools is not considered high (7% of the school population, compared with 3.85%, source: Scottish Office, Scottish Abstract of Statistics, 1995), the private expenditure on education has risen. Statistical data (Hellenic Republic, 1995) on the private expenditure on education has indicated an upward tendency despite the fact that the disposable income of the same period was dramatically reduced, and the inflation reached 23%.

According to the latest figures there were more than seven thousand private tuition centres, or cramming schools called *frontistiria*, focusing on teaching foreign languages, and more than 2,500 supporting pupils with their general education, especially as preparatory centres for examinations. It has been noted that 'almost the total number' (Katsikas, 1994, p. 16) of those pupils who sit the Panhellenic results (equivalent to the A Levels exams) attend private tuition. In the '*frontistiria*' in 1994 there were 780,000 pupils studying. To this number has to be added the pupils who have chosen private tuition on a one-to-one basis where the tutor usually visits the child's home, or in small

groups where between two to five children go to the tutor's house for group tuition. The annual turnover of all the tuition centres has been calculated to total 157 billion drachmae (Katsikas, 1994, p. 16), and in addition to this, has to be added the expenses of the complementary books that tutors use. To give an indication of the amount of money spent privately in education (without calculating the fees in private schools) one can compare the above figure with the 1992-1993 public expenditure for primary and secondary education which totalled to 320 billion drachmae (Hellenic Republic, 1995, p. 5). It is clear that on top of the public expenditure the Greek family pays a further 50% of that figure to support their children's education.

In Scotland, however, the situation was different. In the early establishment of an education system, back in the 16th century, there developed the notion of the 'lad o' pairs' (see: McPherson, 1994). This was based to a degree on meritocracy: the idea that boys of ability should have opportunities for educational advancement, regardless of social circumstances. This did not extend, however, to a view that every child should have higher education. As a consequence, in Scotland, there has been very little private cramming, apart from those who are low achievers in the private sector, and the parental educational expenditure has been minimal in the school sector.

The different attitudes towards education as a whole, could also be explained by the different cultural emphasis on work. In a Calvinistic/Protestant culture, work possesses the highest value, and hence, there is not such a distinct difference in the value of different kinds of work. In contrast, in the Orthodox culture, work although important, is not rated as highly. In addition, schooling and training for employment is much more closely linked in Scotland than in Greece, where, as it was argued earlier, the dominant ideal for



the education had been to regenerate the culture and knowledge of ancient Greece: a culture that considered manual work only suitable for the slaves.

### *Summary-Discussion*

In this chapter, the developments of government in Greece and Scotland were described and compared, in order to understand why the Greek educational system has been characterised as centralised, bureaucratic and politicised. Furthermore, the dualisms of the education system in Greece were explored to help in the later analysis of the educational provision.

In relation to the educational system in Scotland, the less centralised system and the operation of a 'policy community' was emphasised, as well as the influence in recent years of the Conservative ideology of 'consumer choice'.

Culture in the two countries was also investigated, in relation to aspects of disability and education, relevant to the research focus on specific learning difficulties. In Greece, attitudes towards disability could be characterised as negative by Western standards, whilst family spending on private schools and tuition, even for primary education, suggests a high priority for children's education in comparison with Scotland.

This contextual material provides the wider framework where children with specific learning difficulties are educated and live, and which exerts certain amount of pressure on them. The contrast between, on the one hand, the Greek system's centralisation and emphasis on book knowledge and, on the other hand, the greater decentralisation and knowledge based on life experiences of the system in Scotland, has consequences that will be investigated further in the chapter about the provision.

## Chapter 5

### The Policy Context

#### *Introduction*

As was argued in Chapter 1, this research is a policy related research. Hence, the policy framework governing the provision for specific learning difficulties must be investigated in both Scotland and Greece, and in the EU. In this section I will explore the constructs regarding policy, analyse the principles of the national policies in the two countries and the EU, investigate the perceptions of policy agents in both national and regional level about the framework and policy of the provision, and then move to the school level (primary), to explore the principles of the policies regarding the provision for children with specific learning difficulties.

#### *Policy and Implementation*

Although a thorough sociological account of what policy is would exceed the scope of this dissertation, it is necessary to provide a brief understanding of what is to count as policy. Policy is commonly defined as a plan for action, or as Finch argued, it can be among other things an:

action designed by government ... for identifying human needs and devising the means of meeting them ... (Finch, 1984, p. 4)

According to this definition, the notion of one policy for specific learning difficulties can be understood as the government acting in a benevolent way towards making provision for this group. However, this concept of policy has been disputed by many, including Finch, as simplistic. Hill and Bramley (1986) argued that this concept of policy is based

on the assumption that only a democratically elected government can form policy, being accountable to the electorate, and that it implies a clear distinction among policy-makers and the administrators who would have the duty to implement the policy. This separation of policy-makers and administrators, serves the purpose of maintaining 'the view that only politicians hold real power' (Tomlinson, 1986, p. 5).

Fulcher (1989) has argued that the social context consists of social actors, who are competing for their own individual or collective needs, having vested interests to satisfy. Policy, then, can be seen as the 'capacity to make decisions and act on them' (Fulcher, 1989, p. 9). In this notion there is no distinction between policy-makers and administrators. Hence, implementation can be seen as 'enacted policy' (Macdonell, 1986).

If one takes Fulcher's definition of policy, it can be seen as being present at various levels; national, regional, school, class or even interpersonal. Hindess argued that 'no level of policy determines policy at other levels' (1986, p. 11). This might be partially true, as 'social actors', the 'street level bureaucrats' (Hudson, 1989) interpret the policy at any level according to their own perceptions, especially when there is a notion of 'vagueness' and 'ambiguity' as suggested by Hill and Bramley (1986). They went on to argue that

actors in the part of the system concerned with implementation frequently operate in ways which create or transform or subvert what might have been regarded as the 'policies' handed down to them. (Hill and Bramley, 1986, p.139)

The position maintained throughout this thesis is that although implementation can be seen as 'enacted policy' by the different 'social actors', and the researcher accepts these concepts as important and hence studies the perceptions that these 'social actors' have regarding policy and provision, there is a distinction between policy and implementation. Clough has argued that the polarisation between policy and practice is a result of the

'natural attitude' (Clough, 1996, p. 130) embedded in our culture, which understands policy as a top-down process filtering down to the various levels. Another reason for maintaining the distinction between policy and implementation is that policy consciously or not provides the framework in which the social actors form relations or iterate their interests. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that national policy has widespread effects on regional policies, nor that regional policy influences school policies, and so on. This is especially true in cases where resources, lines of accountability and disciplinary power are in the hands of the level directly above: teacher to head teacher, head teacher to educational authorities, education authorities to government.

### ***National Policy***

As the locus of this research is the policy and provision for specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece, the policy studied should be related to specific learning difficulties. Although this is the rational argument there is a practical difficulty: that there is no policy as such. As it will be explained in the following sections, mention of specific learning difficulties in written, stated or enacted policy can be found only within that for special educational needs in general. The next section, therefore, starts by investigating the national educational policies in Greece and Scotland which prevail in the general education systems, and moves on to show how within these the sub-systems of special education operate.

### **Constitutional Law and the Right to Education**

It was argued earlier that policy can be found in different levels: national, regional, local, school and/or class. The national policy, however, can be subdivided in the constitutional and the legislative laws. A constitution or the constitutional laws can be perceived as the

foundation of a country's legislation, as well as a declaration of the principles by which the government should govern. The importance of investigating the constitution in a study of children with specific learning difficulties derives from the fact that it can provide the legal basis to which people with specific learning difficulties, or special educational needs more generally, can refer in order to secure their rights. A constitution or the constitutional laws form the basis on which all actions of the state and all the parliamentary Acts, including the Education Acts, should comply.

Greece has a constitution, the current one having been written in 1975. In contrast, in the UK, and consequently in Scotland, there is a debate about whether there is a constitution. Wade and Phillips (1970) argued that by a:

constitution is normally meant a document having a special legal sanctity which sets out the framework and the principal functions of the organs of government of a State and declares the principles governing the operation of those organs. (p. 1)

Whereas constitutional law

means the rules which regulate the structure of the principal organs of government and their relationship to each other, and determine their principal functions. (p. 4)

Constitutional law is the fundamental law with 'a higher law status' (Munro, 1987, p. 4).

It has been argued that due to the fundamental nature of the constitutional law the authority is derived by the people of the country themselves. This is supported by the Wade and Phillips (1970) statement that changes in these laws might be derived by the people directly (as the in case of a referendum for devolution for Scotland, or the abolition of the hereditary head of state in Greece). In contrast, in the case of a simple Act, the authority and the power is derived by the Parliament.

In Greece, Article 16, paragraph 2 of the Constitution states:

Education shall constitute a fundamental objective of the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical instruction of the Greeks, the development of national and religious consciousness and the formation of free and responsible citizens. (Greek Embassy in London, 1975)

Furthermore, paragraph 4 states that:

All Greeks shall have the right to free education in the State schools at all levels. The State shall support outstanding students and those needing support or special protection according to their needs. (Greek Embassy in London, 1975)

Hence, in Greece, all children, including those with SEN and with specific learning difficulties have the constitutional right to free education and they are entitled the appropriate provision according to their needs.

In practice, however, despite the existence of a clear constitutional right to special provision in Greece, parents of children with specific learning difficulties or SEN do not make use of their rights to the same extent that the Scottish parents do. The only safeguard is the Constitutional Court which, independent of the governmental or parliamentary authority, controls whether all the parliamentary Acts are in accordance with the people's will. In Scotland, despite the lack of the same constitutional rights, the implementation of the current parliamentary Act, which gave parents the power to pursue the rights stated in the Act, had major consequences for the number of judicial cases with which parents fought for the rights for special provision for their children.

Trying to understand why these difference occurred in practice, one should go back to the attitudes regarding education in Greece and the introduction of the Education Acts by the Conservatives in Scotland, described in the previous chapter. The prevailing attitudes in Greece forced parents to secure extra resources for their children with specific learning difficulties, not by using their constitutional right for free education according to pupils' needs, but by investing heavily in private tuition or cramming schools. In contrast, in

Scotland, the introduction of the 'marketisation of education' by the Conservative central government offered to those who had the means to use the new conditions (i.e. emphasis on parental power, 'choice and diversity') and opportunities to secure extra resources by using the processes described in the Acts.

### **The Education Acts**

Although the constitutional laws can be seen as the 'fundamental' laws, the parliamentary national laws are extremely significant, as they give the details by which the principles stated within the constitutional laws will be served and protected. Furthermore, in the case of Scotland, where education is not enshrined in constitutional laws, the Acts passed by Parliament gain extra significance as they are called to provide the legal basis of civil rights.

Hence, national policies are important and are established by democratically delegated representatives; they can be altered at a later stage, however, and are variously interpreted by different social actors. This is the case especially in more 'decentralised' administrative frameworks, like that in Scotland, where the reports may form 'guidelines' rather than prescriptions and the Acts permit interpretations by professionals or administrators at various levels. However, in 'centralised' systems, like that of Greece, the 'margins of freedom' are much more restricted.

### *Greece*

In Greece, as we saw earlier, education is a constitutional right. The current education Act, entitled '*Structure and Operation of Elementary and Secondary Education and other Provisions*' (MNERA, 1985, FEK 167/30.9.85 t. A'), defines that the aim of education for the Greeks as to assist in:

the full, balanced and harmonious development of the mental and psycho-physical capabilities of the pupils so as to enable them to evolve, independently of sex and origin, into wholesome personalities and live creative lives. (1566/85, Article 1)

The aim of education in this Act was favourable for children with specific learning difficulties and special educational needs more generally since, it can be argued, it set the purpose of education towards independent and productive living. The discourse it followed, however, remained within the medical/psychological area.

The most relevant chapter of the 1985 Act for specific learning difficulties was the tenth, which was entitled 'Special Education'. As we have mentioned above, it was the first time that special education was seen as part of general education. Special education per se was not defined in the Act, and its nature can only be inferred through its aims.

Special education for 'individuals with special needs' aimed to establish:

- a) the total and effective development of their capabilities and aptitudes;
- b) their integration into the productive process; and
- c) their mutual acceptance within the society. (Article 32, par. 1)

Special education was offered to children with special educational needs and among those were children with specific learning difficulties. In Greece, persons with SEN were considered:

the persons who due to physical, psychological or social causes have delays, disabilities or disorders in their general psychosomatic condition or in specific functions, in such degree that prevents or hinders seriously their attendance in general or vocational training ... (Section 32, par. 2)

These 'persons' were further defined by the use of ten categories, as follows:

- i) the blind and those who have serious visual impairment;
- ii) the deaf and the hard of hearing;
- iii) those who have mobility disorders
- iv) the mentally retarded;
- v) those who exhibit other difficulties in learning (dyslexia, speech disorder and others) or generally are maladjusted;



- vi) those who suffer from psychological illnesses or emotional disturbance;
- vii) epileptics;
- viii) hansenians [leprosy sufferers];
- ix) all those who suffer from chronic diseases and need long-term therapy;
- x) those who can not be included in any of the above categories but exhibit disturbances of their personality.

These categories were a further confirmation of the medical discourse adopted by the Greek legislation, a discourse based on the pathological and psychological criteria in order to determine the different categories. These discourses will be examined further in Chapter 6.

It was made clear by the 1985 Act that specific learning difficulties should be cared for in 'units of special education', as children with specific learning difficulties were seen as belonging to the fifth category, where 'dyslexia' and 'difficulties in learning' were mentioned. In relation to the focus of this study, the education for children with specific learning difficulties, the Act did not refer to them in any other instances. After addressing the structure of the provision, it stated the principles that their provision should entail: first, the integration of children with special educational needs wherever possible; secondly, setting the assessment procedures by means of a multidisciplinary committee, placed in what was called medico-pedagogical centre; and thirdly, emphasising the individuality of every pupil and the need to meet the individual needs.

In addition to the major legislation there were two Presidential Decrees relevant to elementary education and SEN. These Presidential Decrees give general guidelines to teachers and learning support teachers about the way they should assess children with specific learning difficulties (G6/142/14-5-1992; MNERA, 1992a), or the use of the certificates from the Medico-Pedagogical Centres (G6/142/14-5-1992). Furthermore, there was a series of ministerial circulars (G6/142/106/3-4-1992 entitled 'Way of

assessing Pupils with Special Needs: *Pupils with Dyslexia*', or 'Children with Special Educational Needs', G6/344/6-11-1991), which further emphasised the principles that were described above:

the educational policy is based on the principles of equal educational opportunities, of school and social integration of the children with special educational needs, in the framework of social justice, of democracy, of the human rights and generally on the principle of the human value and dignity. These children have the same rights as citizens, but also in accordance with the Article 16 of our Constitution. (MNERA, 1992, p. 27)

The document investigates the characteristics of the dyslexic pupil, something that will be considered in the next chapter, as well as referring to suggested ways of educating and assessing, which will be explored in the chapter on provision. One has to note also the reference to the Constitution.

In addition, to the current legislative framework, the booklet on Special Education published by the MNERA, Directorate of Special Education, included the following international treaties and agreements, which further reiterated the principles of the provision for children with SEN:

United Nations	Declaration on the Rights of Children	20 November '59
United Nations	Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded People	20 December '71
United Nations	Declaration on the Handicapped People	9 December '75
United Nations	Sundberg Declaration on the Disabled People	7 November '81
EEC, Ministers of Education	The Integration of the Disadvantaged Children and Young People to the Mainstream Educational Systems	31 May '90

All these documents showed that the Greek ministry had a clear orientation towards foreign influences, including the EU; the latter's influence will be investigated later in this chapter.

### *Scotland*

In Scotland, as we have seen, there were no constitutional references to education. Hence the rights of the citizens and the duties of the government were defined solely by the parliamentary Acts. The national policy on special educational needs which was developed by Conservative governments or governmental bodies over the last two decades, took mainly the form of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 as amended in 1981 (referred to hereafter Education Act 1981).

In addition, national policy could be seen as characterised in the Warnock and Scottish HMIs' reports (both 1978), which influenced to a great extent the 1981 Act, together with circulars and other documents published by central government. The links between these reports and the Education Act have already been indicated in the references to the introduction of the term 'special educational needs', the abolition of the statutory categories of handicap and the introduction of the notion of a continuum of needs. The other major recommendations of these two 1978 documents were the empowering of parents and the reconstruction of the role of the 'remedial teacher'. The two reports, and especially the Scottish one, criticised the 'resource model' approach with the continuous withdrawal from class of the pupil with SEN, including specific learning difficulties. The HMI put the responsibility for education of the child with special educational needs on to the class teacher rather than the 'remedial' teacher. The latter became the 'learning support teacher' and was expected to change her/his role to one of co-ordinating

resources, consultancy for mainstream teachers and head teachers , and co-operative teaching and assessing pupils.

The Education Act 1981 did not tackle specific learning difficulties specifically; it looked at education for those with special needs in general. The national policy stated that:

it shall be the duty of every education authority to secure that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education (Section 1, par. 1).

Parents' delegation of the education of their children to Parliament had resulted in the 'education authority' becoming the prime authority for their education. Nevertheless, the 'duty' of the authority was to be seen as responding to the right of the individual to education, enhanced by a right to appeal, which will be discussed later. School education was defined as:

progressive education appropriate to the requirements of pupils in attendance at schools, regard being had to the age, ability and aptitude of such pupils, and includes ... provision for special educational needs; (Section 2, par. 5).

This allowed for those implementing this Act to make their own 'value judgements' about who has the ability or the aptitude to go to a specific kind of schooling or training.

One of the major characteristics of the 1981 Act was the abandonment of the nine categories which were present in the previous Education Act. These categories were replaced by the notion of 'a continuum of special educational needs', first introduced in the Warnock and the Scottish HMI Reports (both 1978). However, in the Act special educational needs were those caused by a 'learning difficulty' (Section 1, par. 5). A child in the elementary education age with a 'learning difficulty' was defined if:

- (i) he has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children ...
- (ii) he suffers from a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children ... of his age in schools ... (Section 1, par. 5)

It is important at this point to analyse the terms 'significantly' and 'majority'. 'Significantly' being a vague term permits subjective interpretations according to the interpretation of what constitutes a significant difference. In the same sense, the 'majority' allows the pupil with specific learning difficulties to be compared against a majority which is not defined in the Act, and which can be his/her peers in the same classroom, or the same school or the regional or national average. The implications of this are significant for children with specific learning difficulties, who might be identified as having specific learning difficulties in one classroom but not in another.

'School education' as identified in the Act included special education. Special education in Scotland

means educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children ... of his age in schools ... (Section 1, par. 5)

Furthermore, the Act introduced the 'Records of Needs' (RoN) which could be opened when the multidisciplinary assessment concluded that a pupil had, some kind of special need, which might be a specific learning difficulty, which could not be accommodated by the mainstream teacher. The emphasis of the RoN was on the necessary educational provision that such a child should receive. However, despite the empowering of parents suggested by the reports, the Act gave them the right to appeal on several issues, but not on the Part V of the RoN which referred to the educational provision for their child.

The education authorities had, according to the Act, the duty to meet the needs of the child with a RoN. For children with specific learning difficulties, however, this was received with mixed feelings. The statutory nature of the RoN suggested that education authorities might be reluctant to open such a record at a time of constrained resources. Another document which contributed to this concern was the 1995 HMI report which,

although it recognised that 20% of the children age from 2 to 18 may face difficulties in their schooling, suggested that only 'between 1% and 2%' (SOED, 1995, p. 8) of the population will require an opening of a RoN. According to this report the majority of children with learning difficulties, including specific learning difficulties,

which respond to measures, such as through the assistance of a learning support specialist and/or some curricular adaptation. (SOED, 1995, p. 8)

This raises the question whether the introduction of the RoN assisted the children with specific learning difficulties, or the Act was oriented more towards 'pronounced' difficulties. The issues of the understanding of specific learning difficulties in relation to special educational needs more generally, and the required provision will be investigated thoroughly in later chapters.

An additional issue that evolved in the Scottish national policy in relation to SEN and specific learning difficulties was the 5-14 curriculum guidelines (hereafter referred to as the 5-14). Although in Scotland, unlike England, the central government did not use statutory measures to compel the regional authorities and the schools to follow these recommendations, the 5-14 was comprehensively adopted by the schools. Furthermore, the more flexible and subtle approach of 'recommendations' probably resulted in less resistance among the Scottish teachers than among their English counterparts. The root of this success was the introduction of the 5-14 programme as being the 'best practice' identified in the Scottish schools by the HMIs, who had also the responsibility of inspecting the quality and standards of education in all the schools. Looking at the policy documents associated with the 5-14 curriculum, it is clear that they had moved away from a strict adherence to the 'continuum of needs' that the HMI's Report (1978) had identified and the Act adopted, and identified groups of pupils with different special educational needs; i.e. 'abler pupils, sensory impairment, slow learner, emotional

behaviour difficulties, illness, physical disability, specific learning difficulties' (SCCC, 1994, p. 6). Furthermore the following significant points were also raised by the document:

- i) the principle of one curriculum for all, being 'sufficiently flexible' (SCCC, 1994, p. 4);
- ii) the principles of balance, coherence, continuity and progression, the latter being probably the most important, which underpin all the 5-14 programme;
- iii) the role of assessment focusing on the strengths of the individual with SEN;
- iv) the need to have common learning outcomes set but different strands and steps or 'attainment outcomes' (SCCC, 1994, p. 15);
- v) the key strategies for meeting the curricular needs of pupils with SEN were seen as differentiation, individualisation, adaptation, enhancement and elaboration.

Moreover, the document made references for a 'partnership' with the parents. It was the first document that stated that teachers and parents could have a say about the content as well as the method of teaching. Curriculum is a major element of provision, and will be investigated later, along with the perceptions of parents and teachers about its introduction and the consequences it has had for children with specific learning difficulties.

The Conservative central government in Scotland introduced a policy document entitled *Devolved School Management: Guidelines for Progress* (SOED, 1992) which gave further autonomy to the schools by allowing them to manage more of their own allocated funds. This move to reduce the regions' authority and power in favour of the schools raised questions about the economy of scale, the size of schools and the resources available to them as they endeavoured to provide for children with special educational needs.

Greater emphasis on parental influence was recognised in part II of the Education Act 1981 with the recognition of the right to appeal, and the right of parents to make a placement request. In the SOED (1994) draft circular, entitled *Children and Young Persons with Special Educational Needs: Assessment and Recording Services*, although that education authorities were encouraged to involve parents, and the authorities should help the parents to 'articulate their views' (SOED, 1994, p. 15),

that, however, does not mean that because they have asked for, and received, the views of parents, education authorities are, having given such views full and sympathetic consideration, necessarily bound to accept them. (my emphasis, SOED, 1994, p. 11)

The latest HMI report on SEN (SOED, 1995), although reiterating the principles and the convictions of the previous documents and Acts, made a clear shift towards a priority of the management of the provision and the resources. The focus of the document has become the word 'effective'. This document has described the ideal provision as construed by the HMIs, and will be examined in the chapter about provision. Nevertheless, the importance of a shift towards 'managerialism' (Humes, 1994, p. 179) is important in a policy sense, as it implies that administrators are not politically active social actors, but simple objective, ideology free managers. The implication of this for children with specific learning difficulties, especially if one looks at it along with the previous point about the parents, is significant as greater parental involvement and power over managers can be seen as confrontational.

### ***Regional Policy***

As explained in the section about the educational context, Greece has no Regional policy, nor school policy in any other sense than the enacted policy of the teachers and head teachers. Hence, it was not surprising that one regional special educational advisor



stated that the national policy of his region was the policy outlined in the Education Act and the Presidential Decree 603. Statements along the same lines were the norm in the state schools, and only the private school's head teacher suggested that although they did not have a written policy, they were looking abroad for ideas; these will be discussed in the chapter about the provision.

In Scotland, the case was different, as implied in the previous section. The region where the research took place had published a document entitled 'A Policy for Special Educational Needs Provision: Consultation Document' (Education Service, October 1993). The advocated principles were:

- i) that all children should share the same educational aims;
- ii) all children have the same right to education;
- iii) the region emphasised the education in the least restrictive environment providing a range of services;
- iv) integration: locational, social and functional (curricular) where possible.

There was, however, a distinct difference from the national Scottish policy. The regional document identified eight 'areas of special educational provision' (par. 1.2). Although these were not areas of difficulties which would directly imply the categories removed by the previous education Act, it can be argued that the region accepted, even if only for practical reasons, the use of sub-divisions of the 'continuum of needs' adopted by the national policy. It can be argued, therefore, that in the perceptions of the professionals of the region, the continuum of special educational needs never fully replaced the notion of categories. It has to be noted however, that the influence of the reports and the 1980 Act was to focus attention on individual needs and on the provision, rather than on the symptoms or the causation of the learning difficulties. In relation to the focus of this research, the term 'specific learning difficulties (dyslexia)' (Education Service, 1993, p. 5)

was used. This issue, however, will be discussed in the following chapter. The principles of the provision within the region were identified as:

- the right of all children and young people to be educated in the least restricted environment possible ... (par. 2.1)
- the principles of social justice and equality of opportunity for all individuals. (par. 2.2)
- the move towards increased integration of children with special needs ... (par. 2.3)
- the principle of 'closeness to the customer'. (par. 2.4)
- the principle of locality and of the partnership between professionals and parents (Education Service, 1993, pp. 1-2)

This regional policy document also referred to the types of integration and of provision, the management of resources and the 'balanced and relevant curriculum' (Education Service, 1993, appendix 4) and made the following recommendations for specific learning difficulties:

- early assessment;
- increased number of primary learning support teachers;
- extended learning support in secondary schools;
- enhanced staff development to increase awareness;
- dissemination of information to head teachers and parents. (Education Service, 1993, appendix 5g)

The regional document did not deviate a great deal from the national policy, in its principles and recommended practices. The two elements which were distinctively different, however, were the formation by the region of eight sub-groups to study eight areas of special educational needs, and the principle of the least restrictive environment. In addition, the region had adopted the practice of 'designated schools', i.e. schools that were selected and provided with extra resources, human and material, to provide for SEN. This brought some centralisation of resources to allow the economies of scale to operate successfully, but it can also be argued that it acted counter to the localised

provision that the national policy envisaged. During the conduct of this research this regional document and the regional policy was under review. This review arose from two factors: i) the reorganisation of the region as a result of changes in Scotland local government structure, and ii) the emphasis that the Conservative central government put on local accountability and parental choice.

### *School Policy*

In Greece schools were not required and indeed did not have policies in any area, including SEN. The head teachers in the state schools referred to the national policies, as their own policy. Characteristic of these circumstances was the following statement:

We follow the guidelines of our superiors. The regional and the municipal authorities are not our superiors. If they want to put something in the school they can do that through our superiors. ... Through the Offices, the 3 Offices, the Regional Directorates, the Directorate of Primary Education, or the Ministry. (Head teacher 2, interviewed in November 1995)

However, although the national policy was supposed to be the school's policy, in reality, as we shall see in the chapter about the provision, both teachers and head teachers had difficulties in identifying the national policy regarding SEN, because, as one head teacher put it:

we have to look at the national level, but we do not have the opportunities to get informed because of the lack of communication. (ht. 1, interviewed in October 1995)

A slightly different picture was outlined in the private Greek school. Like the state schools, this school did not have written policies for SEN. However, the head teacher indicated that all the policies of the school were under review in a 'transitional period'. This review had been initiated by the conference entitled 'Vision 2020: the [school] in a new era' which examined and evaluated all the school's policies as well as the changing nature of its context, both in a local as well as an international perspective. One of the

final recommendations of the discussions on the area of the hidden agenda of the school, was to introduce:

Special provision for the pupils with individual needs (e.g. very high IQ or learning difficulties). (Educational Foundation, 1994, p. 43)

The reference to learning difficulties was important, since the Greek education system is recognised as one which de-emphasises the pedagogic role of the school in favour of an over-emphasised knowledge-based didactic role. The recommendations also referred to changes in the management structures, the curriculum and the adoption of materials and methods; all of these were elements of the education provision which potentially had implications for children with specific learning difficulties in that school.

In Scotland, the national policy (see HM Inspectors of Schools, 1988, or SOED, 1994) 'recommended' that schools should have clear policy statements regarding special educational needs and learning support. The five Scottish schools involved in this research all had policy statements on Learning Support. Since the research was conducted in a transitional period, however, their policies were under review and two schools were reluctant to make their policies available to the research.

From those three schools which did make their policies available, one was in the private sector and two in the state sector. The state schools' policy acknowledged that there was a

- wide range of ability within any one class; that
- also teachers require support; and that
- parents [have] a role to play in meeting their child's needs. (School's Policy, 1993, p. 1)

The learning support provision aimed, in both schools, to cater children who would be more or less able, or who would have 'short-term' difficulties. Emphasis was put on early identification, on the individuality of needs and 'realistic, manageable and enriching'

work. The provision was based on a 'co-operative, flexible whole-school approach', which allowed for consultation time among teachers and the learning support department, and liaison with agencies outwith school.

The private school's policy was distinctively different. The language used and the concepts implied were different in terms of suggesting a different kind or range of difficulties with which the learning support department would have to be concerned. The title of the document was '*Learning Support: Unlocking Potential*' which immediately referred to a specific discourse about specific learning difficulties, i.e. that of the dyslexia lobby. The main areas that were emphasised in this document were the belief in everyone's potential, the need to promote the self-esteem through praise and encouragement, and the strong assertion that the key of successful provision is communication. Their policy document made references to the 5-14 as it was produced more recently than those of the state schools.

The state schools' policies did not differ markedly from the regional policy since they followed the same principles of learning support as part of their provision for special educational needs, including specific learning difficulties. The distinctive difference could be found in the contrast between the regional and the private school policy; the latter took the view point of the dyslexia lobby.

### ***European Union and Education***

Scotland, as part of the UK, and Greece are countries which both belong in the European Union (EU). For this research, it was important to understand how and to what degree the EU has influenced the educational systems of the two Member States (MS), focusing in particular on the areas of disability and specific learning difficulties. In this section,

after a brief look at the EU, we will see the evolution of EU intervention in education, from the early years of the European Economic Community (EEC) to the Maastricht Treaty and beyond. Further, I will look at the influence of EU in the area of disability and the HELIOS programme, where education and disability meet. Finally, I will discuss the issue of harmonisation of policies, and the perceptions that the people involved in this study had about the EU role in the policy process.

### **European Union: the General Context**

The EU is an Economic and Political Union of 'the High Contracting Parties', which compose fifteen countries: Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Denmark, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, and Sweden.

The most important task of the Union, according to the Maastricht Treaty (11 December 1991), is to 'organise, in a manner demonstrating consistency and solidarity, relations between the Member States and between their peoples.' The Treaty itself 'marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen.' (Council of European Communities, 1991, Article A).

The objectives of the Union are:

- to promote economic and social progress ...
- to assert its identity on the international scene, ...
- to strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of the nationals of its Member States through the introduction of a citizenship of the Union;
- to develop close co-operation on justice and home affairs;
- to maintain in full the *acquis communautaire* and build on it ... (The Treaty, Article B, my emphasis)

The aim of the EU to promote social as well as economic progress provided a distinctive difference from the Treaty of Rome, agreed earlier by the European Economic Community, which aimed to address only economic matters. The link between economic and social progress derives from the argument that education can feed the economy with the necessary skills to enhance productivity and output. This argument has received momentum in a changing environment with the introduction of new technologies and the globalisation of the markets, and governmental responses to these changes have been criticised as slow by business people. The fact, however, that social rights and interests now take the same priority as economic progress can be seen as progress in social solidarity towards the weaker members of the society. In addition, the introduction of the 'citizenship of the Union' and the 'close co-operation' on home affairs also make references towards solidarity of the economically weaker member states in order to eliminate distinctive differences among them. However, according to the Treaty, this can be only achieved if economic co-operation is linked with collaboration in areas which in past were considered as solely in the hands of the MS. For the first time in the history of Europe there is an acknowledged importance ascribed to social aspects. Jacques Delors's, previous president of the European Commission, statement illustrated this further:

The creation of a vast economic area, based on the market and business co-operation, is inconceivable -I would say unattainable- without some harmonisation of social legislation. Our ultimate aim must be the creation of a European social area. (Commission of the European Communities, 1986, p. 12)

The 'social area' consists of social policy, health, vocational training and youth, and for the first time since the foundation of the EEC, education and culture.

## **Education in the Legislation: the Beginning**

Turning now to the evolution of education within the EU policies, since the foundation of the EEC, we find in the Treaty of Rome (1957) article 128 (Council of the EEC, 1957, quoted in Barnard, 1992) the first reference in European legislation to education. However, the article identified only vocational training, and not education as a whole. The evident assumption was that through training the economies of countries will flourish. It reads:

The Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and on the common market.

The only reference to general education (in contrast to vocational) was found on the education for migrant children. Regulation 1612 of 1968 (Council of the European Communities, 1968) stated that children of non-national workers should have the right to attend 'general educational, apprenticeship and vocational training courses'. Barnard (1992) argued that

Traditionally, education has been regarded as a matter which falls exclusively within the competence of the Member states. (p. 123)

Furthermore, it was not surprising that even this reference to general education in 1968 was found in a 'soft law', i.e. only a regulation, and nine years had to pass before a Directive, a piece of 'hard law', appeared in 1977, laying down certain details on the education of migrant workers. Barnard supported the argument that UK has been proved to be one of the countries that fiercely fought against the extension of the European competence to education.



## **The Turning Point: the Gravier Case**

The turning point in the evolution of EEC participation in education was the Case 129 in the European Court of Justice in 1983 (European Court of Justice, 1985). In Gravier vs. City of Liege, the Court defined vocational training as:

any form of education which prepares for a qualification for a particular profession, trade or employment or which provides the necessary training and skills for such a profession, trade or employment ... whatever the age and the level of training of the pupils or students, and even if the training programme includes an element of general education. (European Court of Justice, 1985)

This decision was the start of the snowball effect for the development that came after 1983, when EEC took a much more active role in education. Fogg and Jones (1985) argued that 'the ripples out into the educational world that have been caused by this judgement have only just started' (p. 295). A year later, the court acknowledged (European Court of Justice, 1989, Blaizot case: 24/86) that vocational training could be received in universities.

## **The Recent Developments**

Currently, we are in the era of the EU, in contrast with the EEC. The change of the name indicates the different intentions and a change in the objectives, presented above. The change was formally presented in the Maastricht Treaty, signed on 11 December 1991, and came into force on the 1 of January 1993.

For education, the 'Treaty on European Union' was a major step forward, 'a landmark' (HELIOS II, 1995, p. 140). The Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome (presented above) was replaced in Chapter 3, entitled 'Education, vocational training and youth'. It can be argued that although the impact of the provision described in these articles was rather

limited, their real importance lay in their existence, which put pressure to the Communities to pursue the policy outlined by the Maastricht Treaty.

The policy was 'sketched' by the article 126, which read:

1. The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their actions, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity. (my emphasis)

This article differed from the one that it replaced in that it acknowledged 'education' as a whole, instead of just vocational education. This was considered a major step forward as 'the European Union Treaty had at least now provided education with a clear legal basis.' (Barnard, 1992, p. 127)

The European Union Treaty had the following objectives in relation to education:

2. Community action shall be aimed at:
  - developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States;
  - encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;
  - promoting co-operation between educational establishments;
  - developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States;
  - encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors;
  - encouraging the development of distance education.

These aims were not new for the Union. They were present in the past as secondary aims of the social policy. With the Maastricht treaty they became primary aims, in a document of major importance. In the future it seemed that the Community 'might contribute to the development of quality education as part of its new responsibilities and in a manner which complements Member States' activities.' (Commission of the European

Communities, p. 97), not so much in content matters, as these will always remain in the competence of the MS, but on issues more 'neutral' such as disability and special educational needs. These, however, will be examined in the chapter about the nature of special educational needs and specific learning difficulties.

### **Principles of Integration and Special Education According to HELIOS**

The annual conclusions of the HELIOS programme for 1994, published in June 1995, gave very clear ideas and concepts regarding integration, and special education in general. Despite the fact that the EU would argue that this was a report produced by the Commission, the content was the outcome of the working groups formed by members appointed directly from the MS, and had no legislative power; it was not even a recommendation, far less a directive.

However, the report was of major importance, since it gave a very succinct presentation of specific issues of special education, which have implications for the education of pupils with specific learning difficulties.

The objective of the HELIOS programme 'is to integrate the children, the student with the special educational need in the mainstream education.' Integration was construed as

a positive relationship between individuals and their physical and social environment. It allows disabled people to develop their potential and to contribute to the development of a non-discriminatory society in which they can be perceived as and consider themselves as full and equal citizens. (Lamoral, 1995, p. 140)

Moreover, equal opportunity was perceived as:

the process by which the different systems in society and the environment ... are made accessible to all. (Lamoral, 1995, p. 140)

These are the main aims and the underlined principles of the HELIOS programme, as defined in their latest publication. To achieve the objective the team of experts, in co-

operation with the working groups which were dealing with specific topics, investigated several key issues for successful integration. Several factors were identified, on which our attention will be focused.

**National policy on integration:** The impact of the existence of a national policy on integration was obvious to the working groups. The working group responsible for the pre-school and primary education emphasised the 'impact of legal texts' and saw the advantages of an overall educational system which takes integration in schools into account:

The implementation of integration ... depends greatly on legislation on education ... [but] is not sufficient and it must absolutely be accompanied by good practice. (HELIOS, 1995, p. 148)

The latter was perceived as accepting the child as a whole person, empowering parents in the decisions taken and working towards the change of the current attitudes.

A further point arising was the need for **co-operation and partnership**, as 'communication appeared to be the cornerstone of all partnership actions'. This should be based on synergy, constant contact, interdisciplinary teams, flexibility, and mobility.

The last element for the successful integration was seen to be the **training of the professionals.**; training which must include

reflection on educational projects, the school philosophy, integration projects; training as a team, ... interpersonal relations; ... innovation in teaching and new technologies. (HELIOS, 1995, p. 149)

The work groups dealing with the pedagogical prerequisites of integration, suggested that to have successful integration the policies should be based on an '**approach to diversity**'.

Moreover, key items were considered as:

- the adaptation of the curriculum;

- the implementation of Individualised Educational Project (IEP);
- the reorganisation of the school system;
- partnership with parents, where parents should be employed as equal partners with shared responsibility;
- the diagnostics where the role of the teacher is emphasised, and its aim should be 'how to support the child?';
- the changing role of the specialist; and
- the raising of the awareness of the teachers and parents.

These principles were shared by the Scottish HMI and the Greek Director of Special Education. As we saw earlier, the Greek counterpart was more likely to adopt these recommendations than his Scottish colleague. However, one has to notice that the similarity of the principles to the Scottish ones, raising an interesting issue that needs exploration: whether the British delegation has influenced the EU perspective or vice versa. If we take the dates of publications of major policy documents it is clear that the British preceded the EU.

### **Harmonisation of Policies**

Having investigated the principles as seen from the standpoint of HELIOS team of experts, regarding special education in general, I will now examine the problematic area of harmonisation of the policies.

We have seen the article of the Maastricht Treaty, which remains extremely cautious in order not to overrule the traditional stance of the EEC, i.e. that education lies within the competence of the MS. In the article it was very clear that the MS retain that

responsibility and that the Union will complement their actions. This was further stressed by paragraph 4 of the article, as well as the one referring to vocational training (127). The view that the major role in education lies in the hands of the national governments was emphatically supported, and the Council was seen as:

- acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189b, after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt incentive measure, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States;

The report for 1995 of the HELIOS programme suggested that the EU with the Maastricht Treaty 'has entered school and now concerns all levels of education'. Soriano and Henningsen (1995), however, supported the idea that

The purpose of the Community action will not be to harmonise educational systems but to support their action while respecting their diversity and to achieve economies of scale for actions on a European level which cannot be ensured at national level. (p. 142)

Moreover, in the interview in Brussels, the expert of the HELIOS team emphatically took the official EU line, suggesting that

it is never a question that the commission will say to the MS you should do it this way; ... We [will] never at all have the same curricula, the same system of teacher's training, the same system of education. ... Its a question of subsidiarity. (interviewed in January 1995)

Although this remained the official view, in answering a different question about the role of the HELIOS programme, she accepted that

if we can transfer practices it would be perfect as a principle. (interviewed in January 1995)

Although falling short of this aspiration, the exchanges of information and experiences which the HELIOS organised, promoted a better understanding of educational systems, provided a forum for reflection at European level and emphasised good practices and their dissemination throughout Europe, improving the transparency among the different educational systems. Moreover, as Lamoral (1995) put it

One of the essential aspects of the work undertaken in this field by the partners appointed by governments is to ensure the transfer of results at national and local level and to the public in general. (p. 140)

This is clearly along the same lines with the perception of the HMI in Scotland, who suggested that the EU exchanges for:

the next 5-6 years are going to see an awareness of what is happening in other countries. And when we pass that awareness that will start to filter through to what we do ourselves. (interviewed in March 1995)

In addition, in Athens, the Director said that

we look for common solutions in the common problems. (interviewed in December 1994)

Hence, one can foresee an implied, subtle notion of harmonisation in the HELIOS expert statement about the 'transfer of practices', which is also present strongly in Greece with the 'common solutions', and less so in Scotland with the 'filter through' approach.

### **The EU as Perceived from the MS**

Having investigated the evolution of education within the EEC and the EU, I will now move to see how the EU role was perceived by the Director of Special Education in Greece and the HMI responsible for Special Educational Needs in Scotland.

#### *National Level*

Investigating the context in which the Greek official responded, it is important to note that Greece as a whole had been more pro-European than UK. For example, apart from the small minority of the Greek Communist Party which abstained the vote in the Parliament, the Maastricht Treaty was ratified by all other parties, consolidating a total of 96% of the votes; this reflected the views of the Greek people in general. In Britain, the Euro-skeptics on the political right managed to threaten the Conservative government and to sustain an uncertain political environment (e.g. the removal of the party whip of the 9

Euro-skeptics who were also seen as one of the major reasons for the election defeat). Furthermore, the votes in Parliament on Europe were decided with close margins, a constant petition for a referendum on Europe has continued and in the press there have been constant anti-Europe comments on various issues. In Scotland, however, both the Labour Party and the SNP, the two biggest parties, gave greater support to the EU, which brings Scotland and Greece closer in their regard of Europe.

The Director of Special Education in the Greek Ministry of Education characterised the European role in influencing the Greek policy formation, as 'a very important role' (interviewed in December 1995). Furthermore, in his written introduction to the Annual Information Booklet of Special Education (MNERA, 1994), he noted:

However, our country, as a member of the EU, has the duty, the right and a national interest, to provide for its citizens, as we all are European citizens as well, all the educational opportunities which are supported and organised by the EU, in all levels of general or vocational education (Maastricht Treaty, articles 126 and 127). (MNERA, 1994, p. 11)

The same booklet, which was distributed to all schools and all interested parties, included the whole EU document on integration of children with special educational needs in mainstream education (87/C 211/01). The climate which had been created at the European level was described by the Director in Greece as 'non competitive and supportive' (December 1994).

The HMI responsible for Special Educational Needs in Scotland, although not recognising any EU policies as influencing Scottish policies for specific learning difficulties, emphatically accepted the influence when it came to special educational needs in general:

'Oh, absolutely yes, absolutely'. However, he suggested that

at the moment [it] is early days. ... We are not all of us, people in special educational needs, all clear, ... what other policies there are in other European Countries. (interviewed in March 1995)



But, he recognised a 'drift' towards integration, and a trend to share and co-operate more with the other EU partners. In addition, he accepted that 'we used Europe, if you like, almost as a stimulus for change.'

In Brussels, a member of the task force for education within the HELIOS programme noted that the HELIOS programme 'is the only one dealing with disability' and specific learning difficulties are incorporated in it 'because we have a sector which is called education [and] the learning difficulties are in'. She perceived the EU role as limited to

exchange [of] information and experiences ... We are working with and we promote exchanges among the people of the MS, on the different sectors, on the different levels. (interviewed in January 1995)

A situation had been created where the EU tried to keep a low profile and officers saw themselves as just promoting co-operation and exchange, whilst in Scotland their role was perceived as 'stimulus for change' and in Greece as 'very important' in the formation of the policies.

### *Regional Level*

The regional head of special education in Greece, was the Special Advisor, as we have seen earlier. He suggested that EU role in forming the policy, especially for the future, was significant and brought about through the involvement of Greece in the HELIOS programme. He perceived that although Greece was 'behind' in policy and provision for SEN,

what the Europeans are giving us today ... is their history, their experiences, so that these could lead us to the right track. Furthermore, we can learn from their mistakes and avoid them, so that we could reach them soon. (interviewed December 1996)

However, he also perceived that this 'track' was facing resistance in the implementation due to 'lack of will from the MNERA ... and things get stuck in the bureaucratic and political wheels.'

In Scotland, the views were completely different. The newly appointed SEN regional advisor did not know of any European initiatives and she could not comment on any European question. However, during the piloting of the interview schedule with her predecessor, it was made clear that the region was in contact with the EU, as one of the advisors was on an educational visit to another EU country, and 'we are conscious that there are things out there'. He argued that the EU has influenced Scotland but

not at great extent as yet. ... I think if you went to a member of staff or a related member, they would not be aware of any European influence. (interviewed in December 1994)

#### *At School Level*

In Greece, head teachers had varying views regarding the role of the European Union in forming the national policies for SEN and specific learning difficulties. The head teacher in the private school suggested that the EU could help financially and

from an attitude point of view. As a state, we have restricted models: ... And I believe, in this context, that Europe will help, with its attitudes. And with the post graduate training which is proved easier to young Greeks, who can go and study abroad or to complete their studies. (ht. 5, interviewed December 1995)

Furthermore, two head teachers noticed that the EU supported various programmes on cultural or immigrant education, but they were not aware of any particular programme in association with specific learning difficulties. Finally, one head teacher argued that the Greek education system had nothing to look for in Europe, as he did not think that

our children, the Greek pupils with specific learning difficulties, are much fewer than in other countries within the EU. Our education system is very good; 90% of the pupils in primary 1 learn to read and write ... I don't

understand why some attack the this education system continuously. (ht. 2, interviewed November 1995)

The teachers' perceptions reflected the differences among the head teachers. The majority took a positive position in relation to the EU as they perceived the European education systems including the provision for SEN and specific learning difficulties as a source of inspiration for change. A learning support teacher suggested that

if we were to take advantage of the experiences and mistakes of the other countries, their research work, we could have developed on their initiatives, like the closing of the special schools, the move towards inclusion, to build quality programmes. But we don't do anything. (lst. 2, interviewed November 1995)

Furthermore, it was perceived that the foreign education systems were more 'organised' and that the learning experiences and materials were tailored for the pupils, an important feature for children with specific learning difficulties. Some teachers perceived that although the EU had a positive role to play

education has its own individualities, basic needs, psycho-synthesis. It needs research, planning, clear goals, resources to succeed. It is the major way to retain the national identity within the European Union. (mt. 45, interviewed December 1995)

A minority of teachers, however, were more reluctant to approve the EU influence and some even rejected it completely; they perceived the EU role as one which could determine the position of Greece as a dependent country, and that a European influence on the Greek education systems would further encourage this outcome. In Scotland, the head teachers' perceptions of the European influence on policy showed different levels of awareness. The most common response was that they were 'not aware' of a EU role on the policy formation in Scotland in national or regional level. Furthermore, they did not have any knowledge of any particular initiatives regarding specific learning difficulties or SEN, and only one head teacher perceived that the EU could bring extra funds to Scottish

education (without, however, being able to indicate how this would be accomplished).

One, nevertheless, suggested that

the European dimension will become more important as we go on. I hope that it does not have any more influence. Because I feel that ... there are huge differences between education systems and I would hate to think that a European parliament or a European bureaucrat was deciding what was going on in Scottish schools. (ht. 7, June 1995)

This view was the most popular among Scottish mainstream teachers and learning support teachers alike. The general perception was that the education system for children with specific learning difficulties, those with SEN or the population more generally, was 'good' and had nothing to gain from an European influence. The only exception were two class teachers who referred to the introduction of foreign languages, as an element of progress prompted by the EU. The general resistance of 'foreign' influence could be best summarised by the following views of a learning support teacher who argued:

I think probably there should be broad principles that should be followed, for instance the rights of the handicapped and the disabled. ... But I suspect that individual countries with their individual cultures will interpret that in slightly different ways. ... Because of the Scottish culture is so much different you could never say this is good in Denmark put in Scotland. (lst. 8, interviewed in February 1996).

The head teacher of the private school continued the same line of argument suggesting that 'anything coming from Brussels that validates our culture and sense of national identity will probably be used; anything too prescriptive won't be.' (ht. 10, interviewed March 1996)

### *Parents' Perceptions*

In Greece, half of the parents interviewed did not contemplate the European Union as a source of influence on national or regional policies, nor they were aware of any initiatives regarding specific learning difficulties. Among those who did, however, the majority had

a positive response to the role that the EU could play in the policy formation, as they argued that

they can take some kind of help, some elements from abroad and bring them to Greece, so that they can make some things. I have not heard if this happens, but I know that the professions associated with special education came from abroad. (m. 54, interviewed December 1995)

The concept that 'abroad' the programmes for children with specific learning difficulties were good was common among the Greek parents. Only one father suggested that the EU would not have a positive influence for the Greek education, as it was focused only on 'money'.

In Scotland, the picture was different. All but one set of parents had nothing to say about the EU influence on the Scottish education system. One who did respond argued against any involvement, as she

wouldn't like to think they would have had anything to do with it, but being in Europe now and everything coming under the European market law there is every chance they will be able to start interfering with education, because they seem to be doing it to everything else. But I wouldn't like to think so because I think Scotland's quite good in their education. (m. 67, interviewed June 1995)

### *Summary - Discussion*

In this chapter the relationship between policy and implementation was investigated. This research maintained the position that between the two there is a difference, as perceived by the people involved in the study. Nevertheless, the arguments for 'enacted policy' have also a significant weight as they stress the importance of the 'social actors' interpretations of the world.

The discussion about the policy concerning specific learning difficulties began by exploring the constitutional laws in the two countries, Scotland and Greece, as the legal basis for securing the rights of people with SEN. It was found, however, that in practice

the attitudes and the general policy circumstances had a much more significant effect than the existence of constitutional rights. Cases of judicial resolutions of conflicts over provision for specific learning difficulties were only present in Scotland, despite the absence of the constitutional right present in Greece, to free education for all.

The principles of the Education Acts in both Scotland and Greece were examined, and found to be characteristically distinctive: the former was based on an educational approach, where the child with specific learning difficulties (or any other SEN) was assessed and provided for according to his/her educational needs; in the Greek Act the assessment was based on the within-child deficits and the provision responded to the ten categories of difficulties. In addition, the Scottish Act had abolished the categories of handicap, whilst the Greek maintained ten categories including one regarding 'learning difficulties (dyslexia)'. In Greece there were no regional or school policies (with the exception of the private school), whereas in Scotland the region and schools had at least outline policy documents. The distinctive element of the Scottish regional policy was the adoption of different sub-groups to investigate eight different areas of SEN, bringing back a degree of categorisation which had been discouraged by the Warnock Report (1978).

In the last section, the evolution of the EU involvement in education was described. The initial point was the interest of the EC in 'vocational training', assuming that training and economic growth were linked. However, in 1983, a very wide definition of 'vocational training' incorporating almost every educational system was adopted. This brought forward the new Article on education, included in the Maastricht Treaty. The Treaty itself was a 'landmark' towards a new era of a social Europe.

In the disability field, the first concern of EEC was for disabled people in terms of employment and mobility, transport and access to buildings. From there it moved to the

HELIOS programme which had a much wider range of action, including handicapped people and those with 'learning difficulties of any kind'.

The different definitions were indicated, although the EU stand was that this was 'a problem ... of titles'. Many (Tomlinson, 1982; Barton, 1988; Brown, Riddell, 1994), however, would argue that there was a political stance behind every term regarding disability or special needs, and the EU ambition for an 'ideology-free' concept was also political.

Further, it was not surprising that the EU initiated its involvement in social and educational matters from the periphery, the sphere of vocational training, and moved gradually towards the one of special education. In addition, the EU has taken the role of an informed 'expert', in order to influence MS policies. In this way it could act as a policy source which was less likely to cause controversy and conflict (see Croll P., and Moses D. (1994). Being an expert-like policy source, the EU could manipulate more easily the conflict between local and central issues. Nevertheless, a struggle for power has arisen from the conflict between on the one hand, 'harmonisation' and centralisation and, on the other hand, diversity and decentralisation. This has eased following official acceptance that education was a local issue for each and every MS.

The fact that the EU allocated 208.2m ECU (£162.4m) funding for school education had changed the balance in EU priorities. The perceptions, however, of the people in all levels, national, regional, and school including parents, regarding the influence of the EU on their education system, and in particular on policy and provision for specific learning difficulties, differed between the two countries. In Greece, the majority welcomed such an influence, and saw in foreign models better organisation, attitudes, programmes, research and resources, although some concern was raised regarding the Greek national

identity. In Scotland, however, with the exception of initiatives that stressed the national identity, there were only voices of concern regarding the 'interference' of the EU in Scottish education.

Throughout this section, from the first legislative articles, to the implementation of the HELIOS programme, the small and cautious steps with which the EU has entered and established itself in the area of disability and education were examined. With its 'soft' and distant approach of an 'expert', in conjunction with the vast resources it possesses, the influence of the EU in these areas may well become greater in the future, especially in Greece, a country previously considered to be lagging others in this area of education. This effect was evident in the recent attempt by the MNERA to pass a parliamentary act based on the principles that were outlined by the HELIOS programme, which were similar to those already present in the Scottish Act.



## **Chapter 6**

# **Perceptions of Specific Learning Difficulties: Literature and Policy Documentation**

### ***Introduction***

In the previous chapter, the principles as well as the context of the policy on specific learning difficulties were investigated. This chapter presents a detailed analysis of how the policy documents construe specific learning difficulties

In the first section, the constructs of specific learning difficulties in the literature in Scotland and Greece are explored. The second section provided an analysis of the policy documents, such as statistics or circulars, which specifically refer to specific learning difficulties, and the constructs embedded in them. The last section discusses how policy agents at national, regional level and EU construe specific learning difficulties.

### ***Specific learning difficulties in the literature***

#### **Approaches and Discourses**

In an attempt to understand better the constructs of specific learning difficulties used by the people involved in this research, the ways in which they refer to disability will be analysed. Fulcher (1989) argued that the discourses used by different social actors serve different vested interests and she pointed out that the most important types of discourses were: medical, charity and rights.

The medical discourse puts emphasis on the individuals' deficits rather than on environmental factors; it implies a dependence on doctors. Fulcher (1989) suggested that the medical discourse had been the dominant one in the area of SEN through the use of terminology such as

body, patient, help, need, cure, rehabilitation, and its politics that the doctor knows best. (p. 27)

In relation to specific learning difficulties this discourse would look for neurological 'abnormalities' as an aetiology, which would require medicinal or other 'cure' (e.g. training of the eye's movement, pharmaceutical therapy), to be provided by 'professionals'. The discourse would also argue that specific learning difficulties form a distinct group of difficulties.

Tomlinson (1982) and Fulcher (1989) have noted that the charity discourse has created a notion of benevolence associated with humanitarian principles, whilst remaining patronising and disempowering. The charity discourse, along with the medical approach, can lead to pupils with specific educational needs being perceived with pity or as 'heroes' in their struggle. In both these discourses the core is the disability, and disability

is used to exclude rather than to include, and to oppress rather than enable. (Fulcher, 1989, p. 24)

In relation to specific learning difficulties the rights discourse can be understood through the language of the Dyslexia lobby, which can be identified by the 'consumer wants' (Fulcher, 1989, p. 30) rather than needs. Under this view, again pupils with specific learning difficulties form a distinct group within special educational needs, who need specialised remedial provision, preferably on a one-to-one basis.

In Greece, the literature regarding specific learning difficulties and SEN in general has not engaged with research which put emphasis on the different discourses used in describing

the area of disability. References to the different approaches and discourses can only be inferred, therefore, and only Stasinou (1993) has noted the distinction between medical/psychological and the educational/social discourses.

Studies in the UK, including Scotland, however, have looked at the different approaches and discourses in SEN and specific learning difficulties. Riddell et al. (1992), studying the Scottish and the UK literature, saw three different approaches in the explanatory frameworks for specific learning difficulties: psychological, psycho-educational and psycho-medical. The influences acting on these approaches derived from the different professions.

The psychological explanatory framework is divided by two conflicting or complementary models. The first of these, based on psycho-linguistics theories of reading and writing acquisition, was characterised by Pumphrey and Reason (1991) as 'top-down'. This model uses whole words as it emphasises the importance of the meaning in the development of reading skills. In contrast, the second model or 'bottom-up' approach, was based on analysing a word on its phonics, hence

decoding written language and stress is placed on the acquisition of pre-reading skills. (Riddell, et al., 1992, p. 9)

A further area of conflict within the psychological approach, which has implications for children with specific learning difficulties and provision for them, relates to whether the pupils with specific learning difficulties have difficulties which are distinctive from other pupils with literacy problems. Characteristic of this debate was the difference of opinion among Bryant and Impey (1986) and Snowling (1985). The former argued that the differences were in the severity of the difficulties and not in the quality, whilst the latter maintained that some pupils may face developmental delays in acquiring reading and writing skills and others may face qualitative differences.

The psycho-educational approach, was based on the psychological stances mentioned above. On the one hand, those who believe in the qualitative differences between pupils with specific learning difficulties and others with literacy problems would argue in favour of a structured teaching method, based on phonics. On the other hand, those who believe that the problem resides in the developmental delays in the acquisition of literacy, would argue for teaching methods applicable to all pupils. This debate has not been resolved and there is no unambiguous, generally accepted, theoretical framework describing the acquisition of literacy on which teaching methods could be based.

Finally, neurologists, speech therapists or occupational therapists have developed various theories about specific learning difficulties, such as those associated with the ophthalmic movements or the sensitivity to the light. However, Pumfrey and Reason (1991) have argued that

to date, the evidence for a neuro-pathological aetiology of specific learning difficulties is not conclusive but is very persuasive. (p. 158)

This research will argue on the same lines and will look at the perceived aetiology of specific learning difficulties by the interviewees only as means to further understand and elaborate their perceptions about the nature of the difficulties. As a teacher, as a parent and as person with specific learning difficulties my main interest is on the understanding of the difficulties and the necessary provision rather than the aetiology.

The three discourses of disability, as well as the three different approaches described above, could easily be seen as polarised on a spectrum which at the one end would be the individual and at the other the social. The medical and charity discourse, with the psycho-medical and psychological perspectives, associates special educational needs, including specific learning difficulties, with characteristics and causes intrinsic to the individual. In contrast, the social model, associated with the rights discourse, sees

factors contributing to disability as being outside the individual in the social surroundings, including the attitudes of others and teaching methods.

### **Specific learning difficulties in Greece**

The point has already been made that educational research in Greece has not been particularly highly developed and, furthermore, the country has a history of adopting models for educational systems, approaches or terms from overseas. Stasinou (1991) argued that there was a definite need to:

clarify the concepts of the term 'learning difficulties', because the prevailing perception among teachers is unclear and vague. (p. 247)

Bablekou (1991) acknowledged that the term 'children with specific learning difficulties' was established in Britain with the 1981 Education Act, and later imported to Greece.

She defined children with specific learning difficulties as those:

who face learning difficulties, despite the fact that their intelligence and cognitive abilities are normal or higher. These difficulties can be found in one or more curricular areas, like reading, writing, spelling, maths and oral language. This group fails due to seemingly unknown causes, as the children do not have any overt neurological, physical, psychological, social or other problems, which could lead to school failure. (Bablekou, 1991, p. 70)

Although this definition was similar to the one prevailing in the Scottish literature, Bablekou (1991) noted that within specific learning difficulties there was a sub-group of difficulties 'specific language difficulties' which included dyslexia, dysphasia, aphasia, dysgraphia and what in Greek is known as dys-spelling (δυσορθογραφία). These conditions, however, are inconsistent with the notion of specific learning difficulties as understood in the quotation above, because all imply a neurological anomaly. Bablekou followed the psycho-medical model prevailing in Greece, and this became more evident in discussion of the aetiology. Alexandrou (1995) in his book entitled 'learning difficulties'

put more emphasis on dyslexia, and referred to all the hereditary syndromes that cause mental retardation and other severe learning difficulties.

Koromelas (1985), however, taking a different approach, acknowledged that children with 'learning difficulties' may be those who

live in isolated rural agricultural areas, deprived or overpopulated city areas, whose mother tongue is idiomatic or foreign minorities, whose parents are illiterate or have low income and whose family environment is socially deprived and culturally poor. (Koromelas, 1985, p. 98)

This approach took a social perspective on learning difficulties, suggesting that they were caused by adverse social conditions. In a special issue of the journal *Σύγχρονη Εκπαίδευση (Contemporary Education)* in 1989 on 'learning difficulties' it was argued that

there are degrees of learning difficulties which their causes can be found in a physical deficiency or what is called 'mental retardation', supposedly measured with 'objective' tests; their consequences spread from the lack of ability to 'integrate' to the simpler forms of school failure, which in the school age take dimensions of a 'massive' phenomenon. (Original punctuation, Chronopoulou, Giannopoulos, 1989, p. 54)

In this quotation there was some evidence of what in Scotland had been called the 'continuum' of needs (i.e., degrees of difficulties), and emphasis was put on 'learning difficulties' without attributing them to causes associated with pathological conditions. However, although the editors made this distinction, the articles included in the journal incorporated approaches varying from language difficulties to mental retardation. The confusion and the lack of understanding of the term 'specific learning difficulties' was further enhanced by the variety of constructs and the different interpretations of the term 'learning difficulties'.

In summary, it can be argued that in Greece there were two attributes to specific learning difficulties: first, these difficulties were associated mainly with dyslexia in the literature

(see Karpathiou et al., 1994, Kourakis, 1996, Katsiou-Zafrana, 1993, Stasinou, 1993); secondly, there was a strong link with the psycho-medical view, evident in the aetiology.

### *Aetiology*

In trying to define specific learning difficulties, Koromelas (1985) supported by Chronopoulou and Giannopoulos (1989) put emphasis on the minority view that environmental and social circumstances were possible causes of these difficulties. These included:

- inadequate schooling,
- stress,
- lack of school readiness,
- developmental lag,
- deprived social and cultural environment,
- negative socialisation,
- improper behaviour by teachers or peers,
- teaching methods,
- positioning of pupil in class,
- language dialect/idiom,
- parental lack of information,
- assessment procedure (system of progression within primary school).  
(Koromelas, 1985, p. 98)

Nitsopoulos (1989) investigating social and cultural factors, however, referred to these factors as 'secondary', and included others such as family size and order, occupation of mother and father.

The main emphasis in the Greek literature, however, is put on psycho-medical pathology. Karpathiou et al. (1994), for example, devoted a substantial part of their work to support their theory of 'localised functional cerebral lesions of the cortex' (Karpathiou et al., 1994, p. 332) based on extended research involving electroencephalographs (EEGs).

Bablekou (1989), along the same lines, argued that there were different theories regarding aetiology, but concluded that dysfunctions in the memory can be a causal factor for specific learning difficulties. Stasinou (1993) categorised the theories as shown in Table 6.1. This table presents the different theories of the aetiology of specific learning difficulties which could be found in the literature, and were adopted by different researchers in Greece. It suggests that specific learning difficulties were seen in Greece almost entirely from a medical or the psychological perspective.

**Table 6.1: Theories of Aetiology of Specific Learning Difficulties**

<b>Neurological</b>	<b>Minimal Neurological Dysfunction</b>	Neurodevelopmental lag
		Gerstmann syndrome
	<b>Neuro-Psychological</b>	Peripheral
		Cultural
		Developmental
		Neurological
	<b>Cerebral Dominance</b>	Lack of specialisation
		Maturation lag or delay of left hemisphere
		Dysfunction of left hemisphere
		Abnormal left hemisphere
		Disassociation auditory and visual stimuli
		Laterality
<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Information Processing</b>	Perceptual and motion deficits (visual, auditory processing, erratic eye movements)
	<b>Sequencing</b>	Cat / act, mirror images,
	<b>Memory</b>	Visual, short term capacity
	<b>Verbal Processing</b>	Word recognition, reading comprehension
		Discrimination of speech sounds



## *Characteristics*

The prevailing view of specific learning difficulties in Greece was the one which associated them with dyslexia, and the characteristics of the two were seen as identical. Kourakis (1996) in his work presented Table 6.2 lists three categories of such characteristics.

### **Specific learning difficulties in Scottish Policy**

In the previous chapter the general policy context was investigated and it was made clear that, in accordance with the Warnock Report's recommendations, specific learning difficulties were seen within the continuum of needs. Warnock acknowledged the difficulties of identifying a child as having specific learning difficulties, especially when compared with 'long-term' poor readers:

Although there are no agreed criteria for distinguishing those children with severe and long-term difficulties in reading, writing and spelling from others who may require remedial teaching in these areas, there are nevertheless children whose disabilities are marked but whose general ability is at least average and for whom distinctive arrangements are necessary. (Warnock, 1978, p. 218)

Other than 'average ability' and difficulties in reading and writing (and occasionally in mathematics) Warnock did not offer detailed picture of what specific learning difficulties were. However, children with specific learning difficulties were defined by Tansley and Panckhurst as

those who, in the absence of sensory defect or overt organic damage, have an intractable learning problem in one or more of reading, writing, spelling and mathematics, and who do not respond to normal teaching. (1981, p. 259)

**Table 6.2: Symptoms/characteristics of Specific Learning Difficulties**

<b>Reading Difficulties:</b>	losing the line in reading
	reading syllable by syllable without breathing flow
	replacement of words with similar ones in concept [e.g. walk with run]
	misinterpretation of the concepts of sentences [i.e. comprehension]
	mirror reading
	insertion of phonemes or syllables
<b>Spelling Difficulties:</b>	evident spelling mistakes
	untidy writing, lack of spacing
	repetition/omission of letters or syllables
	inseRTion of caPitals
	mirror writing of words or phrases
	confusion of beginning and end of phonemically similar or small words
<b>Behavioural Characteristics:</b>	stress from learning
	attention disturbance
	daydreaming
	no clear self-concept
	low self-esteem
	periods of emotional isolation
	normal to high IQ
	peculiar way of thinking
	intense involvement with personal projects
	expression through motion and creative projects
	high critical ability
mature behaviour during narration	

(Kourakis, 1996, p. 78)

Tansley and Panckhurst did not limit the category of children with specific learning difficulties to those who have an underlying neurological or medical problem. They argued that when there was no obvious evidence of a neurological problem, it was wrong to assume the existence of such causes. Gulliford (1985) described children with specific learning difficulties as those whose learning and performance was normal, or even superior, in most ways, but they faced a difficulty in certain kinds of task.

In all the above 'definitions', from the Warnock report to Gulliford, there was a common element: marked difficulties in one or more areas (reading, spelling, and/or mathematics) but with general ability at least average. Here there was a concept of 'under-achievement', which Pumfrey and Reason (1991) argued

is based on the assumption that there is an unexpected discrepancy between the standard of work that the pupil is producing and what, for various reasons, the child is considered capable of producing. (p 38)

### *Aetiology*

Various theories have been developed in an attempt to explain the causes of specific learning difficulties. However, it has been suggested that no assumption should be made about a single cause for these difficulties (Acklaw and Gupta, 1991). The aetiology of specific learning difficulties described by researchers tends to be consistent with the approach they adopt: educational, psychological or medical. Riddell et al. (1992) argued that those who adopted a neurological approach believed that specific learning difficulties were caused by a

finite dysfunction, which is either defined as a cerebral dysfunction (i.e. in left hemisphere) or as a deficit in cognitive functioning (i.e. in coding or in short-term memory). This implies, in terms of the underlying acquisition of skills, that the child will not necessarily 'catch up'. (p. 57)

In contrast those who adopted a different approach suggested there was a 'maturational delay' which allowed to 'catch up' in the longer term. Pumfrey and Reason (1991) have argued that no single group of 'experts' from the three approaches can offer a conclusive theory regarding aetiology, as they all start from different points, using different methods and reporting different results.

For most of the interests of this research and for teachers, however, the fundamental question remains the need to resolve or to circumvent specific learning difficulties for the benefit of the pupils. Hence, the aetiology per se is important only in so far as it informs the practical considerations for the provision. In addition, for this research it provides a clearer picture of the construct of specific learning difficulties that the various interviewees have.

### *Characteristics*

As Tansley and Panckhurst argued, experts have not agreed on the set of criteria distinctive to children with specific learning difficulties. Many researchers in the past have constructed diagnostic tests (such as SCRE, 1976; Schonell, 1972) and many had written lists of the main characteristics of children with specific learning difficulties (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991, Blight, 1985, Thomson, 1984, Newton and Thomson, 1977). The most recent of the latter was the list made by Pumfrey and Reason (1991), which describes the 'specific indicators' of specific learning difficulties:

1. A history of delayed speech and language development.
2. A letter-order confusion.
3. Poor left-right discrimination.
4. Poor auditory memory.
5. Difficulty with sound blending.
6. Difficulty with sequencing and ordering in speech and language.

7. Bizarre spelling patterns.
8. Confusion of b/d, p/q.
9. Reversals of letters.
10. Use of mirror writing.
11. Poor visual memory.
12. Early clumsiness.
13. Poor concentration span.
14. Similar familial history.

Along with these 'indicators' there have been others in the literature about the criteria which characterise a child as having specific learning difficulties. There has been some controversy about the place of emotional factors and the role they play in this area. As Pumfrey and Reason argued:

definitions of specific learning difficulties, which exclude primary emotional disturbance, become equivocal. (1991, p. 70)

On the other hand, they noted that emotional problems can evolve from learning problems, and that it is not easy to distinguish the emotional disturbance as primary a or secondary feature.

### *Perceptions of policies*

In the previous chapter the policy context was analysed, and the principles implicit in the general and special education systems were presented, focusing on specific learning difficulties. In this section the explicit picture of specific learning difficulties as constructed by the same policy documents, as well as the policy agents, will be explored.

### **In Greece**

In the previous chapter the major Education Act (1566/85) was explored as the definitions and the principles guiding special education were set. It was argued that the Act took a medical/psychological stance and it adopted the categorisation approach,

including the pupils 'who exhibit other difficulties in learning (dyslexia, speech disturbance)' (MNERA, 1985, article 32).

The association of specific learning difficulties with dyslexia was further strengthened in the official documents. The circulars which were mentioned earlier gave a clearer understanding of the governmental perception of specific learning difficulties and SEN in general. In G6/399/1.10.1984 the Minister of Education referred to children with 'special educational needs and particularly with specific learning difficulties' (MNERA, 1994, p. 153). In the same circular there was reference to Kirk (1973) who argued that children with 'real learning difficulties' represented on average 5% of the children's population. This population, according to the minister, did not include children who had severe learning difficulties like sensory or physical impairments, mental retardation, cerebral palsy etc. It was noted that the Greek state:

accept the international 10% of the population being handicapped and consequently we consider that there are 176,000 children of school age with special educational needs. (MNERA, 1994, p. 263)

From this 10%, according to the G6/106/3.4.1992 circular, half (about 88,000 pupils) were perceived to be dyslexics (MNERA, 1994, p. 142). Here, it was evident that the 1992 circular followed the model of the 1984 circular, with the exception of replacing the term specific learning difficulties with 'dyslexia'.

In the latter circular the aetiology was seen as complex and following a psycho-medical discourse it noted 'a fundamental dysfunction of cognitive processing' (p. 142). The 'dyslexic child', according to the official document, made sequencing mistakes in writing in reading, whilst there were no problems in oral speech. Furthermore, the dyslexic pupil was perceived as highly intelligent with no other problems.

In the G6/636/27.11.1986, entitled '*educational issues regarding children with special needs*', there were examples of 'dyslexic writing':

- omission, transposition and repetition of letters or syllables within the same word (e.g., **σχοείο** instead of **σχολείο**, **πότι** instead of **τόπι**, **3χ3ι** instead of **έχει**, **1896** instead of **1986** etc.
- use of capital letters among small.
- bizarre or **mirror** writing of letters, words, numbers, etc. (Original emphasis, MNERA, 1994, p. 150)

Another indication of the understanding that the state had of specific learning difficulties was given by the official statistics, provided by the MNERA. Table 6.3 reveals the population with SEN in Greece in the year 1991-1992.

**Table 6.3: Greek Pupil Population with SEN in 1991-92**

Category of Disability	School Unit of Special Education	Number of Children
Blind or partially sighted	5	108
Deaf or hard of hearing	34	722
Physically disabled	20	430
Mentally retarded	131	2400
<b>Learning Difficulties</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>8723</b>
Total	710	12383

(my emphasis, MNERA, 1994, p. 15)

In 1993-94 the number of special classrooms was raised to 802 and the total recorded student population with SEN increased to 14136. These figures, however, indicated a huge problem regarding the provision, according to the estimation of the Directorate of Special Education. It was noted earlier that the total number of children within the school system who needed special education was about 176000, and those who had special provision in 1994 was only 14136. Moreover, among those 176000, according to the percentage quoted, more than half had specific learning difficulties or dyslexia and yet

only about 10000 were provided for. The implications of these numbers for provision will be investigated in a later chapter.

### **In Scotland**

In an earlier chapter the area of special educational needs was investigated, and a brief outline of the policy for special educational needs generally was given. It was noted that about 20% of the school population would have at one time a special educational need, but only 1-2% would require a record of needs (RoN, in the official statistics this figure was 1.7%, see Scottish Office Statistical Services, 1995). In 1995 the estimated population with SEN based on the statistical bulletin was 163500 pupils (Scottish Office Statistical Services, 1995, p. 1), based on the 20% found in Warnock and the HMI reports (SOED, 1995). However, no one in Scotland suggested that half of this population had specific learning difficulties or dyslexia. The official approach was distinctively different from that in Greece:

most special educational needs arise from **curricular difficulties**, such as gaining access to the curriculum or problems in grasping and retaining concepts and skills in areas such as English language, mathematics, science and the expressive arts. The causes of such difficulties are most likely to lie in a mismatch between delivery of the curriculum and pupils' learning needs. (Original emphasis, SOED, 1995, p. 8)

Moreover, the official documentation noted that some children might

have **specific** special educational needs related to difficulties in acquiring competencies in a particular aspect of learning, such as talking, reading or spelling, and require specialist intervention. (Original emphasis, SOED, 1995, p. 10)

Both quotations were consistent with the Scottish approach to disability, which emphasised the educational needs of the individual, identifying the educational, environmental and social factors influencing a pupil with SEN. This approach also



allowed a definition of specific learning difficulties as those difficulties which can be provided for within mainstream classes with different educational approaches.

Another document published by the SOED, again following the same approach, was the document entitled *A Parents' Guide to Special Education Needs*, which was one example among the various Citizen's Charters. In this document the same understanding of SEN was present, as it was stated that 'many children will probably have a learning difficulty of one kind or another at some time' (SOED, 1993, p. 5) Once again this was consistent with the Warnock 20% which was referred to in many official documents. In the *Parents' Guide* there were examples of characteristic 'learning difficulties' which included such items as reversals of 'b' and 'd'. The document without getting into details, took a psychological 'developmental lag' theory, and stated that most 'overcome' (SOED, 1993, p. 7) their difficulties by the age of 9.

In addition, Table 6.4 identified the 'signals' which the guide suggested to inform parents about learning difficulties:

**Table 6.4: Signals of Learning Difficulties**

<p><b>In Primary 1, 2 and 3:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulties with reading, writing and number work;</li> <li>• poor memory;</li> <li>• difficulties in relating to other children;</li> <li>• slowness in developing independence;</li> <li>• difficulties in grasping classroom routines;</li> </ul>
<p><b>In Primary 4, 5, 6 and 7:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children may have difficulties in reading, writing and number work compared with the standard of their classmates;</li> <li>• there will often be a lack of interest in schoolwork generally but particularly low motivation in those subjects which a child finds most difficult;</li> <li>• children may be unusually quiet or unusually noisy.</li> </ul>

(SOED, 1993, p. 7)

Another issue that has to be mentioned in discussing the understanding of SEN and specific learning difficulties in Scotland, is how all these documents handled the theoretical concept of the continuum. It has been stated in the previous chapters that Warnock introduced the notion of 'one continuum of difficulties', difficulties which were to be seen on an individual basis with emphasis not on the deficits within the individual but rather on the strengths or otherwise of the educational provision. However, this concept of a single continuum was not apparent throughout the official documentation. For example, the SCCC (1994) document *Support for Learning* acknowledged that a child with specific learning difficulties was distinctively different from one who was a slow learner, or who had emotional behaviour difficulties, or a family trauma, or a physical disability. This, it could be argued, was not entirely consistent with the simple notion of a continuum, and suggested a re-introduction of the categories.

The SO Statistical Services (1995) publication on special educational needs also made references to specified types of difficulties. Under the title *Main Nature of Difficulty in Learning* sub-categories for children with RoN were identified as shown in Table 6.5 (p. 144).

Once again this was indicative of different view that saw children with specific learning difficulties, to some extent at least, as a discrete group of children. One could argue, of course, that this categorisation was only for practical purposes, and that the commitment to the general principles set by Warnock were still in place. This debate, however, brings into the surface the discussions about the labels and stigmatisation. Those who reject any form of labelling and categorisation, argue that labels affect expectations, self-concept and confidence and so can have negative consequences for the development of the child with any kind of difficulty. Pumfrey and Reason (1991) argued that

**Table 6.5: Nature of Difficulty in Learning**

<b>Main Nature of Difficulty in Learning</b>	<b>Primary Schools %</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Sensory: Visual	3.8
Hearing	5.7
Physical or Motor	13.7
Language and Communication Disorder	11.7
Social and Emotional Difficulties	4.8
Learning Difficulties (LD): Moderate	25.6
Severe	8.2
Profound	1.3
<b>Specific LD (in Language and Mathematics)</b>	<b>9.0</b>
Complex or Multiple Impairments: Dual Sensory	0.3
Moderate LD and Other	7.0
Severe LD and Other	3.9
Profound LD and Other	0.9
Other	4.0

(my emphasis, SOSS, 1995, p. 9)

Self-concept relates to the individual's perceptions of her or himself. These perceptions are formed through personal experiences and interpretations of the environment and especially influenced by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others and attributions for one's behaviour. (p. 67)

The 'significant others' like teachers and parents, however, form their perceptions to a degree from the label and the information given to them. Hence, if a child has been labelled as having a disability of any kind, then the expectations of the others, as well as the child's self-expectation, will be lowered, as previous research has shown (see Lappas, 1993, Pidgeon, 1970). However, Riddell and Brown (1994a) reported the debate between Soder (1989, 1991) and Booth (1991). Soder argued that the abolition of labels could undermine the disabled people's experiences, whilst Booth argued that labels bring automatically stigmatising connotations and should, therefore, be abolished.

### **In the European Union**

In an earlier chapter the principles for education and integration were explored, as well as the perceptions of the people about the role of the EU in the future development. Here, the policy for disability and learning difficulties will be addressed.

The Maastricht Treaty gave special consideration to the social aspects and issues that had arisen within the EEC in the past. In the 'Agreement on Social Policy concluded between the Member States of the European Community with the exception of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' the eleven MS in 1991 agreed 'to implement the Social Charter on the basis of the *acquis communautaire*' (Council of the European Communities, 1991, p. 197). The May 1997 change of government in the UK, however, enabled a re-confirmation of the pre-election statement on behalf of the newly elected Labour Party government that the UK will sign the Social Charter to be made at the Amsterdam meeting of the Head of States. Article 1 of the Maastricht agreement

stated the aims of the Social Policy, which included among others 'improved living conditions, proper social protection, ... and the combating of exclusion'. In addition, Article 2 stated that the Community would support activities aiming towards 'the integration of persons excluded from the labour market, without [any] prejudice'. Moreover, all the measures which might be implemented would 'take account of the diverse forms of national practices' (Article 1). So, one can argue that the same principle of policy making (respecting diversities, supplementing MS actions, encouraging co-operation) which were present in education were also present in social policy and relevant to work on special needs.

The EU tackled the area of special educational needs through the terminology of disability. The policies for disabled or 'handicapped people' can be found under the general area of social affairs. The European Social Policy White Paper which was published on the 27 of July 1994, had two titles which sketched the EU policies: 'Promoting the social integration of disabled people' and 'Equal opportunities for all'.

In this latest document, there were no definitions. If one looks at the past in order to find some definitions for disabilities since dated in 1981 can be located. The first document, 'Problems of the Handicapped' (Economic and Social Committee, 1981), identifying the views of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities, followed the definitions of the World Health Organisation, which distinguished among impairment, disability and handicap. These concepts were defined as:

**Impairment:** 'Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function.'

**Disability:** 'Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.'

**Handicap:** 'A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role

that is normal (depending on age, sex and social and cultural factors) for that individual.' (p. 4)

Despite the fact that impairment, disability and handicap were seen as words derived from the medical discourse, they were interpreted in a much more open sense. The environmental and cultural conditions under which people live were acknowledged to play a role in the perceived difficulty of a person to fulfil his/her potential. This again related to the Warnock Report, which identified possible causes of special educational needs outwith the individual, such as in the school curriculum.

Moreover, the European Social Policy White Paper (Council of the European Communities, 1994) acknowledged that

More than 10% of the total population of the European Union have disabilities. The needs of individual disabled people may vary considerably depending on the nature of their disability, coupled with factors such as their previous experience, their level of skill, and their personal circumstances. Assistance often needs to be tailored to the severity of a disability. (p. 51)

This statement was reminiscent of the arguments of Warnock, and the subsequent education Act. If the term 'disability' were to be replaced by 'special educational needs' then the similarities could be more easily identified. The same percentile has been also used in the bulletin for Special Education in Greece published by the MNERA (1994, p. 263).

The European programme that is relevant to these children is the HELIOS. Within this programme which covers a wide area of disabilities, references to 'learning difficulties' (Council of the European Communities, 1987) can be found. The Council and the Ministers of Education on the 14 of May 1987 decided that they should:

reaffirm the importance of achieving the maximum possible integration of handicapped children into ordinary schools, as well as the main measures mentioned in those conclusions concerning elimination of physical

obstacles, training of teachers, development of school curricula and gaining understanding among families and the local community; (No C211/1)

In addition to this clear declaration in support of integration, they considered some future developments in the area of integration into ordinary schools, which included that of:

Educational objectives for schools, including the need to provide children with skills for adult and working life, should enable all children to fulfil their potential. Their abilities and acquired skills should be stressed rather than their incapacities, and systems and teaching methods should be flexible enough to respond to individual needs, including those of handicapped children and of children having **learning difficulties of any kind.** (Annex I, No C211/2, my emphasis.)

However, no further clarification of how these learning difficulties were understood was evident within the EU policy documents available to the researcher. The lack of consideration of specific learning difficulties in the EU documentation, and its commitment to define phenomena only at a general level will be understood later when the perceptions of the EU policy agent and expert will be discussed.

### *Policy Agents' Perceptions for Specific Learning Difficulties*

Policy agents were interviewed as they had the power to interpret, elaborate and implement policy at national and regional level. Hence, their understanding of specific learning difficulties had significant implications for provision for these pupils. One has to note, however, that there were some differences in the power vested in them; in Scotland, the regional planning officer for special education at regional level had much more influence on the regional policies in comparison with the Greek counterparts, whilst in Greece, the national Director of Special Education had more direct input than the Scottish HMI responsible for SEN.

In Greece, children with specific learning difficulties were seen as those who

are within the educational framework, without having any other particular problem, they cannot follow the pace of the mainstream class -the lesson of

their classes ... in a specific curricular area. (Director of Special Education, MNERA, interviewed in December 1994)

These children were seen by him as having learning difficulties which are 'not apparent, less serious, [and are] within the school'. At the regional level, in Greece, the special advisor argued that

the last five years dyslexia was the slogan, but now we are all in learning difficulties. I, however, distinguish specific learning difficulties from learning difficulties. Specific learning difficulties are dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dys-spelling (δυσορθογραφία) ... (interviewed in December 1996)

This respondent did not have a clear idea about the aetiology, however, and he suggested various theoretical perspectives (eye movements, cognitive, neurological). He concluded that each theory could be correct or it might describe a specific kind of specific learning difficulties.

In Scotland, the HMI responsible for SEN within the SOED perceived specific learning difficulties as

a difficulty in a specific area of the curriculum, ... fairly narrow, and not related to broader or more general congenital difficulties. (interviewed in 1995)

Talking about the possible factors which could lead to specific learning difficulties, the HMI suggested that pre-school education and other early experiences were important factors. However, he concluded that

I think the research would also point another basis, and that would be a constitutional aspect of specific learning difficulties. and that brings you to the dyslexia, and that whole constellation of difficulties there, I think you will accept that for some people there are neurological problems which are causing specific learning difficulties. So in a sense, is a combination of the two things. (interviewed in 1995)

In Scotland, the regional policy maker for SEN argued that specific learning difficulties

is a term which describes a particular range of difficulties. There are difficulties that are involved in organising and handling information. At a very mild level it might be a mild reading difficulty, or writing or



understanding complex instructions. It is usually just in language or number and it can vary in degrees of difficulty, from a child that would maybe just requires a minimum amount of support, to children for whom we will open a RoN, whose difficulties provides such a level of intensity that affects the child's whole learning process. (interviewed in May 1995)

She saw various characteristics like clumsiness, difficulty in matching material, and 'a discrepancy between the verbal level of communication and the actual work that the child produces in terms of written and number.' She explained that in her region they did not label the children as

The difficulty with giving a precise diagnostic term to a child's difficulty, there is a danger there that you provide education for that term, rather than look at the child as an individual and say this child is requiring this amount of support. We try not to label any child at all. We try to identify its needs in terms of what that individual requires and support that. There is a danger that the child is seen in terms of the label rather than in terms of its required needs. Although we do accept that the term dyslexia ... Some parents feel happier with us using the term rather than specific learning difficulties. (interviewed in May 1995)

She also upheld the argument that children with specific learning difficulties form a discrete group, something that was maintained by the Dyslexia Association with which the region had 'excellent communication'.

The differences in the perspectives between the two respondents at national level, according to the HELIOS expert, derived from the

question about special educational needs and the disabled person. ... Which is a problem totally of titles not of content. It is the medical model or the pedagogical model. (Expert responsible for Education within the HELIOS, interviewed in January 1995)

This EU view was also supported by the fact that in the last report (HELIOS, 1995) the terms 'children with disabilities', 'children with special needs' and 'children with special educational needs' were used interchangeably.

Finally, within the HELIOS programme, and hence the EU, officially they did not have a formed construct for specific learning difficulties. It was argued that

we are not supposed to perceive. We are liaisons of how the people in the MS classify; we go with them. ... We just receive which way the MS are.  
(*Ibid.*)

### ***Summary-Discussion***

In this chapter the nature of specific learning difficulties was investigated in Greece, Scotland and the EU. As specific learning difficulties were associated to a degree with disability, especially in Scotland where the two were linked through the continuum of needs, the investigation began by examining the discourses regarding disability. In Scotland, medical, charity and rights discourses were the three identified, with the medical having the dominant position. In Greece, the medical discourse also dominated, but the difference with Scotland was that there seemed to be no rights discourse. This distinction could be explained by referring back to Chapter 4, and the attitudes to disability. Strong evidence of charity discourse was also found in the official circulars published by the MNERA and will be discussed later. Only a very small part of the Greek literature was devoted to the educational/social perspective, and the dominance of the medical/psychological was unchallenged.

In the literature on specific learning difficulties different approaches were identified; in Scotland there were three (psycho-medical, psychological and psycho-educational) and in Greece two (medical/psychological and the educational/social). The similarities between the discourses in the two countries were evident. To some extent this could be explained by the way the literature presented specific learning difficulties in terms of characteristics and aetiology, and by the tendency that Greeks have to refer to foreign literature as they recognise that their own educational research has not been well developed, especially in the area of special educational needs. It is indicative that only very recently the researcher became aware of the reorganisation of the Pedagogic Institute so that an office

for special education could be created. Moreover, a characteristic of this tendency was that three of the five learning support teachers in Greek primary schools, in the state and private sector, had training at some time outside the country.

What was distinctively different between the countries was the emphasis put on the different approaches. In Scotland, emphasis was put more on the psycho-educational approach, with characteristic exemplification in the policy documents. In Greece, however, the dominance of the psycho-medical approach was apparent in the literature. The close association between specific learning difficulties and dyslexia was the strongest tendency in Greece, and this explicit and underlined the psycho-medical discourse. This meant that children with specific learning difficulties were seen as a discrete group. In addition, the confusion between the terms 'specific learning difficulties' and 'learning difficulties' contributed to the association of specific learning difficulties with the language used by the medical discourse; 'learning difficulties' was the umbrella term which included categories of children with profound disabilities.

Another difficulty with terminology arose from the fact that the Greek term specific learning difficulties (in Greek: ειδικές μαθησιακές δυσκολίες) was adopted from the UK after Warnock introduced it in 1978. The researcher believes that the phrase specific learning difficulties was seen in Greece as a euphemism, to disassociate the child with specific learning difficulties from the dominant medical/psychological discourse. This tactic did not succeed, however, because specific learning difficulties continued to be understood predominantly as an umbrella term including 'dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysphasia or dyscalculia'; these had clear definitions with medical/psychological connotations.

In Scotland, the shift from the categories model to the continuum model of special educational needs, and the consequent change of emphasis from the deficit to the

educational needs of the individual, came about in the late 1970s as a result of pressure from voluntary associations and pressure groups, professionals and academics suggesting that the segregated model of special education had to change. To some extent, this change was prompted by the development of comprehensive education, something that has not happened in Greece (recent efforts to create comprehensive lycea were not considered successful).

Investigating the policy documents on specific learning difficulties showed even more clearly the differences between Greece and Scotland. In Greece the Education Act (1985) has a pathological approach to special educational needs, defining several categories of disability, including 'those who have difficulties in learning (dyslexia, speech disorders and others)' (MNERA, 1985). The circulars identified 5% of the school population as having 'specific learning difficulties' in 1984 and 'dyslexia' in 1992 (MNERA, 1994). A change of government (the Socialists lost to the Conservatives in 1990) may have been a factor in this change of terminology. The existence of specific learning difficulties among the rest of the normative categories, raises the question of whether MNERA understood specific learning difficulties as being such a disability. The same official documents referred to the necessity of teachers being 'understanding, discrete, loving and to exhaust any leniency' (MNERA, 1994, p. 143).

In Scotland, the 1981 Education Act did not make any reference to specific learning difficulties, only to learning difficulties which were defined as based on the educational needs of the individual child. In the later circulars specific learning difficulties were defined as curricular difficulties, associated with lack of specific skills in reading, writing and (but less so) mathematics. Furthermore, instead of taking the pathological Greek

view of the 'cognitive dysfunction' (MNERA, 1994) the Scottish view was one of developmental lag, as presented in the parents' guide (SOED, 1993).

The researcher believes that the differences between Greece and Scotland in the understandings of specific learning difficulties in the literature and policy documents, derived from the fact that education research and policy making bodies and advisors in Scotland built up a term to distinguish a group of children ('children with particular difficulties', Warnock, 1978, p. 43) from others within the continuum of SEN, whilst in Greece the term was adopted to distinguish pupils from their peers within the mainstream class. In Scotland, the term was introduced in an effort to re-integrate children with problems in learning back into mainstream education, whilst in Greece, the term was used to take children out of the mainstream class into the special class. The latter, however, should be looked at from the perspective of a total lack of mainstream support for SEN in Greece, and the expressed need by teachers to provide for those who were failing in school.

The EU's official position was that they should not express any view, but that the Member States should follow their own understandings. However, 'learning difficulties of any kind' were found within the HELIOS programme which linked education and disability. Disability was defined by medical terms identifying 'impairments', although the 'handicap' was understood within social and cultural conditions. In the chapters on provision, when the recommendations of the EU are discussed, it will become clear that the EU perceptions of specific learning difficulties were closer to those in Britain.

Policy agents in both countries reflected the views found in the literature and the policy. Although the director of special education in Greece perceived specific learning difficulties with an educational perspective, the circulars that he co-signed disseminated a

different message. In Scotland, the HMI within the SOED, following the Scottish circulars, perceived these difficulties as curricular accepting, however, a 'whole constellation of difficulties' associated with dyslexia, and taking the position that there were qualitative differences between the dyslexia and a curricular understanding of specific learning difficulties. The EU expert suggested that the perceptions of specific learning difficulties differ according to which model one followed, the medical or the pedagogical. She concluded that 'is a problem totally of titles not of content', however, the views expressed in the literature and by other respondents highlighted different constructs.

## Chapter 7

### Perceptions of Specific Learning Difficulties: the educators' view

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter the attention is focused on the perceptions which primary mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers have of the nature of specific learning difficulties, based on the specific case-study pupils. Priority, however, is given to the learning support teachers as they had the key role in the identification of the case-study pupils, and hence, their perceptions had a major influence throughout this research, as discussed in chapter 3. After the exploration of the views of their colleagues comparisons between the two countries and among the groups are considered.

#### **Learning Support Teachers' Perceptions**

Learning support teachers' views on specific learning difficulties were of particular importance in this study, as they were responsible, in sixteen out of the twenty cases, for the identification of the case-study pupils. They were asked to describe their pupils' difficulties, by the use of an open ended question: 'Can you describe the difficulties that *your pupil* [name] faces?'. This approach was designed to prevent the imposition of the researcher's constructs about specific learning difficulties on the respondents; the focus of this study was **their** perceptions. Characteristic of these interviews was the fact that learning support teachers had a tendency to speak more generally, rather than restricting themselves to talking about two (and in one case for four) children with specific learning

difficulties within the responsibility of their learning support department. The tendency to generalise, rather than speaking about the identified pupils, led the researcher to use further questions focusing on the particular case-study child and drawing examples from the observation period in seeking further explanation. An important feature of these interviews was the time available; in Scotland learning support teachers were much more pressured by time than their Greek colleagues. In Greece, the interviews with the learning support teachers included the longest interviews conducted in the study, two exceeding two hours.

In all but one case, the learning support teachers associated specific learning difficulties with written language difficulties. As we shall see, they saw the language difficulties from a similar perspective to their mainstream colleagues. In examining the performance of their pupils, they initially described the problems as any teacher would see them: 'bad speller', 'difficulty with written language', 'joining words', or 'confusing letters æ/î'. The one case in Scotland which departed from this general pattern was linked with oral difficulties; the child could not register and follow oral instructions.

In Greece, learning support teachers put emphasis on writing, in contrast with their counterparts in Scotland. This different emphasis could be explained by the perceived role of learning support teacher in the two countries, which will be elaborated more in the next chapter. In Greece learning support teachers were seen, by the majority of their colleagues, only as remedial teachers and they were able to act with less professional freedom than in Scotland. The policy framework in Greece also suggested such a role since the 'special classrooms' were regarded as School Units of Special Education (see Chapter 6), and the duties of the learning support teachers were confined to these



classrooms. Furthermore, the Greek learning support teachers were dealing mainly with writing difficulties through referral by the mainstream teachers.

Greek learning support teachers' terminology was not heavily influenced by the psychological approach, with the exception of the learning support teacher in the private school, who was both a teacher and child psychologist. The researcher believes that the difference in the terminology between the two countries arose mainly because of the use of formal diagnostic assessment by the learning support teachers in Scotland, whilst in the Greek state schools there was either no such an assessment or it was devised informally by the learning support teachers themselves. This influence of a psychological discourse in the assessment was caused by the influence of the psychologists on assessment procedures in Scotland, a feature which was also mentioned by the HMI responsible for special educational needs. In Greece, formal assessment was carried out in the medical-pedagogical centres with psychologists having the dominant role. The lack of assessment in school practice in Greece was highlighted by one of the two learning support teachers who had devised their own assessment tests:

The principle of assessment has not been present in Greek education until now, and in particular in special education, at all. ... Everybody does what ever he/she likes. (lst. 2)

It seemed that the nature of the diagnostic assessment used by learning support teachers determined to a great extent the terminology they used. For instance, in the private Greek school the learning support teacher spoke about the WISC or the VADS (Visual Aural Digit Span) and she pointed to the fact that the profile of her student showed the scores in all measurable areas of the test, concluding that there was a 'language perception problem ... weak sequencing and spatial abilities' (lst. 5).

On the other hand, the two Greek learning support teachers who devised their own tests used much more 'common sense' educational terminology: e.g., 'does not know the basic spelling rules' (lst. 3), 'confuses the sound alike [endings]' (lst. 2).

### *Intrinsic aetiology*

Learning support teachers in both countries referred to intrinsic causes of specific learning difficulties. In Greece, two learning support teachers in the state sector referred to intrinsic causes only in the so called 'problematic' cases where they noted 'perinatal' and 'postnatal' medical factors. Furthermore, one Greek learning support teacher perceived specific learning difficulties as 'in-born', but she did not put any emphasis at all on causation arguing that

I am not interested in why, but what I can do to help. (lst. 2)

In Scotland, all five learning support teachers noted causes such as 'auditory processing', 'visual integration', 'sequencing', 'language perception'. To these one has to add their counterpart from the Greek private school, in total six learning support teachers. The latter argued that Attention Deficit Disorder could be a cause for specific learning difficulties. This view is likely to have been influenced by her studies in the USA. The majority of the learning support teachers, unlike their mainstream colleagues, did not see lack of concentration on the part of pupils as a cause for specific learning difficulties.

Nine out of the ten learning support teachers in Greece and Scotland referred to specific intrinsic causes for specific learning difficulties. However, they could not be categorised easily as all following the psychology discourse, such they also suggested extrinsic causes for specific learning difficulties. Their views were based on individual cases, rather than their own understandings of specific learning difficulties. In the cases of those which could be categorised as following the psychological discourse, there were differences in

the emphasis put on intrinsic reasons, which were seen as primary causes, and on the extrinsic, which were regarded as secondary causes enhancing the symptoms that children with difficulties already had.

One Scottish and three Greek learning support teachers, following an educational discourse, referred to the term 'immaturity'. In these four cases, the arguments were linked with the age of the child when he or she entered school for the first time and associated with a lack of school readiness. In case of Greece, this was consistent with the comments made earlier about the Greek education system (i.e., academic, knowledge based). Despite the fact that in Greece children enter school a year later than in Scotland (5 1/2 rather 4 1/2), the nature of the system and the embedded principle of teaching to the 'average child', rather than focusing on individual needs and pace, influenced the perceived significance of the entry age.

A substantial amount of 'trade' terminology was evident once the Scottish learning support teachers started talking about 'reading age', 'sound/visual discrimination', or 'word retrieval'. This tendency was stronger in Scotland than in Greece, and as already suggested, was linked with the kinds of assessment carried out by the Scottish learning support teachers. This assessment was often supervised or completed by the psychological services of the region. In the Scottish private school, as in Greece, the learning support teacher had close co-operation with private psychologists. In this case it was a clinical psychologist, who confirmed the learning support department findings of suspected neurological dysfunction, as the primary aetiology. For one pupil, the learning support teacher said:

From working with him, he seems typical that he is not able to erase from his memory something that you had told him; so he will ask him a question after you have taught him something and he will give you the answer to the

previous question; So it seems that his memory shelf is not clearing, so he is not processing the next piece of information. (lst. 10)

In this case the memory dysfunction was perceived to be a possible cause for specific learning difficulties of the pupil. However, this view was not shared by all the Scottish learning support teachers; the majority saw memory problems as a characteristic effect rather than a cause of the difficulties.

### *External aetiology*

Although nine of ten learning support teachers referred to intrinsic factors for some of their pupils, eight of them argued that in some cases factors external to individuals were contributing equally to, or even more substantially than, the intrinsic factors, in causing their difficulties. The main examples of such causes could be categorised as contextual and emotional. The most significant contextual cause raised by Greek learning support teachers was the education system itself.

### *Education System*

Although the education system, elaborated in Chapter 4, provided the broad framework in which this research took place in both countries, the Greek teachers, unlike those in Scotland, recognised emphatically the system's influence on children with specific learning difficulties.

In Greece, in all five schools learning support teachers referred to the education system in general. In particular, one of the principles behind the Greek education system was condemned by learning support teachers:

[we have] to go away from the basic principle of the Greek school 'one lesson for all the children', which destroys the children. (lst. 2)

Another suggested that there was a need to be 'focused more on individual learning styles' (lst. 5). It was not surprising that both teachers who suggested such a change were learning support, and had the sensitivity and training to understand that they must meet the specific requirements of every pupil. In addition, a common characteristic of these two particular teachers was that both had studied abroad, and hence they had also experienced a different model of education/school/class organisation and management, based on different principles and philosophy.

The other major problem that the Greek system was perceived to have, was the almost religious attachment to the prescribed curriculum. The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs published every year the books which were distributed free to all children. The books were the same throughout Greece, including private schools, and it was 'obligatory' (ct, sch. 4) not only to follow them, but to cover most of the content by the end of the year. The books were divided into lessons, which were supposed to match the duration of the allocated time for this subject in the daily schedule of the school. This allocation was the same for all schools. In addition to this, the Ministry published a teachers' book, which included recommended teaching activities, questions, and exercises in relation to every lesson of the book.

According to the OECD report, the books

are based on the ability level which the average pupil should acquire.  
(MNERA, 1995, p. VII A2.1)

This assumption, that every child, including those with specific learning difficulties, has to reach the same level at the same stage and time, was also condemned by a learning support teacher; furthermore, she argued that the teachers teach to the predetermined level, despite the individual differences present in their classrooms.

A characteristic example of the seriousness of this situation is illustrated in the following account which, although the language that the learning support teacher used can be perceived as somewhat critical, reflected a common view among teachers. She described the attitudes and the expectations of people who influence the education of all pupils, including children with specific learning difficulties.

I was eye-witness once, when an educational advisor came to my school, when a young teacher asked him: 'I have a class with a lot of difficulties, what should I do?' 'You should do your curriculum!' This passes the message to the teacher, who is a probationer, that he should not give a damn who is going to learn or not. What if 5-6 children are ruined? You have to stick to the book. You should teach all these, to teach, not the children to learn. This is a tragedy. And the administration of our education encourage and promote such models: advisors, regional heads, school heads ... You should look to do your lesson, and leave the poor child to his fate. (lst. 2)

In addition, the OECD supported the argument that despite every change on the analytical programmes in the last few decades, the content as well as the management and structure of primary education have remained focused on academic studies. This has had clear consequences for children with specific learning difficulties as they face problems in an academically oriented school. If one adds to this the petition for the 'modernisation of teaching' (OECD, 1996, p. III 2 3), a clear understanding of the broader context of the Greek education system and its negative influence on children with specific learning difficulties emerges.

In Scotland, learning support teachers did not refer to the impact of the education system per se as their Greek counterparts did, apart from concern about the time taken from provision for children with specific learning difficulties by initiatives such as the 5-14 programme (Scotland's relatively new national curriculum for primary education).

### *Family Factors*

Family factors were identified as influential by most of the learning support teachers in both countries, including those who primarily put emphasis on intrinsic factors. Learning support teachers saw two different influential elements within families: i) organisation and co-operation, and ii) behaviour which has effects on the emotions of pupils.

In Greece, the learning support teachers suggested that the home environment played an important role:

If the family was more stable and more organised and the father had a more positive attitude he would probably do a lot better. And I think a lot of the immaturity we see [in him] as a child, reflects what is going on at home. (lst. 65)

This was noted throughout the socio-economic spectrum; the quotation above comes from the private school, and the following comes from a state school:

At home he does not have a stable family environment, as his father is unemployed, or changes unexpectedly jobs, or he quits his job, his mother was sick, she had two strokes, his sister was sick. Hence, the child is living in a unstable -financially and emotionally- environment. (lst. 53)

Although both these learning support teachers stressed the importance of the home environment, and there were commonalities between the two statements, the distinctive difference was on the definition of the word 'stability'. In the first case the word 'stable' implied 'organised', that which has an order, a routine for the child. In the second case, the perception of 'unstable' had as its basic characteristic that of the presence of crises in which the child was involved.

In addition, Greek learning support teachers identified cases where parents either did not co-operate with teachers or lacked the knowledge or patience to help their child effectively. In the case of the private school above, the problem stemmed from the father 'calling him [the child] stupid' (lst. 65). The learning support teacher further argued that

the family had 'pretty much ignored us in the second grade' (lst. 65) and this had consequences for the progress of her pupil.

The lack of patience and skills on the part of parents to assist in homework was reported by learning support teachers. This was corroborated by some parents who explicitly said that their 'nerves' (m. 62) were affected when they were trying to assist with their children's homework. Almost all the learning support teachers in Greece invited parents to school to teach them how they could help with their children's homework (this will be discussed further in the chapter on provision).

The contrast with Scotland was significant; in Greece teachers not only had to support parents emotionally and give broad guidelines, but they also had to try to alter the parents' attitudes towards learning, which they had learned through their own experiences as pupils in the education system. Although still criticised by the OECD, since 1976 attempts have been made to shift the emphasis from the classics (emphasis on ancient Greek and the humanities) towards a more modern curriculum and these attempts were reflected in the books and the circulars published by the MNERA. Parents who had been educated within the 'old' system, however, had problems recognising the value of the new and had difficulties adapting their ways of learning to the new requirements of supervision. A characteristic example can be drawn from the grammar: in the 'old' system pupils were required to learn by heart all the endings of the declinable verbs, in all voices, numbers and persons and the same for the nouns in all forms. The new system was based on the principle that the pupils would learn gradually through their exposure to the language, and by 'randomly' coming across grammatical phenomena which were repeated throughout their primary school career, going into more detail each time in a spiral schema. The grammar book in the new system was seen as only a reference book,



whilst in the old system it was part of the daily 'lesson'. Parents perceived this as a lowering of standards, they complained about the lack of grammar in the curriculum and they had difficulties in adapting their approach to supervision from their familiar 'rote memory'.

In a similar way, there were implications for the set of cultural attitudes towards education as a whole (discussed in Chapter 4). Learning support teachers in Greece mentioned the emotional difficulties that their pupils with specific learning difficulties experienced, due to the immense pressure by parents to succeed in their schooling put on them. In Greece, this pressure was linked to the general culture as well as the education system which, it was argued, was geared towards academic studies and reflected the cultural belief that education is the means for social mobility. This has influenced the attitudes of the families towards school failure and, as learning support teachers suggested, had severe consequences for those with specific learning difficulties:

The child's school failure has direct impact in the family. The family through the child tries to improve its social status, its ego. This is very bad and very serious, which puts a heavy load on the child. This causes confusion which works against the child. (Ist. 34)

In Greece, the importance that the performance in schooling has for a family was implied in statements made by parents, teachers and children alike. Pumfrey and Reason (1991, p. 236) wrote of the need for 'avoidance of cumulative difficulties building up as a result of a lack of positive intervention'. It was evident that parents' and children's emotions were bound up in their attitudes and expectations. When children faced difficulties in meeting the expectations of their parents, then the family had to minimise the tensions and the conflicts which would have arisen. Otherwise, the stress on the children to succeed could cause serious emotional difficulties, which could themselves lead to specific learning difficulties and even the rejection of schooling.

However, one has to note the influence of the education system in the parents' expectations. As suggested earlier, there were distinctive differences between the Scottish and the Greek education systems. It can be argued that these differences influenced the behaviour of parents towards school failure. It has been argued, that the Scottish system was promoting the learning of transferable skills, which were perceived as the means by which a child can develop to a successful adult. In a society which views its school system as promoting these skills, it is understood that school is just one place where the child can learn these necessary skills. In contrast, if one has the view that academic knowledge is what will lead to success in the future, then greater dependence will be placed on those who have the expertise to provide that knowledge: the school. Hence, the societal view of education influences the co-operation and the relationship between home and school, which in turn, influences the manifestation of specific learning difficulties.

In Greece, as suggested in Chapter 4, education was seen as the only means of social mobility. In addition, educating the child was not perceived as a personal 'adventure' for the child, but rather as a 'family affair'. Characteristic was the following quotation, where the use of plural 'we' instead of the singular 'he', indicated the involvement of the family in the child's education:

Now, the θ [th] sound which we could not say, we say it. (my emphasis, Gr. mother 21)

Hence, failure in schooling had the consequences that have been described. These factors enhanced the anxiety to succeed in children with specific learning difficulties, because they were the most vulnerable in an education environment which pressurised pupils to 'learn their lesson' rather than to 'experience learning'.

The emphasis on school success was apparent in the parents' responses to the school failure of their children with specific learning difficulties. In the context of Greek attitudes to disability, parents expressed their shock (e.g., 'I lost the world', m. 13), when they were informed that their children had specific learning difficulties. All the Greek learning support teachers had to deal firstly with the negatives attitudes and the pressure that parents put on their children.

Learning support teachers in Greece suggested that weaknesses in the co-operation with their mainstream colleagues might also have been a possible cause of problems. One learning support teacher was hardly able to co-operate at all with her mainstream colleagues, and she found herself in a hostile situation with the school administration.

Another suggested that:

you see that the performance of these children fluctuates, because of the teacher factor. [...] Unfortunately the teacher in grade four was not very co-operative. (lst. 5)

In Scotland, this was indicated by terms like 'it was not spotted earlier' (lst. 7), or, in the case of reading, mainstream teachers tendency to assess 'on performance rather than understanding' (lst. 10).

In Scotland, this pressure from the parents and the societal factors of the kind described above were not evident. Although Scottish people were proud of their education system, and, most of them put high value in education, their behaviour was different. These differences were reflected in the different relationships between school and home. In Scotland, emotional pressure on the children was reported only in two cases; one was linked with oral language difficulties and the other was related to a lack of a common understanding of specific learning difficulties. In the first case, the child had serious emotional difficulties, arising from being abused by his father who was also abusing his

mother. In the second case, the father, according to the teachers, could not understand the nature of the difficulties that his son had, and this resulted in pushing him too hard (physical punishment) to 'learn'. Those two cases, however, were considered by the learning support teachers as extreme and were not perceived to be generalisable and characteristic of the Scottish parents.

### **Mainstream Teachers' Perceptions**

Mainstream teachers were asked to describe the difficulties of the case-study pupils who were in their classrooms. The same questions were used as those asked of learning support teachers. Most of the teachers, in Scotland and Greece alike, referred to problems in language as the major characteristic of children with specific learning difficulties.

#### *General Characteristics*

Mainstream teachers in Greece associated specific learning difficulties with difficulties in language. They also described their characteristics in writing by using general terms like 'missing letters' (ct. 65), 'missing all his vowels' (ct. 21), or 'with no spaces in-between the words' (ct. 24), and characterised pupils as 'very bad speller[s]' (ct. 35) making 'many, very many mistakes' (ct. 62). In addition, they mentioned partial or complete lack of intonation, a characteristic of the Greek language of some importance (for example, the word κάλος means a corn on the foot, whilst καλός means good). In relation to reading, mainstream teachers supported that children with specific learning difficulties 'read slowly, syllable-by-syllable'. (ct. 34)

Others argued that pupils with such difficulties in lower grades cannot identify the letters, which because of the analytic-synthetic method used in teaching reading and writing in

Greece was perceived as of great importance. The use of this particular method was seen as having implications for children with specific learning difficulties.

In Scotland, however, teachers referred to general characteristics such as 'unformed, difficult to read' (ct. 69) writing, 'going down a slum' (ct. 310), or with 'no punctuation' (ct. 39). Regarding spelling, Scottish mainstream teachers suggested that children with specific learning difficulties might write correctly up to three-letter words (ct. 510), or that they could

manage on writing the beginnings of sounds, the beginnings of words, but the ends of words just fade off. (ct. 79)

They also referred to reversals of b/d, p/q, l/g, (ct. 36) and in reading, pupils with specific learning difficulties were divided by their mainstream teachers into two categories: those who had mastered reading technically but had no comprehension, and those who had not mastered reading at all:

she cannot read on sight, because she would have difficulties: what is that word? and meaning of words, comprehension a little bit, but behind everything else. (ct. 67)

A further distinctive difference between Scottish and Greek mainstream teachers was that the former mentioned national assessment levels when they referred to writing, spelling or reading. In almost all the cases where this happened it was evident that children with specific learning difficulties were perceived to have working within Level A or Level B (the lowest curriculum levels of 5-14).

These two children at the moment they are working on level A for reading, at level B for talking, A-B for listening, and writing they are still working on A, I would not say that they have passed that. (ct. 68 & 78)

Two Scottish teachers in private and state schools also referred to reading age and compared it to chronological age. The lack of reference in Greece to any assessment

levels or outcomes of assessment like the reading age, can be explained by the lack of formal assessment.

### *Understanding of Difficulties*

Mainstream teachers in both countries could be grouped in two groups: i) those who believed that their pupils did not have the abilities to write, spell or read; and ii) those who conceptualised their children's difficulties as lack of skills or maturity. The first group can be associated with the individualistic, deficit or medical model. In contrast, the latter can be associated with the social, environmental or educational model.

### **Lack of Ability**

Greek teachers who fell in the first group subscribing to the 'lack of ability' model, were in proportion two to one with those who were grouped in the second. They described their pupils as having difficulties expressing themselves, describing their ideas and putting them onto paper. The most extreme statement in this group, illustrating an understanding of the difficulties as innate, was made by a teacher who said:

[he] does not possess a good reading ability. ... Everybody has some abilities which cannot be exceeded. (ct. 62)

Seven of the Greek teachers were in this category and came from all the schools; socio-economic factors of their particular schools appeared not to influence their perceptions. Investigating the causation as perceived by mainstream teachers who subscribed to this group, one can see statements which were indicative of the cause as intrinsic to the child:

that it is an intrinsic problem in the encephalon, it does not caused by any other reason. (ct. 21)

Moreover, the terminology used, can also give evidence of this particular doctrine supporting the medical/deficit/individualistic model. Greek mainstream teachers of this

group felt that pupils with specific learning difficulties 'could not' or 'cannot' read, write or speak, whilst their colleagues who used a different standpoint argued that they 'have not developed' their skills. The difference between the two is evident if, on the one hand, one conceives the verb 'can' as 'to indicate ability' (Collins, 1994), the latter being considered as innate. In addition, the use of the term 'dyslexia' again emphasised this medical/deficit/individualistic model which had extensive support in Greece.

Six Scottish mainstream teachers were categorised in this 'ability' group and used the nouns 'problem' or 'trouble' to describe the difficulties of their pupils. Those pupils who had reading, spelling or writing problems, were usually associated, as in Greece, with 'dyslexia' and, in addition, with 'language' or 'reading difficulty', which were seen again as innate:

he sometimes can be defeated by his limitations. (ct. 87)

Limitations which were perceived as caused by factors intrinsic to the pupil 'through the genes' (ct. 39) or as a trend within the family.

There was a difference between the two countries, however, regarding memory. One would have expected that Greek teachers would have mentioned lack of memory as a possible area that might have had a causal effect to specific learning difficulties, given the nature of the curriculum and the emphasis in the education system on 'book learning'. In reality, however they did not. They were more persistent about concentration, and this was reflected in the organisation of the class (desks in rows, teaching from teacher's desk and blackboard, no movement, class teaching). The Scottish mainstream teachers who emphasised the memory as a factor were those in the private school, where the ethos of the school was apparently more academic than in the state primary schools. Nevertheless, in comparing the two countries, it was evident that in Greece those

mainstream teachers who were grouped in the 'ability' group were greater in number than their colleagues in Scotland; this can probably be explained by the different cultures, attitudes to disability and education systems.

### Lack of skills

Those class teachers who appeared in the second group, which has been called educational/social/environmental, had a different standpoint. Their major concern were the social factors, extrinsic to the child, from which the specific learning difficulties had arisen. The language that this group used was different from that used by the first group. Instead of 'cannot' these mainstream teachers supported the idea that their pupils 'have not developed' their skills. The difference between the two is evident if one interprets 'develop' as 'to bring to a more advanced stage' (Collins, 1994) This allows for time, and is much closer to an 'educational' approach that is based on the belief that with the appropriate educational intervention, children with specific learning difficulties could overcome their problems.

In Greece, the mainstream teachers who belonged to this group were three, fewer than those in the other group, and fewer than their Scottish counterparts in the same group.

Their approach was exemplified by one Greek teacher who suggested that his pupil:

does not read the instructions correctly -maybe due to that he hasn't developed his reading skills. (ct. 35)

Looking at the causation and the terminology used by mainstream teachers belonging to this group, helps to illuminate the distinctive elements of their constructs of specific learning difficulties. Greek teachers in this group tended to look for causes either in the family, in the previous education of their pupils or in the characteristics of the education



system. Examples of possible family reasons given by mainstream teachers were abundant in the data gathered:

I believe it is the intense stress of the mother. She has stress, although she stands by him, she helps, she has stress that she passes it to [him]. You know, the good image of our child. I think that he has a sister older who does very well, and you know, from the boy we expect something more (ct. 35)

Some mainstream teachers perceived a change in the teaching approaches, coinciding with a change of schools, as a cause of specific learning difficulties. They did not refer to the emotional strains that a move of this kind might have caused, but rather to the child's lack of the same experiences as the rest of their class. In particular one class teacher noted the different teaching method, the holistic (look-and-say), used by their pupil's previous school in Cyprus.

In the case of the private school, the context in which children were perceived as having specific learning difficulties was important. One mainstream teacher suggested that there were specific characteristics within the school that contributed to the children being perceived as having difficulties:

He might not be strong enough for this particular programme which is heavy, and maybe, with many question marks, maybe it would do him good if he could change. (ct. 35)

The curriculum in Greece was seen as posing problems for children with specific learning difficulties; this finding was consistent with those from the learning support teachers. 'Lack of concentration' (ct. 65) or 'daydreaming' (ct. 23) were also seen as possible causes of difficulties. However, Greek teachers were not clear in their accounts about whether this was primarily a cause or simply a characteristic effect of specific learning difficulties. (Concentration was an important factor but it was identified in the statements of both groups.) Mainstream teachers in Greece did not refer to curriculum demands on 'memory' as a possible area of causing specific learning difficulties. This

came as a surprise to the researcher, given the learning approach observed in Greece, which could be characterised as 'pattern learning', and very demanding on memory.

The terminology used by these teachers illuminated further their perspective. Instead, of the term 'dyslexia', they used the term 'immature' (ct. 23). This term put less emphasis on innate ability and more on time and other environmental-educational factors, which with the right intervention could overcome or circumvent specific learning difficulties. A characteristic example of this attitude, came from a Greek primary 1 teacher who argued:

It is a matter of time and support. With some help, little pushing, she will make it for sure. (ct. 13)

Scottish mainstream teachers referred more to the performance and attainment in reading, writing or even oral language, rather than the abilities or the child itself. They either referred to 'immaturity', for example, in reading, or 'immature' reading skills. In both cases the possibility that the pupil could, given time, achieve maturity or acquire skills was accepted. Those who mentioned skills were much more elaborate than their Greek colleagues about the different skills that they teach. A characteristic example came from a mainstream teacher in the private school, who gave a detailed analysis of the prerequisite skills in reading:

he was not predicting terribly well, he was not reading into the picture which helps with the text. He also ... did not use the context of the story to help to his reading. And he did not use his understanding of the text to help with his reading. If he came across with the word it was the wildest guess with no relationship to the text. (ct. 510)

This analysis of skills could be associated with what the researcher has called 'specificity of skills' (see the pupils' perceptions section in Chapter 8), which characterises the Scottish education system and the teaching approaches it adopts.

Like their Greek colleagues, Scottish mainstream teachers looked to the family for possible causal factors of specific learning difficulties:

I think there are due to whether or not children are motivated and stimulated from ... in the first place is the family, in the second place is the school, and the teacher. In their cases, I think that both live in quite a bad family, not for things like to get their football, but for, as I said in the beginning, just introducing sounds to their children in the beginning this is A this is O, by the time the children have grown up and built up a knowledge in it and builds up their self-esteem. ... It is like they have decided to support them at this stage rather than then. (ct. 77)

Another teacher suggested that the change from a state school to the private sector played a part in causing problems to the child involved:

We use phonics, but you see in the state system [he] would have been taught look-and-say. And I am sure that part of his problem is that he has not had a good grounding. I don't know but it is my opinion, from all the evidence I am getting he has not have a good grounding as an infant. (ct. 510)

On the issue of the curriculum, the Scottish teachers of this study did not perceive it as causing any problems. 'Concentration', however, as with the Greek teachers, was seen as a possible factor, but again it was not very clear whether this was perceived as a fundamental trait or an effect. References to 'organisational' skills were quite extensive. Children with specific learning difficulties were construed as not being trained to develop these skills which were seen as necessary to learning:

His organisational skills [were] behind the rest of the class. For example, you could imagine the first week, the first month of the new term. All the classroom would have to learn that the finished work goes to the finished tray, if is tidying up time and they have not finished, it goes to the unfinished tray. There is the language corner, where all the language books are, the number corner where all the number books are. That took him a long time, and he was continually at my side, checking 'where does this book go? I have not finished this so where does this mean that it goes? This is my number book, but where is the number corner?' (ct. 310)

The lack of reference to organisational skills by Greek teachers could be explained by the lack of movement in the classroom, lack of 'corners' (e.g., language) and the lack of activities which require such skills of pupils.

Scottish mainstream teachers who subscribed to this group, used different terminology from those in the ability group in describing the difficulties. The most common was 'language difficulties' (ct. 57) or 'language learning difficulties' (ct. 510). These contrasted with the term 'dyslexia' used teachers in the first group, and with 'reading difficulties' a term which was associated with the old category system.

Despite some similarities between Scottish and Greek mainstream teachers in describing the characteristics of their pupils with specific learning difficulties some distinctive differences were found: for example, the Greeks emphasised methods of teaching reading and writing, and the Scots reading comprehension and assessment. Furthermore, a larger number of mainstream teachers subscribed to the 'lack of ability' group and adopted an innate deficit understanding of specific learning difficulties in Greece, in contrast with their Scottish counterparts who subscribed in greater numbers to the 'lack of skills' group, perceiving social factors as influencing the maturity of the pupils.

These differences between, Greece and Scotland, can be explained to some extent by the following two factors. The first is the sparseness of assessment in the Greek education, and in particular the complete lack of screening tests or school readiness tests, which could give an indication of pupils at risk, and were used, for this purpose in Scotland. In Greece, only the private school had developed a school readiness test for the pupils who joined the school in primary 1; for the other one third of the pupil population, which joins the school in primary 3, there was a selective examination process in place. The general absence of this kind of assessment, however, had the consequence that Greek mainstream teachers were not aware of the specific developmental stage at which their pupils were, nor their strong or weak points and they could not match developmental stage with teaching methods and expected skill. The second factor, which was particularly

important in explaining why the Scottish mainstream teachers referred more to specific skills than their Greek colleagues, was the nature of their education system, and the better co-operation of mainstream with the learning support teachers who were trained to assess and to intervene in order to develop the skills of their pupils.

### **Head teachers' Perceptions**

Head teachers were asked in a similar manner to the mainstream teachers and learning support teachers about their constructs of specific learning difficulties. However, the emphasis of the interview was put on the policy and provision within the school, rather than the nature of the difficulties. In two cases the head teachers were also the mainstream teachers of the pupils, and in the Greek private school, because of the size of the school (more than 1000 pupils), the head teacher did not know personally the children involved in the study.

The majority of the head teachers, like their colleagues, associated specific learning difficulties with language:

It is basically now difficulties with [...] language that now we are working on. (ht. 7)

The main difference between, on the one hand, head teachers and, on the other hand, mainstream teachers and learning support teachers was that the latter emphasised ability but the medical discourse was more evident among the head teachers:

the actual problem here is not that the overall intelligence is low but there is a dysphasia, or that there is a dyspraxia. [...] Nobody trained us at all that that's in the brain, that is going to be something that you will have to compensate as a teacher; that you are not able to help the child. [...] But I am sure that doctors say feel the same way. Patients that have died 20 years ago, if only they knew what they know now. (Scottish, ht. 10)

The above was the most extreme example of the medical/deficit discourse used, as the metaphor of the doctor and patient was used to describe the relationship teacher and pupil

with specific learning difficulties. However, extreme this might look it was common among head teachers to refer to problems caused mainly by 'innate' (ht. 2 and 9) factors:

Hereditary factors cause this kind of problems. Moreover, some problems during the conception, some psychological problems of the parents during the conception, some possible problems during the pregnancy, all these combined, causes a problem. (Greek, ht. 4)

The perception of innate causation was evident in the understanding of learning difficulties as seen by the head teacher in the private Greek school:

a learning difficulty is something that is in the child, it is not a difficulty to learn due to lack of studying, it is -let us call it- impairment or individuality of his/her 'construction', which might derived from various reasons, mainly biological. (Greek, ht. 5)

Although the majority of the head teachers shared a similar understanding of specific learning difficulties and its constitution, those in the private schools suggested secondary reasons relating to the emotional state of the child and the family. It seems that they were concerned about the expectations of the parents in this specific socio-economic group and, especially in the Greek school, about the high rate of divorced families.

The emotional problem might not be a learning difficulty, however, it inhibits learning. (Greek, ht. 5)

Furthermore, the head teacher of the Greek private school argued that parents' and generally society's expectations were very high, and this put pressure on the children to become scientists, professors, solicitors, doctors or other high status professionals; such aspirations required high academic achievement. Parents tend to expect more than their child can actually achieve in both countries. The pressure put on the pupils by their parents had been a focus for studies in Greece and the UK and these studies have reaffirmed the arguments (see Nasiakou, 1977, or Chazan, et al., 1991).

The head teacher supported the view that Greek society, characterised as an overpopulation of professionals or 'scientific proletariat', was composed of people

struggling to find employment in their profession (e.g., Greece has the lowest number of people per lawyer within the EU: Greece 1:385, UK 1:895, see: Mandrou, 1997, p. E4). Nevertheless, parents still wanted and expected their children to do well in their schooling so that they could enter the university. To help them do so, even from primary school, they might stay in and 'study' with them for (on average in this study) two hours each evening, or they might pay for private tuition (in one case in a state school the pupil had 10 hours of private tuition a week).

In Scotland, the head teacher in the private school put emphasis also on the expectations that parents and teachers should have of children with specific learning difficulties. She suggested that

you draw with the child 'if you finish the task in the time given or soon afterwards, and you concentrate on the very best of your ability that's fine by me.' (Scottish, ht. 10)

This also raised the issue of concentration, and it was implied that lack of it was a characteristic of these children.

One Greek head teacher, however, initially took a very different stand point regarding specific learning difficulties from her colleagues and counterparts. She refused to accept that such fundamental difficulties exist and asserted that the problems that some children were facing in the recent years were caused by, firstly, the insufficient use of the blackboard by the mainstream teachers which resulted to less copying from it, and secondly, the language that parents use to speak to their children:

Many of the problems are created by the parents themselves. The language of the parents does not go down to the level of the children. We are talking with 'adult-like' words. Children in primary 1 and 2 cannot understand their language, they don't have the right age. The parent must reach down to the level of the child and then start -together. I believe that this is the biggest mistake which happens in these cases. (ht. 2)

In addition, she referred to the change of books and the change of the language and expectations of parents as the possible factors which brought 'dyslexia' into focus, whereas in former years 'it did not exist' (ht. 2). She suggested that the new books were too much 'do as I do' and 'ready made'. This was similar to the view regarding 'patterns' that were investigated earlier (mainstream teachers' perceptions). The rejection, of the existence of 'dyslexia' and, to an extent, of specific learning difficulties by this particular head teacher has to be related to the micro-politics of the specific school. This was the school where the learning support teacher felt hostile and there was no co-operation between the administration and the learning support. This hostility was initially evident even during the interview, and this administration was the only one which checked with the regional office to check that the researcher had obtained permission for 'access to schools'.

### *Summary-Discussion*

At school level, the perceptions of primary mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers, were sought in order to understand how specific learning difficulties were understood at the ground level. The aim was to find similarities, differences among the groups and across the countries and to see what factors might have influenced these perceptions.

First, language was perceived by all the groups in both Greece and Scotland as the area where specific learning difficulties were manifested. References to mathematics were much fewer in number and mentioned in the accounts only when a specific point was made (e.g. 'times table' stressing difficulty in memory). This commonality could be explained by the value that both countries put on language. Furthermore, language has been 'prioritised' by the analytical programmes, the place of the language 'lesson' in the



daily schedule and the general agreement that language difficulties could lead to difficulties in any other subject (for example, a child having problems reading the instructions in a science project).

The differences between the countries became apparent when the emphasis on the different elements of language were investigated. In Scotland both writing and reading were equally stressed. In Greece, the most frequent references were writing and, in particular, spelling; this can be explained by the demands put on children to write, in circumstances where all subjects were book based and children had to write in exercise books.

In Scotland, mainstream teachers put emphasis on teaching skills, and the majority of the class teachers viewed specific learning difficulties as a delayed development of pupil's skills, which resulted in the manifestation of the difficulties in reading and writing. In Greece, however, the majority construed specific learning difficulties as lack of innate ability. The discourse used by this majority group was medical, the approach to specific learning difficulties psycho-medical and the difficulties were construed in an individualistic nature.

Some mainstream teachers in both countries construed specific learning difficulties as immaturity, taking the view of developmental lag. Characteristically, emphasis was put on school readiness, especially in Greece, implying that school age was an important factor. The discourse in this case was educational, taking a social view of the difficulties and allowing for environmental factors. Teaching methods, family environment, education system characteristics and cultural considerations were seen as influencing the pupils' experience of specific learning difficulties. In Greece, the curriculum, books as

well as the principle of 'one lesson to all', has been condemned by mainstream teachers and learning support teachers alike.

The Greek curriculum, which will be examined further in Chapter 10, was perceived as 'centralised' and academic, and mainstream teachers condemned the pressures that it put on them. Its prescriptive nature was seen as forcing teachers to 'finish the books'. Learning support teachers in Greece suggested this centralised curriculum implied a principle of 'one lesson for all' and argued that the system was geared towards the 'average' child. In contrast, in Scotland, the curriculum was not seen as a causal factor for specific learning difficulties. Mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers perceived it as having the necessary breadth and flexibility to accommodate pupils with such difficulties. In both countries, however, learning support teachers and mainstream teachers suggested that a pupil's change of school which resulted in a change of teaching methods and curriculum, could cause specific learning difficulties.

Linked with the issue of the curriculum being directed towards the 'average' child and the 'one lesson for all' was the nature of the educational assessment, or rather the lack of it, in Greece. Learning support teachers and the head teacher in the private school, condemned the lack of any educational assessment, which left the teachers not knowing the strengths, weaknesses and the level of working of each child. In Scotland, mainstream teachers in describing their pupils with specific learning difficulties noted that they were 'pre' or 'at' Level A or B, suggesting that they could be working at one level in reading and writing and at another in listening. The lack of educational assessment of any kind, even informal diagnostic, in Greece, could be explained by the fact that because they were not teaching on an individualised basis there was no need to assess or to find the base line. This was picked up by learning support teachers, who either developed

their own assessment schedules, or in the case of the private school, used assessment tests developed abroad. In Scotland, the use of assessment and the co-operation with the psychological services allowed a better understanding of the level of performance of each individual pupil.

The nature of this co-operation influenced the discourses used by the mainstream teachers and learning support teachers. Being closer linked with the psychologists the psychological approach was more evident. In addition the training that learning support teachers had influenced their constructs, and they had moved away from the language that mainstream teachers used. In the private sector, where it seemed that the ethos of the school encouraged a psychological approach and language more than the state sector, this evidence was stronger.

Mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers, who did not subscribe to the ideas of hereditary causation or the medical discourse, looked to the family for possible factors causing specific learning difficulties. In both Greece and Scotland, primary teachers referred to the stability of the family environment, across the socio-economic spectrum, but identified different problems. For example, where in a low income family the instability would have arisen from anxiety about lack of employment, in a high income family it would consist of 'an adult-like life style' or a high rate of divorces. In Greece, however, learning support teachers especially were more concerned about the educational pressures within the family. They suggested that the cultural emphasis put on education created an environment where school failure, which was common among pupils with specific learning difficulties, had social consequences to the whole family. In addition, the cultural characteristic of involvement in the child's education, put a great

deal of emotional stress on children and parents, particularly in cases where parents could not adapt their thinking to the education approach present in the current curriculum.

Mainstream teachers and learning support teachers who construed specific learning difficulties as immaturity and looked for educational or social aetiology, did not construe children with specific learning difficulties as forming discrete group. However, those colleagues who perceived them as hereditary and followed the medical discourse, associated specific learning difficulties with dyslexia and perceived it as discrete.

Head teachers in both countries perceived specific learning difficulties as mainly apparent in language, and primarily caused by problems in the 'construction' (as in making) of the children, and secondarily by emotional pressure. The manifestation of the difficulties was seen in the same manner as the rest of the respondents. However, the link between the medical discourse and the private head teacher in Scotland was very strong, and she used a powerful medical metaphor to describe the provision required. In contrast, one head teacher in Greece, suggested that there were no children with specific learning difficulties as such, and all the learning problems that some children faced were due to their parents' expectations, and unsuitable books or teaching approaches. She did not see children with specific learning difficulties as a discrete group.

In summation, head teachers, mainstream teachers and learning support teachers in Greece and Scotland construed specific learning difficulties as problems mainly in language acquisition, especially in reading and writing. There was some variation between the two countries in the emphasis put on different elements like spelling. Across all the groups there were two main constructs of specific learning difficulties. The first adopted a psycho-medical approach and language associated with the medical discourse, following the view that these difficulties arose from a hereditary lack of ability, and that

children with specific learning difficulties formed a discrete group. The second construct, adopted a psycho-educational approach and language which was associated with a social construct of the difficulties, looking at cultural, educational and family factors; the main difference between this construct and the first was that a child with specific learning difficulties was regarded as immature rather than lacking ability.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Perceptions of Specific Learning Difficulties: the Consumers' view**

#### ***Introduction***

In this chapter the views of the consumers (i.e. the parents and the pupils in the primary schools) on specific learning difficulties involved in this study are explored. Their views are compared with those expressed in the previous chapters and, when applicable, the similarities and differences will be highlighted.

#### **Parents' Perceptions**

Parents' perceptions of the nature of specific learning difficulties were gathered using similar methods as in the case of the teachers. The majority focused their responses on language. This can be explained by the importance that both education systems place on language, which reflects the emphasis that both societies and cultures give to reading and writing. To give an indication of this emphasis, in Scotland and Greece alike, parents complained about the falling standards in the written work of students, and especially the lack of well constructed sentences 'using correct grammar' and syntax (Gr. mother, sch. 2) in order 'not to murder the language' (Sc. father 5, sch. 10).

Although there appeared to be no significant difference in terms of manifestation of the problems, parents in Greece were the only ones who raised the issue of attitudes to disability. In Chapter 4 the broader contextual framework was investigated, which included the attitudes to disability, and a historical analysis was made in order to explain

the current attitudes. Parents in Greece were extremely anxious, as noted by the learning support teachers, about the school failure of their children, for reasons that were explained in Chapter 4. The Greek parents' references to disability as an issue were particularly significant since disability was not used as a question in the semi-structured interview schedule. The intention was to avoid leading the interviewees to associate specific learning difficulties with disability.

One Greek parent commented that 'people have certain stereotypes about these issues' concluding:

Greece is prejudiced regarding these matters. (mother, sch. 4)

Moreover, parents described their initial despair and fear, when they were told that their child would need the assistance of a learning support teacher. Statements like 'I lost the world' (mother, sch. 1), or 'I thought that my child was sick' (mother, sch. 3), or that children who went to the 'special classroom' were 'mental' (father, sch. 3), were indicative of their fear of this 'prejudice'. It was evident, furthermore, that these statements were present throughout the social spectrum, from a skilled labourer to a wealthy shop owner. Even at the top of the social ladder, in the private school, a mother suggested when asked whether she knew any other children with specific learning difficulties:

parents might not want it to become common knowledge; this is very personal, I don't ask, you do understand. (mother, sch. 5)

This 'attitude problem' was picked up by learning support teachers (see previous chapter) during the interviews in different ways. One, being explicit, supported the parents' views:

I believe that we have in Greece an attitude problem, and I do not know whether it exists elsewhere. We face the child with special needs with pity, rather than acceptance. (lst. sch. 4)

These statements on disability were expressed not only by the parents of those two serious cases identified as 'problematic', but were common among the majority of the parents reflecting their anxieties.

### *Ability group*

No significant differences appeared between the two groups of parents, Scottish and Greek. Both emphasised that specific learning difficulties were mainly manifest in language. All parents, used expressions such as 'he/she cannot' or 'he/she has problems with' and described the characteristics of specific learning difficulties in their children following the kind of discourse that has been previously attributed to 'the ability group'. However, there was a distinctive difference between parents and mainstream teachers; parents did not use the word ability, but they implied the lack of it.

As it became clear from their statements, parents described their children's problems as they experienced them through homework or asking about their school work. Children with specific learning difficulties had 'illegible' (Gr. mother 21, and Gr. mother 35) writing, may 'skip, repeat, cut' (Gr. mother 65), 'cannot copy correctly' (Sc. mother 79) or 'join' (Sc. mother 68) the words, and may 'not use any vowels'. (Sc. mother 78) Furthermore, parents were concerned about concentration. They were confused, however, about whether concentration was an effect or a cause of specific learning difficulties.

Most of the parents used the verbs 'cannot', 'does not have', 'lacks', and the noun 'problem', in association with concentration, or suggested their child was 'easily distracted', indicating their perception of the problems as intrinsic in nature. However, there were some parents who supported a slightly different view. By suggesting that they



could create a situation where the child could concentrate, they took the viewpoint that concentration depended to some extent on environmental factors:

if you push him to concentrate, immediately he understands it and does it.  
(3/5)

Parents, and in particular fathers, were very easily drawn into a line of argument, about negative consequences to their child of a lack of concentration. They saw it as carelessness or even laziness. A Scottish father said:

I think one problem of his is careless. I was doing maths sums the other night and he is almost as if he is not really concentrated 100% at all times His mind is on something else. I mean he makes foolish mistakes, (510)

One father in Greece, being more graphic, said to his wife:

What are you saying to me about the dyslexia pill. The child is lazy, as all children. (65)

This indicated how important it was that parents had a clear understanding of specific learning difficulties; the negative characterisations of labels such as 'fool' or 'lazy' could have an effect on the self-esteem which has a profound effect on learning. In addition, as one mother stated, parents were confused about the relationship between memory and concentration:

She forgets things or she cannot concentrate, I have not yet sorted it out.  
(6/2)

These were no substantial differences on these matters between the Greek and the Scottish parents. However, if comparisons in relation to socio-economic status rather than nationality are considered, it becomes evident that parents from higher social groups elaborated more on the difficulties of their children to a greater extent than others. For example, where a parent from a lower socio-economic group would say

he has always had the difficulty of his reading and writing (Sc. mother, sch. 9),

another from a higher social group would be much more detailed in his or her analysis giving characteristics of 'the difficulty of his reading and writing'. For example, a mother in the Scottish private school suggested that

He does reverse: Fedruary and tadles instead of tables and he used to do p. and q now that I remembered, but it seems that he sorted that out. [father] And simple words like two, [mother] the, are, [father] he mixes the order (Sc. parents 510)

This, however, does not mean that no parent from a more disadvantaged background gave any detailed account of his or her child's difficulty, but only that the majority limited themselves to general description.

Another characteristic, spelling, was described differently by different socio-economic groups. For example, parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds might refer to 'back-to-front' writing (Sc. mother 79) while those from higher social groups would use terms such as 'reversals' (b/d, p/q, or  $\beta/\delta$ ) (Sc. mother 310, or Gr. 65). Reversals were most frequently mentioned by the parents of pupils in private schools. In Scotland, this could be attributed to communication with the 'dyslexia lobby', and in Greece to the information given to them by the learning support department of the private school.

A further set of statements, common to parent groups in both countries, reflected the discrepancy between oral ability and writing abilities. A Greek mother from the private school, suggested that the difference between oral and written abilities were 'an 80%' (Gr. mother, 35), and a Scottish unemployed mother from a small rural school, said:

it took him five minutes to write a story this size [very small], and then she asked him to tell her a story for five minutes, and that story was **this** [much larger]. (mother 79)

Moreover, children with specific learning difficulties were seen as having problems in attempting to 'put sentences together' (Sc. mother 67) and express themselves.

Lack of fluency was the most common characteristic of children with specific learning difficulties in reading. A child with specific learning difficulties may 'guess' (Sc. father 510) instead of read a word, 'and he guesses very very wrong'. Most Greek parents perceived a reader with specific learning difficulties as one who reads 'syllable-by-syllable', and who may find long, composite words difficult. Such problems were noted in Scotland too. Parents were concerned about the 'reading comprehension' of their children, both in Scotland and Greece,

He can read perfectly well, probably as good as any other child of his age, but the problem with his reading is that if you ask him what he has read he could not say to you what it is all about. (Sc. mother 56)

These accounts of characteristics of specific learning difficulties as seen by parents did not seem to differ much from those of the group of teachers who subscribed to the 'ability' perception. However, there were some significant differences between the perceptions of teachers and parents, on the possible causation of the difficulties.

### *Causation*

Parents, like teachers, used both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in trying to explain why their children had specific learning difficulties. The difference from teachers, however, was that there was not a clear cut differentiation among those who believed either in intrinsic or extrinsic causation. The researcher could not identify a pattern, or an association, between the parents' perceptions of specific learning difficulties and the causation that they put forward. This was in contrast with the teachers' association of 'ability group' with intrinsic factors, or 'skills group' with extrinsic factors. According to parents, extrinsic causes could be grouped into two sub-groups: i) those arising from the family, and ii) those arising from the school.

Parents, among all interviewees, were the most self critical. They looked for possible causes within the family, to the same degree that teachers did. The difference between the two groups, however, was that teachers rarely looked at themselves as the source of problems. Parents supported the idea that a plausible cause could be that their child could be 'spoiled' (Gr. 52) being the only child in the family, or 'babied' (Gr. 62):

so she was kind of baby, she was kept like a baby I think, because she was the youngest that is what sometimes I think. Maybe because she is the youngest of four, and you tend not to let them grow up as quick as you let the first ones grow up. (Sc. 67)

Parents also explored as a possible cause their lack of involvement in children's education.

In Greece, in a case of low socio-economic status family, a father said:

I have not sat down and played with [him]. Up to 2:00 I work, I finish work I start something else. I have not showed the interest to sit and play -even for an hour- with the child, basketball or football, I have not done it. Sometimes he asks me to play football, I play for a while and then I get bored. How can I be occupied with the child? I go and do something to the car. Then I do things to the house on my own the last four years. So, I did not pay attention to the child. There I am inferior regarding the child. As a father, I did not get involved at all. (Gr. 52)

A mother, also in Greece, was angry as she was arguing that nobody had told her about the importance of bedtime reading and other play activities involving language. Emotional causation was also mentioned, in particular in the case of 'language understanding difficulties', as a Scottish mother put it:

that goes back to when he was born, as my husband did not want children and both were accidents, and the second was really the nail in the coffin, definitely rejected the birth (...), and he was angry at me and he was always very intrusive, always creating problems. (Sc. 56)

Furthermore, a Greek mother said that she could get so anxious about her child's education that she was trying to restrain from hitting him.

Although parents looked at themselves for possible factors that influenced the manifestation of specific learning difficulties on their children, they also investigated

thoroughly teachers, methods, and elements of the education systems. The lack of pre-nursery or nursery education and the lack of early intervention were mentioned. In addition, a father from the private school in Scotland, whose son was previously in a state school, commented on the level of interest in the work provided by the school suggesting that the reading material was not motivating enough. In addition, he argued that a 'personality clash' between pupil and teacher led to the child's refusal to go to school, with obvious learning consequences.

In Greece, it was suggested that the class teachers' method might have been inappropriate:

she was not asking him to read, towards the end she was not putting him to read, as a result the child was bored. She was writing, writing writing, long pages, and the child could not understand what was happening. (Gr. 52)

In addition, parents had realised that the prescriptive curriculum, with the common-to-all books resulted that their children with specific learning difficulties were 'just present' in the classes, something that was picked up by learning support teachers.

Parents, however, recognised more factors which were intrinsic to their children. Among those, the most commonly used were heredity, medical causes in three cases, and in four cases immaturity.

In both countries, and throughout the socio-economic spectrum, parents suggested hereditary reasons for specific learning difficulties. In one case in the Greek private school it was mentioned that:

[mother] when we did the diagnosis they had told us that this is hereditary, and I don't think that there were other factors [father] The psychologist reached the conclusion that probably he had inherited that from me, that I might have been dyslexic. (Gr. parents 65)

This pattern was also present in a Scottish school with a very low socio-economic catchment area, who argued that 'it runs in our family' (Sc. Mother 79). Other parents referred to medical reasons, in the cases of children who had severe difficulties, most probably due to meningitis in one case, peri-natal difficulties in the other.

What was very interesting was that those parents who suggested that their children were immature, were all in the private sector in both countries. Three out of four (the fourth one suggested hereditary causes) argued that their children were immature:

I think [he] is immature, I think he is immature for a young 9 year old child. And my older son, at that stage he was immature too, but he grew out of that. I don't remember if he had problems like [him] but he was immature like [him]. (Sc. father 510)

The other statements that were used only by fathers in both countries, and especially in the private schools, was that their children were giving up easily and were lazy. Moreover, a Greek father in the private school said, when the mother suggested that the child was aware that he had a problem:

[This] might be a small mistake to know that, he might take advantage of it, he is a child!! (Gr. father 65)

### *Pupils' Perceptions*

Pupils' were asked to respond to the question: 'what do you find particularly hard in the lessons?' This open ended question was selected in order not to influence the responses towards any specific subjects (e.g., language or maths). However, pupils in both countries associated specific learning difficulties with language; this finding of course, reflected to some extent the views of those who identified them as suitable for case-studies (i.e. the learning support teacher or the head teachers). Sixteen pupils out of twenty, from both countries, were concerned mainly about their writing and spelling.

Analysing the data gathered from pupils in both countries resulted in three significant findings relating to: (i) the specificity of skills; (ii) the social versus the individualistic paradigm of language difficulties; and (iii) the lack of difficulties.

### **Specificity of Skills**

The pupils had understood and were conscious about the cultural and educational emphasis on language, something that in Greece had been passed on through nursery rhymes and an expectation of going to school to learn 'the letters'. Although most of the pupils, in Scotland and Greece, spoke about the difficulties they were facing in language, the terms which they used in the two contexts were different. In Greece, the most common description of their own difficulties were in 'writing' and difficulties in being able 'to read'. The majority referred to reading and writing in general. The lack of identification of particular difficulties could be explained by the nature of the educational system. The Greek educational system, can be characterised as scholastic and oriented towards academic studies. The OECD report described it as centralised, not only in the administration and organisation as it was elaborated in chapter 4, but also regarding the content of studies. The report continued:

The Greek education, and especially secondary, having as main aim to provide general education, with emphasis on humanities, and to prepare the pupils to enter to the higher education institutions, does not help particularly in the development of skills. (OECD, 1996, par. IV)

The scholastic and general nature of the education system had negative consequences for children with specific learning difficulties as they were the first to suffer from an educational approach which ignored any individuality. Children with specific learning difficulties, as the next chapters will elaborate further, need to be taught to their strengths

and not to be in an educational environment where the teaching targeted the 'average' child.

In Scotland, however, although pupils mentioned writing and spelling, they were able to identify **specific tasks** which were causing them difficulties. For example, many emphasised that they could face difficulties 'when you are writing a sentence' (pupil 6, sch. 8), or in 'my English Alive' (pupil 6, sch. 7), or 'if you are doing a story' (pupil 3, sch. 10), or on 'project sheets' (pupil 5, sch. 7). One can argue that children in Scotland were aware, to an extent, of the different skills required to do different tasks. The researcher argues that the Scottish education system was much more **task and activity oriented**, and children had associated different tasks and activities with different skills required in language. In support of this argument, Theodoropoulou (1992) described the Scottish curriculum as 'project based' with practical applications simulating real situations. Hence, pupils, in their accounts of their language difficulties, referred to those activities that they found more demanding:

project sheets and sometimes when she gives me sentences to add a word in there, sometimes I don't get quite right. (pupil 5, sch. 7)

The fact that projects could be tailored to the specific needs of a particular child allowed more flexibility for the teachers of children with specific learning difficulties. These pupils were able to identify in the different projects and the different material used, various weaknesses in their reading and even more so in their writing skills. This can be identified as 'specificity of skills', and the differences between pupils in the two countries can be put down to the different educational systems.



### *Social Versus Individualistic Paradigm*

Another distinctive difference between the two groups of pupils, the Scottish and the Greek, was the ways in which they referred to their language difficulties. In Greece, pupils suggested that they themselves had difficulties with writing, reading or spelling. Statements like 'I can only read small words' (Gr, P1/1), or 'I have a dyslexia [problem] with ö/è (f/th sounds)'. One could argue that the difficulties in language were seen in Greece by pupils as originating in themselves. The only Greek pupil (from a state school) who tried to explain why she was making mistakes, used the term 'dyslexia' (pupil 6, sch. 2), which further emphasised this intrinsic notion.

Another suggested that it was one of the reasons why she had been facing difficulties in the class, and making mistakes was the cause of great anxiety:

Sometimes I have stress and I make mistakes. (pupil 62).

The only reference to an extrinsic factor made by a Greek pupil, concerned the curriculum; a boy had problems with religious education because

you have to learn by heart (pupil 3, sch. 4),

Generally, therefore, Greek pupils saw the causes of their difficulties as intrinsic to themselves.

In Scotland, however, in contrast with the above statements, pupils referred to experiencing difficulties 'when there are hard words' (pupil 6, sch. 6), or 'it [the language] is very hard sometimes' (pupil 5, sch. 10). This indicated a conceptual difference about the origins of their difficulties: pupils in Scotland perceived these as a characteristic of the language rather than arising solely from their own intrinsic weaknesses. In Scotland, moreover, a child explained why he made mistakes:

you are thinking in your head and the [teacher] will tell you to do something else. (pupil 5, sch. 7)

It can be argued, therefore, that pupils in Scotland construed the possible causes as, in part at least, extrinsic to themselves, and held a social construct of specific learning difficulties.

The differences between pupils in the two countries, in their support for ideas that the source of difficulties was intrinsic or extrinsic, was generally in line with the views of the other groups interviewed.

One concern that the pupils in both countries had was their lack of memory:

you cannot remember what is in your head, something like that. (pupil 57)

Pupils from Greece and Scotland in equal numbers suggested that lack of ability to recall (for example 'how to spell a word' or 'times table') was causing them difficulties with their schooling. Memory, therefore, was perceived by them as an important causal factor of specific learning difficulties. However, in Greece, one case study pupil suggested that the problem was not only within themselves but also as a result of interaction with the education system as:

because you must tell it by heart, and it is a bit difficult. (pupil 35)

This was characteristic of the emphasis that a scholastic education system based on book knowledge placed upon the pupils, putting children with specific learning difficulties yet again under pressure.

### *'No Difficulties'*

Although the majority of pupils spoke about difficulties in language, there were four cases (one in Scotland and three in Greece) where, for different reasons, the individuals did not suggest that they had any problems. Retrospectively, it could be said that the inclusion of

these case-study pupils in this study was an artefact the identification procedure that had been followed. As the focus of the research was to investigate the people's (i.e., pupils, parents, mainstream teachers, learning support teachers, and head teachers) constructs of specific learning difficulties the researcher asked the head teachers to identify pupil cases and they usually delegated this responsibility to the learning support teachers.

This approach, however, had some consequences and limitations. In one case in Greece one person did the identification of the pupil and another was interviewed at the end of the school visit. In the Greek private school, the learning support department, had two teachers/child psychologists, and it seemed that the perceptions of the two individuals of what was meant by specific learning difficulties were somehow different. The identification of the two cases was made by the senior member, who was asked to identify two pupils with specific learning difficulties, but in the interview later the junior member of the team suggested that one of these case-study pupils (Pupil 3, sch. 5) was in fact 'a slow learner'.

A rather different set of circumstances characterised the identification of the other two Greek pupils who did not include language difficulties in their accounts. The learning support teachers who undertook the identification of the cases were so keen to illustrate to the researcher their work regarding integration, that in both instances they included pupils with moderate or severe learning difficulties (even mental retardation, as it was expressed during the interviews) among the case studies. This occurred despite the fact that everybody who was involved in the identification process was explicitly asked to identify two pupils with specific learning difficulties. In these two cases, there were problems because the pupils were unaware of the extent of their difficulties, and communication with the researcher was inadequate.

In Scotland, in two cases the identification of the case-study pupils was conducted by head teachers themselves, and it was one of these pupils who suggested that he had no difficulties with language. According to his beliefs he was performing as well as the rest of his group, so he had 'no problems' (pupil 7, sch. 8). This pupil's teacher made comments relating this view to his home background and the value the family put on education. Again the cultural difference between Scotland and Greece was evident. No matter what the socio-economic background education was highly valued in Greece, whilst in Scotland the working class families seemed to put less emphasis on education.

### *Summary-Discussion.*

Parents of the case-study primary pupils were divided, like teachers, on whether specific learning difficulties were to be construed as lack of ability or immaturity. Those who belonged to the first group suggested hereditary causes, such as the 'genes', whilst those in the second looked for age, family or teaching methods. The significant difference between the parents in the two countries was their perception of disability. In Greece, parents suggested that the society was 'prejudiced' against any kind of disability; this was reflected in their reactions when they heard that their children had specific learning difficulties. In addition, differences were found between not only the countries of origin but also the socio-economic groups. Parents from higher socio-economic groups were more elaborate describing their children's difficulties and they were more inclined to use language usually associated with the Dyslexia voluntary associations, especially in Scotland. Those parents were also more vocal about the appropriateness of the teaching methods and materials and 'personality conflicts'.

Looking across the countries at the perceptions of pupils, the difference in their references to specific tasks was noted. This resulted from the different education systems, the

Greek being generally focused on formal academic knowledge whilst the Scottish was more task oriented. These differences between pupils could be linked with the references of mainstream teachers in Scotland to the necessary skills elements in the acquisition of reading. This emphasises the different approach of the two education systems: the Scottish encourages and develops skills, and the Greek which is based on knowledge acquisition.

In addition, pupils perceived differently in the two countries the origins of their specific learning difficulties. In Greece, they thought that they did not have the ability to read or write (as one pupil put, she had 'a dyslexia'), whilst in Scotland pupils suggested that the language itself was too hard. This difference may have been influenced by the approaches adopted by other groups of respondents. In Greece, where the emphasis was on a medical model focusing on deficits pupils talked about 'lack of ability'. In contrast, in Scotland, where the emphasis was on the educational model focusing on the strengths, pupils talked about the 'hard' language.

## Chapter 9

### **Provision for specific learning difficulties in the literature, policy documentation and perceptions of the policy agents**

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter ideas about the provision in the primary schools for specific learning difficulties, as presented in the literature and the policy documentation in Scotland, Greece and where available EU, are discussed. The views of the policy agents in both countries as well as the EU are also explored in order to compare them in later chapters with the constructs of the educators (i.e. mainstream teachers, learning support teachers, head teachers) and the consumers (i.e. pupils and parents) at school level.

#### *Provision in the Literature*

In Greece, the education literature focused on the different perceptual models of specific learning difficulties, rather than on provision. Stasinou (1993) admitted that

the literature about dyslexia has focused more on the possible causal factors of the phenomenon rather than on possible models of intervention.  
(p. 144)

Another characteristic of the Greek literature on special educational needs in general and specific learning difficulties in particular is the fact that it turns to foreign literature and models. For example, Jouriadou and Bitzarakis (1990) referred to Italy and Denmark as examples for practice of integration. However, a MNERA (1988) seminar on special education was organised in association with UNESCO and focused on examples from Greece. In the proceedings of the seminar one could find many examples of provision

within special classrooms all over Greece. The common characteristic of pilot and high profile exercises aimed to raise awareness among the teachers through a structured and multisensory approach.

All the reports in the above seminar started by presenting an assessment list, which identified the 'base line' of the performance strengths and weaknesses of the pupils involved. Then a task analysis was presented for each individual case, along with the materials (cards with pictures, syllables, words, and use of a 'window' card) used, the reporting grids and the evaluation sheets. A typical example is presented in table 9.1 (p. 207).

Anagnostopoulou (1989), taking a broad view in discussing provision, has highlighted its cultural and attitudinal context:

The school addresses in theory the pupil of average intelligence and sets norms and rules standardised upon a 'statistical mean', which basically remains unchallenged. In reality, the school has not harmonised the development of all the children, which is neither the same, nor stable. ... The school, which should have harmonised its methods, aims and general ethos to the children's individuality, is a place of homomorphy and tends to exclude any child which for any reason is different. (p. 84)

Koromelas (1985) has made several recommendations for change in the Greek school system in order to enable it to provide for pupils with specific learning difficulties.

Among other suggestions he proposed:

1. the adoption of individualised teaching,
2. merging of small and isolated schools,
3. reducing the number of pupils in the P1,
4. teacher training,
5. change of attitudes of teachers and society,
6. assessment of school readiness and encouragement of pre-school education,
7. co-operation between school and family, and
8. social contributions. (Koromelas, 1985, p. 99)

**Table 9.1: Summative Card**

Name	Pupil C			
Materials	Sheets with syllables			
	Cards with syllables			
	A window card			
Material	Instructions	Behaviour		
Sheets with syllables	Read these syllables	Reads the syllables		
Cards with syllables	Read these syllables	Reads the syllables		
A window card	Read the syllable you can see	Reads the syllable		
Criteria		Begun	Achieved	Assessed
Time shorter than the average of the assessed children				
STEP 1: (C-V)	target 76'	13/11/87	18/11/87	20/11/87
STEP 2: (C-C-V)	target 123'	18/11/87	20/11/87	25/11/87
STEP 3: (V-C)	target 156'	20/11/87	25/11/87	30/11/87
STEP 4: (C-V-C)	target 135'	25/11/87	30/11/87	3/12/87
STEP 5: (C-V C-V)	target 176'	30/11/87	3/12/87	11/12/87
...		...	...	...
STEP 11: (C-C-C-V)	target 192'	21/1/88	26/1/88	28/1/88

(MNERA, 1988, p. 312; C: consonant, V: vowel)

Most strongly, however, he argued for 'an additional teacher' who would devise individualised programmes for the pupils with specific learning difficulties, conduct the assessment along with the mainstream teacher and co-operate with the special advisors for guidance. Polychronopoulou (1984) also argued for better training of learning support teachers as well as rigid regulation from the government to raise the standards of private provision, which she called 'pseudo-specialists'.



The issue of school assessment has had a prominent position within recent Greek literature. Kerides (1994) argued that within the history of Greek education, the assessment competition for entrance to the universities has had significant weight, and has been perceived as the 'highlight, the peak' of the education process. He concluded that the practices of rote memory learning

have characterised the Greek education system, from the first grades of primary school to the university ... and it is based on memorising and almost photographically reproducing a particular curricular material, which comes from that provided by the school authorities school books. (Kerides, 1994, p. 23)

This practice has particular consequences for children with specific learning difficulties, who are perceived to have poor memory. In addition, the acknowledgement that all the assessment was based on written material, also posed a significant difficulty for these children as their language skills were perceived as their weakest point. Children with specific learning difficulties in Greece have to cope within a school system which is based heavily on written material and they are assessed on their ability to memorise this material.

Bablekou (1991) argued:

Assessment, especially in the form and content which it has in our country, is an insolvent practice, anti-pedagogic, anti-psychological and socially unfair. ... The myopic view and the lack of planning by the state is combined often with the attitudes of the educationists. In the name of the equality of pupils and the pursuing of an objective assessment, some argue that if different assessment criteria are used for those with learning difficulties it will prove to be in the expense of the rest of the pupils. (p. 73)

With regard to diagnostic assessment Stromatas (1990) noted that there were no pedagogic assessment tests which have been standardised for Greece. He argued that often the learning support teachers devise their own tests, which always confirm the difficulties for which the pupil has been referred. Furthermore, the role of the mainstream teacher within the assessment team has been underestimated by some like

Karpathiou (1994) or Alejandrou (1995). In contrast, Stasinou (1993) acknowledged the importance of the class teacher in assessing the difficulties of a child.

In discussing the relations between schools and parents Psalte and Gavrielidou (1996) have noted that although the majority of the Greek parents helped their children at home, there was a definite need for guidelines given by teachers in order to achieve some continuity between home and school. Stromatas (1990) put the responsibility on the mainstream teachers as the 'only responsible and competent' (p. 127). Furthermore, he argued that co-operation with parents was extremely important as they had to approve their child's attendance in the 'special classroom', currently the only means of provision for children with specific learning difficulties in Greece (there will be more about the special classrooms in the next section on policy).

In relation to methods, Stasinou (1993) presented three approaches to a European conference held in Greece; these were all derived from foreign literature. He referred to the phonemic methods advocated by Bradley and Bryant (1983), the Snowling (1987) method where the child learns to cut the word to syllables and, finally, the multisensory structured approaches like the one presented by Gillingham and Stillman (1969). However, once more the lack of evidence of research within Greece was highlighted as no data from a Greek research programme were presented. Zachos (1993), from the perspective of the Centre of Psychological Health he founded with his brother (both educationists with studies abroad), was probably one of the few to collect data and work on a programme similar to the one developed by Snowling (1987). The programme was structured and based on cutting the words at suitable points so that they were phonemically or conceptually divided. In addition, the words were taught acoustically, conceptually and as a grapheme, in order to make stronger associations among the three.

Furthermore, phonemic, lexicological and grammatical analyses were also used to further enhance the associations.

In Scotland, the discussions on provision for special educational needs were dominated by the concept of integration. In the literature the term integration has been reported to be polysemous, as the different interest groups perceived it according to their own interests. Fulcher (1989) has also commented on the complexity of the term, and the way in which it leads to broad definitions which Allan (1995) has characterised as 'meaningless' (p. 13).

In the first chapter of this dissertation references were made to locational, social and functional integration. Integration was associated with specific learning difficulties with a different sense to that of Jones (1981) who saw it as having the aim to 'de-institutionalise' children and move them into mainstream education; almost all the children with specific learning difficulties were already provided for within the mainstream framework. The intention was to encourage children with specific learning difficulties to remain in the mainstream classrooms.

Hence, in the case of children with specific learning difficulties who already were within mainstream education, the core issue was about functional education. Allan (1994) noted that

children with specific learning difficulties were also viewed as capable of being integrated functionally. For this to occur, however, teachers thought it necessary to introduce some measure of withdrawal for discrete language or mathematics programmes up to year 9 in their education to enable them to make better progress in the mainstream (becoming a more skilled reader was a particularly important element of this). (p. 163)

Pijl and Meijer (1991), however, suggested that the concept of function was not helpful. They preferred the term curricular integration, which meant a common curriculum and common aims. This was particularly important for specific learning difficulties in

circumstances where they were defined in policy documents as 'curricular difficulties' (see Chapter 6).

Integration, however, was not seen by all as a useful concept. Barton and Tomlinson (1984) suggested that integration should be investigated within a wider context, including economic, political and social factors; it needed to be understood in terms of whose needs it was serving: the individual's or the society's.

Because integration was criticised in respect of its emphasis on the location/placement of the individual rather than the education of the child, the term 'inclusion' started to appear in the UK literature, including that emanating from Scotland. Corbett (1994) suggested that inclusion stands for a respect for diversity and difference of any kind, be it race, sex or ability. She continued:

inclusive education can be seen as one step on from integration: more assertive, life-enhancing and visionary. (p. 75)

However, Allan (1995) alerted us to the danger of inclusion being only a new term with no innovations in the practices. She was sceptical that inclusive education would require a change of the attitudes, values, policies and practices which have been dominant within the educational system. An inclusive system would:

include membership in the school community, a single curriculum for all pupils, effective schooling practices (used for all students), friendships and relationships built on reciprocity and support which is not exclusively attached to the student with a disability. (Allan, 1995, p. 17)

In relation to children with specific learning difficulties, inclusive education would require the same principles and practises advocated above. Since in Scotland support was not exclusively for those with difficulties and the curriculum was perceived to be common for most of the cases, more emphasis would have to be placed on changing the attitudes and ethos of schools.

In the Scottish/ UK literature a variety of provision has been reported for special educational needs; this has been organised by Bell and Best (1986) in thirteen different ways: from full-time residential schools to what has been construed as functional integration. In relation to specific learning difficulties, however, Riddell et al. (1992) argued that those interviewed regarding provision emphasised:

- regular withdrawal from class
- one-to-one tuition
- highly structured teaching approaches including repetition and over-learning
- an eclectic programme of instruction tailored to individual needs
- practice in phonics
- concern with the whole family
- a readiness to stress how to cope with the problems if they could not be resolved
- specialised units or centres (e.g. occupational therapy units or reading centres) (original emphasis, p. 205)

In their research, Riddell et al. (1992) emphasised that although some regions had specialist units or centres

the trend appeared to be towards in-class rather than in-centre support in the hope that this might prove to be of more long term benefit for the children and maintain a more stable pattern of integration with the rest of the population in the spirit of the national policy documents of 1978. (p. 205)

This trend in Scotland has been verified in this research, as no case-study pupil had in-centre provision at any time; this will further be elaborated in the next chapter.

Emphasis in the literature was put on a number of issues about provision, such as: identification, methods, materials, assessment, communication with parents, communication with authorities. A common characteristic of the discussions about these issues was that the most influential factor in adopting one view or another was the perceptions about the nature of specific learning difficulties. Conflicts between different

groups, for example teachers and parents, were caused over provision in circumstances where their perceptions of the nature of the difficulties differed.

On the issue of identification, parents have been reported as raising complaints about the timing of the identification, suggesting that the usual P3 or P4 assessment was late, and that if the difficulties were picked up earlier they could be 'cured'. Riddell et al. (1992) also argued that the type of diagnostic assessment was a source of conflict:

Since [parents] believed their child to be suffering from a clearly identifiable condition they expected psychometric tests to be administered to confirm or deny its existence. (p. 123)

In addition, the same research gave evidence of dissatisfaction among parents with the provision, which they perceived as not addressing the discrete nature of specific learning difficulties. Parents believed that their children should have more systematic and structured teaching methods, asking for more one-to-one tuition, and even separate schools for their 'dyslexic' children. These conflicts, were underlined to an extent by the 'battle over resources'; parents' prime aim was the provision for their children, whilst educators and policy agents took a broader view of the needs of all children with special educational needs.

Emphasis within the Scottish (and generally the British) literature was put on the communication and collaboration among teachers and parents. This was accounted for partly by the Warnock report (1978) recommendations and the subsequent Education Act (SOED, 1981), which clearly put parents in the picture by stating explicitly their rights in relation to children with special educational needs. In Chapter 5 of this dissertation explored the broader policy context, with governmental initiatives such as the Parents' Charters, Parents' Guide or the rights to place a 'placement request' or to appeal against the opening of RoN.

In the literature, however, the picture that the government was creating of an 'empowered' parent, with a variety of available choices, was diffused. Armstrong and Galloway (1992) argued that despite the publication of information, or reports by the authorities, parents were being disempowered by the need for regional authorities to keep control of the allocation of resources, and by the professionals who had vested interests in maintaining the professional autonomy of their role. Tomlinson (1982) also argued that

The whole ideology of professional expertise denies that parents are competent to make educational decisions about their children. (p. 109)

Moreover, Armstrong and Galloway (1992) noted that there was a need to distinguish the concept of 'partnership' and 'involvement'. Partnership could be understood as an alliance which was based on the sharing of power as well as understanding and respect for the expertise of the partners, whilst involvement might underline the principles of professional authority and expertise. In addition, Swann (1987) argued that parents of children with special educational needs who lack the power over decisions about resources, were in fact recruited 'as resources in the education of their children, pursuing goals defined by professionals' (p. 193).

Another characteristic of the British literature was the emphasis put on the curriculum and how children with special educational needs could access it. Since the Education Reform Act and the introduction of a national curriculum in England, there was a abundance of books and articles on this issue. Lewis (1991) concluded that the national curriculum had generated strong debates. She argued that

the [national curriculum] can be built on for the benefit of all children, including those who have difficulties in learning. A shared curriculum in terms of aims and some content, but differentiation of approaches; the emphases on maintaining continuity, curricular breadth, coherence, progression and high expectations are all valuable aspects of the [national curriculum]. (Lewis, 1991, p. 171)

In Scotland, for children with specific learning difficulties the adoption of the 5-14 curriculum guidelines, however, had not been assessed. Flexibility, a central issue for differentiation in providing for specific learning difficulties, is greater in Scotland than the rest of Britain. Brown and Riddell (1994) argued that despite the assumed entitlement of the national curriculum being for *all* children

there is still the problem, however, that although policy in Scotland has been less extreme in matters like primary school league tables, there remains strong pressure on schools to promote the achievement culture which can compound the sense of failure for pupils with learning difficulties. (p. 229)

Furthermore, the emphasis within the national curriculum on the basics compared with the rest, further undermines children with specific learning difficulties as they face difficulties in language, and they may lack the opportunities to boost their self-esteem by succeeding in other areas of the curriculum. This dissertation will present in the next two chapters some aspects of the perceptions of the educators and the consumers of 5-14 programme.

Finally, the literature has also focused on the classroom provision. Prompted by the policy initiatives, research has been conducted on the new role of the learning support teachers and their collaboration with their mainstream colleagues. Brown and Riddell (1994) argued that policy

laid emphasis on the consultancy function of learning support teachers and considered the role of the whole school in supporting children with special educational needs. The practicalities of the partnership between learning support and mainstream teachers seems to have been given more prominence by central government policy-makers in Scotland ... [and] has been sustained in local authority schemes ... (p. 223)

It has been also been stated in the policies that the responsibility of provision lies within the mainstream teachers in circumstances where they are seen as equal partners with the learning support teachers. However, the research by Allan (1994) and Munn (1994) suggested that the traditional regime of the 'remedial' teacher was still present and that



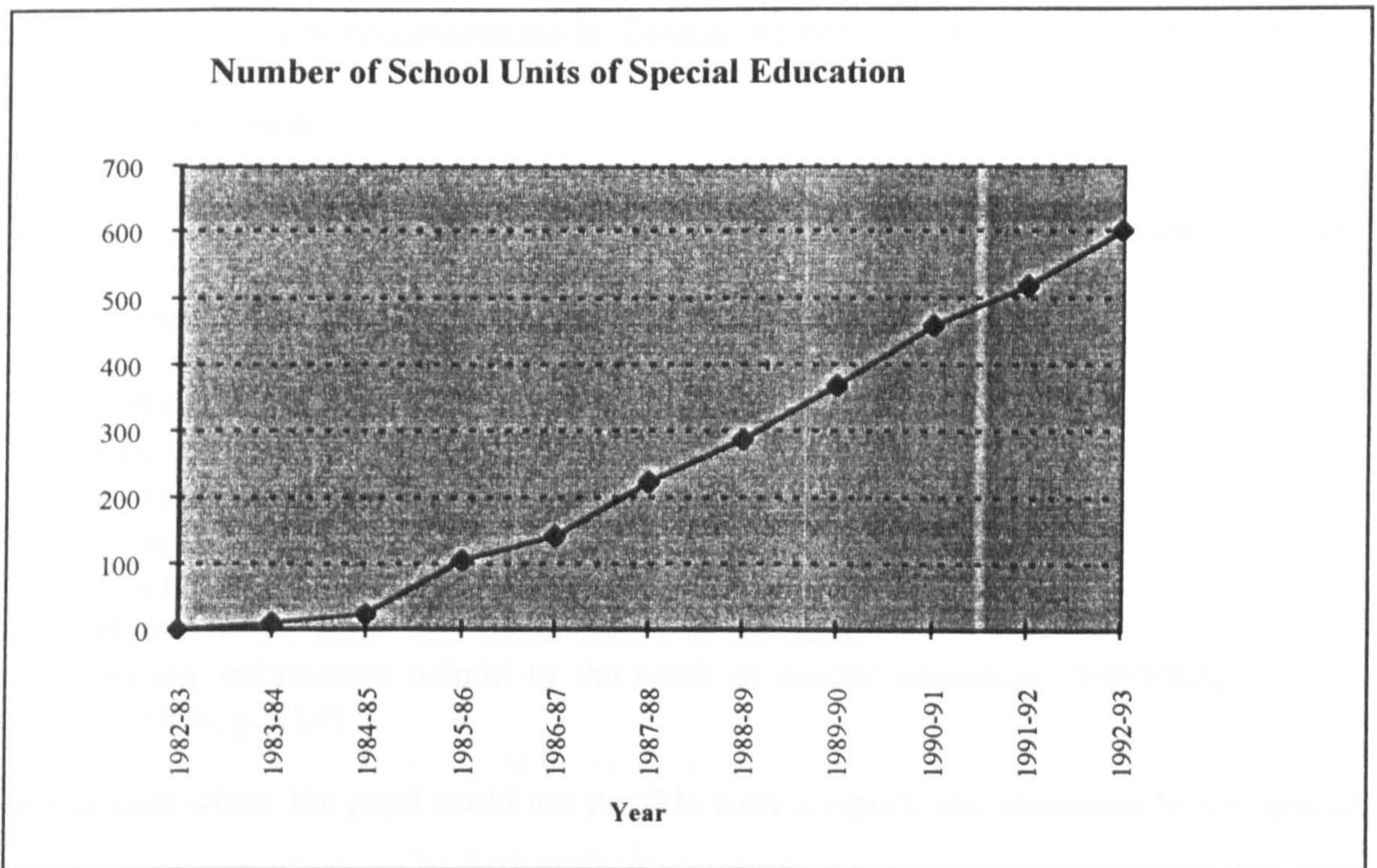
the perceived severity of the difficulties by the mainstream teachers was the determining factor in their readiness to accept the responsibility or not.

### *Provision in the Policy*

In Greece, as it has been noted in chapter 5, the principle of integration was made a national policy in 1985. In the published circular entitled 'children with special educational needs' it was acknowledged that the

vast majority of the approximate 175000 pupils with special educational needs, study in mainstream schools, and **they should stay there**, not as pariahs, but as active members of the pupil's society and the learning processes, as well as the rest of the learning and other school activities, according to their abilities. That means that we are obliged to have, as a contemporary state and society, **one school for all**, with internal differentiation of the educational programmes, when and to the degree dictated by the strengths and weaknesses of the pupils. (Original emphasis, MNERA, 1994, p. 140)

Despite the verbose advocacy of inclusive education, the provision for specific learning difficulties was established by the Presidential Decree 603/82 (see MNERA, 1994, pp. 110-122) in the form of the 'special classrooms'. In 1983-84 the first classes operated in an experimental basis, in 1985 the Education Act 1566/85 was passed through the Parliament where special education for the first time was incorporated within the mainstream education law, and in 1993 there were 602 such classes.



(Based on data provided in MNERA, 1994, p. 12)

According to the policy documentation the special classes were to be established after a petition from the head teacher of the school and the agreement of the education officer and regional head. The minimum number of pupils in order for a class to be created was 8, or 10 according to G6/636/27.11.86. It has been noted (MNERA, 1994, p. 151) that the ministry was under pressure to establish more special classes. Furthermore, the head teachers of bordering catchment areas were expected to co-operate with the head teacher of the school with the special classroom and send pupils with learning difficulties to this class. The financial burden of the special class would be met by the head teacher's budget and the Education Office to which the school belonged.

According to the ministry, the full demand for special classrooms could not have been met, and pupils with specific learning difficulties would have to be educated in mainstream classrooms, with '**individualised teaching**' (original emphasis, MNERA, 1994, p. 151).

However, the policy documentation in Greece did not provide any detailed information about that provision.

In order to attend the special classroom pupils should undergo diagnostic assessment and have a report from the Medical-pedagogical Centre which should include:

- i) the kind and the degree of the declination;
- ii) view regarding the ability of the pupil:
  - a) to attend the programme of the special unit,
  - b) to adapt to the school environment and school life, and
  - c) forecast of future development;
- iii) individual, family and social history of the pupil;
- iv) any information helpful to the work of special education. (MNERA, 1994, p. 114)

In any case where the pupil could not provide such a report, the admission to the special class was based on a decision made by the learning support teachers, and the head teacher was expected to call for the medico-pedagogical assessment. However, the school assessment and report at the end of the year were the responsibility of the mainstream teacher.

In Scotland, the provision for specific learning difficulties was sketched by Warnock (1978) and the HMI report (1978), its principles and general framework were presented in the Education Act (SOED, 1981) and the self-governing Schools Act (SOED, 1989), but the document which represented the provision as perceived in the official policy was the *Effective Provision for Special Educational Needs* (SOED, 1995).

Focusing on the primary school, which is the locus of this dissertation, the document emphasised the importance of primary education for 'a lifetime of learning' (SOED, 1995, p. 37), stressing the need to avoid school failure. The report reiterated the understanding of the majority of learning difficulties as a *mismatch* between pupils' competencies and curricular demands. In the cases where there was a need to open a RoN, the head teacher would use it as a reference record where the needs and provision were fully and

commonly understood by all the involved parties (being teachers, psychological services and parents).

The identification of pupils was structured in eight steps, starting from the class teacher assessing individual pupils using 'procedures normally used in the classroom' (p. 38). Step two incorporated the involvement of the learning support teacher, with the next step involving outside support services. Step four required consideration of the needs by an educational psychologist, which according to the document, may be the last step in 'adjusting the provision in line with needs' (SOED, 1995, p. 38). Steps five to eight were about the opening of the RoN, with the involvement of the medical profession and the parents. The latter retain their right to appeal against the opening of the RoN and the proposed placement.

The most significant characteristic of the identification and assessment proceedings described in the document was the fact that assessment and provision were presented as interlinked.

The main means and starting points for identifying and assessing special educational needs are curriculum-related assessments, following the sequence of **planning, teaching, recording and evaluating ...** This procedure is essential in making effective provision. (original emphasis, SOED, 1995, p. 39)

The curriculum was an area that the report put some emphasis on, as from the beginning it was stressed that the majority of the difficulties were considered to be curricular.

The Education 5-14 framework, shaping the curriculum at the primary stage, is intended for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. The mechanisms of learning outcomes, strands, attainment targets and programmes of study assist teachers in their prime role of making the curriculum appropriate for their pupils. (p. 40)

According the HMI report, the 5-14 helped in preventing the mismatch of pupils' development and attainment with the curriculum and teaching by calling for the devising

of individualised programmes to meet the special educational needs. The document encouraged differentiation, and when this approach was insufficient, the co-operation of the learning support teacher on individualisation, enhancement, adaptation and elaboration in order to construct an Individualised Education Programme (IEP). The definitions of these terms according the policy document are given in Table 9.2. It was suggested that elaboration would be particularly helpful in cases of more profound difficulties.

In addition, the IEP was conceived by the official documentation as a document with all the pupil's details, the delegated staff, the nature of the difficulties and strengths, curricular aims, long and short-term goals, teaching methods, assessment criteria other relevant information and the time of the IEP evaluation.

The forms of provision available for special educational needs included, among others, some which were more relevant to specific learning difficulties: at national level the research and development centres, and at regional level the learning support teams, the learning support within the schools, the special units and classes, the peripatetic specialist teaching services, the regional psychological services, the curriculum advisory and resource services. The most relevant to specific learning difficulties being the curriculum, appropriate resources, availability of expertise, parental involvement, commitment to educate each and every individual and availability of the support services.

**Table 9.2: Planning Strategies for IEP**

<b>Differentiation</b>	Pupils work on the same curricular area, but interact in different ways with teachers and resources.
<b>Individualisation</b>	Aspects of the curriculum and/or approaches to learning and teaching are altered to take account of the special educational needs of individual pupil.
<b>Adaptation</b>	The content of areas or courses is altered to allow pupils facing obstacles, caused by their disabilities, to gain access to comparable experiences to those of their peers or to suitable alternatives.
<b>Enhancement</b>	The content of the curricular areas or courses is expanded to ensure that abler pupils are suitably stimulated and challenged.
<b>Elaboration</b>	The content of the curriculum is specifically designed to meet the needs of the pupils with delayed or seriously disrupted general development, or those who require additional strands or aspects not normally available in the mainstream curriculum

(source: SOED, 1995, p. 12)

The role of the learning support teacher was perceived to be a key role in the provision.

This role included the following:

1. tutoring and class teaching;
2. teaching co-operatively with class teachers;
3. providing consultancy support;
4. providing specialist services; and
5. contributing to staff development. (SOED, 1995, p. 24)

In relation to learning and teaching, the significance of the atmosphere in a classroom which would promote motivation for learning, the planning and the clarity of lessons, the

organisation of resources and classrooms, the emotional support, the appropriate expectations, the matching of tasks to pupils' attainment, the awareness of the importance of language used, the promotion of independent learning skills, the assessment as evaluation of teaching, the feedback to pupils and the need for homework were highlighted. In addition, the use of practical experiences and demonstrations, practice and respect of pupils' interests with the use of play and games, and the 'adage 'little and often'' (SOED, 1995, p. 44) were also encouraged. Nevertheless, it was stressed in the document that

pupils who are too dependent on teachers or their assistants for guiding and prompting their work are prepared to learn only when adult assistance is available (p. 43)

The relationships between school and home were seen as significant. The document stated that these should be based on sensitivity and good communication practices, reassurance of the availability of the expertise and of appropriate provision. Regarding the communication with other bodies and agencies, the role of the head teacher was one of being responsible for bringing together all the professionals and providing time for consultation, seeking the resources, informing on curriculum matters, clarifying roles of staff and allowing staff development. Furthermore, mainstream teachers were encouraged to co-operate with specialists in specifying the needs of the pupil, agreeing priorities for the IEPs, adjusting time-tables to allow the other professionals to have an input, integrating the specialist work in the mainstream classwork, evaluating the provision. Finally, a lot of emphasis has been put on the management of the provision (a whole chapter has been devoted to it). It was argued that:

In effective mainstream schools, policies on special educational needs are usually expressed in terms of provision for learning support, with aims and strategies encompassing all of their pupils with disabilities or difficulties in learning. Such approaches can integrate provision, simplify management and result in more efficient deployment of resources. (SOED, 1995, p. 21)

Furthermore, the need for committed leaders, clear remits and responsibilities, co-ordination of services, team approaches and systems of evaluation were perceived as the corner stones of effective management.

### **Integration and Special Education According to HELIOS**

The European Union's views regarding provision for special educational needs and hence specific learning difficulties were elaborated in the HELIOS I.I (1995) publication. The elements of good provision, according to the European experts were seen to be the following.

**Early intervention:** The importance of early intervention was emphasised by the fact that a whole working group was studying the issue. They stressed the importance of direct work with the child and its family, the interdisciplinary character of the team working with children and families, the co-operation between teachers and parents, the education of parents, and finally, the preparation for a smooth transition to school.

In relation to the **Individualised Educational Project (IEP)**, according to the HELIOS programme, its essential elements and dimensions, were:

**Review: Evaluation (total process)**

**Resources: Technical Aids**

**Advice & Support: nature/form, co-ordination**

**Parents: partnership, empowerment, co-decision**

**Implementation: class organisation, class management, evaluation**

**Curriculum: flexibility, degrees of adaptation**

**Assessment/Diagnosis: pre/ongoing/post**

**Access: building, curriculum, funding/resources**

**Awareness: society, teachers, other key persons.**

The levels of consideration of the above elements should be: 1. the Individual pupil; 2. the Class or Learning group; 3. the Whole School (System); and 4. the Community or Policy



level. The emphasis should be put on the co-operation among all partners and the training of agents in order to raise their awareness and skills.

The EU saw the role of the mainstream teacher as very important in the early intervention, through the early 'diagnostic activity' (the term which in Scotland would be identification). This role was seen as extending to membership of a multidisciplinary team of the IEP, and the communication with the parents. The EU suggested that 'they must change the attitude' of their teams, as well as modifying their resources and teaching methods. Concerning the latter, the working group on the role of the teachers suggested that:

Beyond this necessary adjustment of attitudes, integration is very much facilitated when educational programmes have been developed. For example, organising formal studies in cycles allows for flexibility in the pace of learning; conversely, giving priority to academic knowledge alone slows down the integration process (p. 166)

The HELIOS experts observed that in all of their visits in various MS support teachers were used, despite the fact that 'the term "support teacher" referred to professionals having very different backgrounds and training.' (p. 167) A support teacher could be a teacher with complementary training, or another professional like a psychologist. Their training also varied, with regard to prerequisites, duration, and the associated skills.

Furthermore,

[t]he means of intervention which were described to us during our study visits were very diverse: itinerant teacher or teachers employed by the school, individual tutoring or courses in small groups, inside or outside of the school, in addition to or as part of the curriculum in the mainstream school, within the framework of the school or as part of specialised service outside of it. At times, the support teachers also fulfil the role of technical advisor to classroom teachers. (Daniels and Hogg, 1991, p. 180)

Regarding the resources, the report of the HELIOS programme noticed on many occasions that integration's

success depends on the quantity and the quality of the resources allocated to it. (p. 173)

This statement was backed up from the interview in Brussels where it was suggested that integration 'is a question of resources'.

As far as the **curriculum** is concerned, it was suggested that it was one of the key items, and that the success of the adaptation according to the pupils' needs will determine the success of the project as a whole. It was believed that

even for pupils with severe disabilities, the general curriculum could be maintained, provided social integration is recognised as a worthwhile aim. Experience shows that in many cases only minor changes to the general curriculum are sufficient to [achieve] that effect. (p. 164)

Hence, one can argue that there was a strong support for maintaining the same curriculum for children with specific learning difficulties, since their difficulties are not as severe as those implied in the previous quotation, and so one could see 'differentiation' used instead of adaptation, the term found in both Greece and Scotland.

In relation to parental involvement, Daniels and Hogg (1991) argued that

the national projects have recognised the importance of partnerships with parents in identifying, assessing and meeting children's special educational needs, (p. 180)

something which was reiterated within the European document presented above.

### *Perceptions of policy agents*

In Greece, the Director of Special Education (DSE) within the MNERA was interviewed in December 1994. The principle of the provision for special educational needs and hence for specific learning difficulties was seen to be 'total, genuine - not fake, not just social, not just sharing the same schoolyard - school inclusion and integration'. However, it was acknowledged that from the total school population of 175000 with special educational needs only 15000 were provided for in School Units of Special

Education (SUSE), of which 12000 were in special classrooms within mainstream schools. Of the latter pupils 25% rejoined the mainstream classroom completely.

For children with specific learning difficulties then the DSE argued that it provided supportive education, and

The rest are in the mainstream schools and it is there where we want them to stay. This means even better integration. (DSE, quotation from interview)

However, he acknowledged that there was a need to make mainstream teachers more sensitive to special educational needs issues, and to provide an individualised approach.

The Director argued that the curriculum was the 'major responsibility' of the learning support teacher in co-operation with the mainstream teacher, the special advisor and the advisor, taking into account the aptitudes of the child. He emphasised that by suggesting

that in the future special education should be organised and regarded systematically and methodically within the mainstream schools at all levels. **One school for all, with internal differentiation of the [curriculum] - programmes with flexibility, special staff, means, supportive staff.** (DSE, original emphasis).

The Director of Special Education also stressed the importance of teachers' training. Through in-service training 100 teachers a year were trained in special education, attending a two-year course. In addition, the university Pedagogic Departments of Elementary Education were asked to include modules on special education, so that the mainstream teachers were aware of the principles of the special provision.

Finally, he commented favourably on the role of the parents in the provision for special educational needs as he perceived them to 'have the last word' on whether they would allow their child to attend any form of special education. In relation of the administrative framework, the Director argued that the Directorate had the responsibility for central co-ordination and a co-operative role with other central offices, like finance or building, and

among the Ministry, the regional offices and the schools. He also confirmed that the regional offices where the special classes are situated do not have control of the funds, as these come directly from the Ministry.

The regional special advisor (RSA) was much closer to the reality in Greece of the 'special' provision for special educational needs and particularly specific learning difficulties; he was in daily contact with special schools and special classrooms within mainstream schools. He argued that

specific learning difficulties is provided for either in mainstream schools or the special classrooms. When I say mainstream provision I do not mean that there is some kind of special provision, as parents refuse to allow their children to attend the special classroom, or there is none, and they stay in mainstream classes. In some schools there are some supportive classes, but here again there is no specialised provision, as those who teach are not specialised in special educational needs, but could be supply teachers, or a 13th teacher. Systematic provision only takes place within the special classrooms due to the presence of a learning support teacher. However, even in special classrooms the needs of children with specific learning difficulties are not met as although the learning support teachers have been trained in special education they are not experts in the specifics of dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dyscalculia. (RSA, interviewed in December 1996)

'Supportive classes' (ενισχυτική διδασκαλία) were classes run after school hours in deprived areas to support failing pupils. They were not considered to be special provision for special educational needs, but rather as public cramming centres, in areas where the majority of parents could not afford the private cramming centres, mentioned in Chapter 4. At the time of the research these centres were only at the piloting stage and they are not mentioned in the Acts nor within the booklet published annually by the MNERA.

The RSA argued that there was a complete lack of assessment of the pupils attending the special classrooms; he characterised this as 'a general phenomenon of the Greek education system'. Moreover, he envisaged the ideal provision being in the hands of well

trained and aware mainstream teachers, with the learning support teachers having a consultancy role, along with psychologists and other professionals when required. In addition, he also argued in favour of educational research on the effectiveness of the provision.

In relation to the administrative framework, he referred to difficulties between learning support teachers and mainstream teachers, due to the financial incentives, and the freedom given to the learning support teachers which occasionally was exploited.

In Greece, there is dichotomy of power. Some have the responsibility of the administrative part, and others for the pedagogic part. But the things get mixed up as there are no easy distinctions between the two. There is no flexibility in policy, we are inflexible. ... And the other problem is the party politics within the education system. The administrative wheels get stuck because of these. (RSASE)

Finally, he argued that the needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties were not met in Greece. He believed that the lack of diagnostic assessment and selection process for the formation of the special classrooms failed the system, as the criterion was the number of pupils, rather than the nature and the degree of the difficulties.

In Scotland, the HMI responsible for special educational needs within the SOED, interviewed in 1995 provided his insights to the current provision for specific learning difficulties. He argued that although the duty for provision according to the national policy was given to the regional authorities, and factors such as personalities, and local policies would influence the provision for specific learning difficulties, the provision for specific learning difficulties should not be of one type, but rather a range of provision. He envisaged the ideal provision as being in mainstream classes, with available support from specialists. However, he emphasised that in the SOEID

we try to go over the idea of a partnership between the child, and the parent and the teacher. So the child acknowledges that he or she has a

difficulty, and the teachers can help, and somehow if they both work together there would be a chance of overcoming it.

The issues of parental involvement was further elaborated, based on his views about the general governmental policy for consumer accountability (see chapter 5). He argued that although this policy had changed the relationships among parents, schools and regional authorities, all the parties 'were not unhappy' with the initiatives, despite some reported cases of problems between 'agitated' parents with the provision available in schools. According to his views parents had an active role to play in the assessment procedure, rather than being at the passive end and simply receiving of reports from the experts. He argued that parents were more proactive 'joining voluntary organisations', but he would not recommend making private provision for children. In relation to the appeal procedures the HMI responsible for special educational needs argued that they provided adequately for securing parental rights, although parents could not appeal against part V of the RoN.

Regarding the current provision for specific learning difficulties, he argued that a major change had been in the roles of the mainstream teachers and learning support teachers.

He suggested that there was

a sort of cascade system that seem to operate, where the mainstream teacher would seem to identify the child and help the pupil, the learning support teacher is brought in as a specialist. Again in a primary or a secondary school, we would expect the learning support teacher if necessary to provide specific tutorial teaching, or to provide in class support.

The main change he saw was the administrative and policy making role of the learning support teachers, advising the mainstream teachers and working in staff development, in addition to their responsibilities for the development of the curriculum.

The HMI saw the 5-14 curriculum and its attainment targets as being 'on the table for all the pupils'. However, he argued that the guidelines to teachers to take into account of the nature and degree of difficulties should be observed, and teachers should

make adjustments as necessary. So I think targets are targets, there are things to aim for ... I think when children are for any reason are unable to reach these specific targets then the teacher's job is to see why. It may well be that the targets are inappropriate, it may well be that the teaching methods are inappropriate. For a lot of children it is the latter.

However, he acknowledged that differentiation put a burden on teachers and it was difficult to achieve effectively. As a compensation to this burden he saw the available advice by the learning support teachers and other specialists. Finally, he stated that the SOEID's policies for the provision for specific learning difficulties were only inferred from its general policies for the curriculum (5-14 programme), or for special educational needs generally. However, and despite the fact that responsibility lay with the regional authorities, he argued that specific learning difficulties were provided for sufficiently in the current system of provision.

In Scotland, at local authority level, the regional policy agent (planning officer for special educational needs) perceived that

for specific learning difficulties our ideal would be enough support; teacher support and specialist teacher support, who can work with the mainstream class teacher, with the parents, with any support staff (non teaching support staff) that are in school. So it's a co-ordinated approach. (interviewed in 1995)

She argued that in the region there was adequate provision despite the cuts in the budget. She emphasised the 'common understanding of the child's difficulties', and the 'equipped environment with curricular support' as a key elements in the quality of the provision.

In relation to parental involvement, she explained that the region started to use the term dyslexia along with specific learning difficulties as a result of parental pressure. The

commitment to satisfy parental wishes when at all possible was expressed. However, she argued that the 'huge clash' (which often led to appeal procedures) with the parents occurred not in cases of specific learning difficulties, but in cases where special education was more demanding in resources.

Commenting on the major changes over the last decades, she argued that there had been a raising of awareness of specific learning difficulties and the expertise in the assessment, along with

the commitment to addressing every child's needs in the class. We can no longer say 'he is not functioning very well, he is not my responsibility'. That we are publicly accountable for every child's progress. And also the involvement of parents in the education system, which is a relatively new initiative and we are accountable to parents in the first line, if you like. And school boards have meant that there is a greater understanding on part of the community at large of how a school works.

The officer for special educational needs planning within the region recognised the importance of the partnership between teachers and parents. She saw the need to train more teachers to work as team with their colleagues and with parents, and she noted that one of the prerequisites for a good learning support teacher was to establish good communication with the parents. She stressed that

partnership involves a respect for each other's views, a respect for each other's expertise, but it also involves the creation of open debate and the fostering of major respect, but not necessary mutual agreement. But I think that's a bit idealistic in terms of how far we are with that.

She recognised that those who had been for many years in the regional education service had difficulties in changing their attitudes.

In the European Union, as it was suggested in chapter 5, the education experts within the HELIOS programme argued that their role was only to inform and to promote exchange of information. The documentation explored in the previous section was characterised as 'a technical perception' which, with the Maastricht Treaty and the inclusion of education



as a competence of the Commission, was to be promoted as 'a European Concept in all the MS'.

In the area of special educational needs, the EU expert suggested that

we work for what is called inclusive school; what it is called integration school- inclusive school. It means that the school has to change. The way in which schools have been working in the past in order to be flexible, to be ready to be adaptive to the needs of every child. It means that the demands are much more high. And that is the process of quality.

Although she denied strongly that the EU promotes one single model for provision, she suggested that its involvement has brought changes in many countries of Europe, including Greece. The success criteria for provision were seen to be at the 'economical level', and in 'professional resources', suggesting the importance of human and other resources which, in the case of Greece, included the buildings.

According to the HELIOS expert the ideal provision for specific learning difficulties would be in a school which had pupils with special educational needs integrated, an inclusive school.

Because the school system tries to reflect on the global organisation. If you have integration of a blind, a deaf, Down child immediately the approach changes. If it is well done, not just to leave it in the classroom and say, OK now it's yours, but to make a real pedagogical integration. It means, then that the teachers may change their approach, because you cannot have a traditional way of teaching, because he must be able to support and to adapt to the problem to the individual need. ... Because the programme will change, will be adaptive, flexibility will be, and the technical support will be. And that what we have perceived the clear benefit coming out of integration. That for the other children at the level of the classroom is changing.

She reported that many teachers in Europe have started to ask for pupils with special educational needs to be integrated in their classrooms as a means of securing extra resources, both material and human.

In relation to parental involvement, she recognised its importance, but she argued that the impact parents could have would depend on how well organised they were. There was also a clear indication of the acknowledgement of market forces, and voluntary associations were perceived to have a role to play, competing for resources.

### *Summary-Discussion*

Looking at how provision in the primary schools for specific learning difficulties is dealt with in the literature, policy documentation and perceptions of policy agents in Greece, Scotland and the EU, one can see similarities and differences. The most significant similarity was the policies' and policy agents' commitment to functional integration or inclusive education. The literature in Scotland has explored the difficulties of inclusive education in relation to the ethos and practices of the school system. It was also noted that the literature and the policy in Scotland were much more closely linked, as if one was a response to the other, and there was a dynamic dialectic between the official documentation and the literature on special educational needs. However, differences among the two countries and the EU were most apparent in the application of this commitment to practice.

In the Scottish literature, policy documentation and policy agents' perceptions there was a clear and shared understanding of the role of the curriculum in the provision. This was also shared by the EU experts and was reflected in the European document. It was clear that the aim of an inclusive school providing for special educational needs including specific learning difficulties, would be achieved only through a curriculum for all. Facilitating this, curriculum policy and literature documents emphasised the need for assessment of individual needs, planning attainment aims (long and short-term targets) and materials, teaching methods (differentiation, individualisation, adaptation, and

enhancement) and evaluating provision to operate as a continuous process. Furthermore, the EU stressed the need to address the issues of awareness and attitudes.

In addition, in Scotland and the EU new roles for learning support teachers emerged and were perceived as significant by the policy agents, policy documentation and the literature. The learning support teacher's role moved away from the remedial form of teaching taking a more co-operative teaching role with the mainstream teacher who was considered to have the responsibility for all pupils. In addition, the learning support teacher acted as consultant and expert, and was seen as necessarily involved in school policy making exercises and staff development.

Greece, however, although having a stated commitment to 'one school for all' in the official documentation, identified no mandatory criteria for this school. The curriculum has been characterised as the responsibility of the learning support teacher, the assessment has been seen as appropriately carried out away from the schools in Medical-pedagogical centres, and the learning support teacher role has been regarded as comparable only to the remedial teacher in Scotland. The provision for specific learning difficulties was seen to be in the form of the 'special classrooms' and, although increasing in number, their effectiveness has not been evaluated. Furthermore, the regional special advisor acknowledged a lack of assessment procedures within the centralised system, and a dichotomy separating the pedagogic and the administrative elements of education. It was clear that according to the RSA the system was failing pupils with specific learning difficulties and special educational needs in general. That, surprisingly, was confirmed by the Director of Special Education within the MNERA, who acknowledged that from 175000 pupils estimated having special educational needs only 15000 were provided for, of which 12000 were in the special classrooms.

Another issue that came through as significant in Scotland and EU documentation and literature was the involvement of the parents. It was clear that in Scotland parents were seen as consumers, to whom teachers should be accountable for providing a service to satisfy the perceived needs of the pupils. This was one reason why the regional planning officer for special educational needs put emphasis on a 'common understanding of the difficulties', something that research (see Riddell et al., 1992) also verified as a key factor for the provision. However, policy and literature had different views regarding the 'partnership' with parents. Whilst policies declared the importance of parental rights through appeals, placements requests and involvement in the provision, research in the UK (Amstrong and Galloway, 1992) advocated that the equal basis for partnership could be undermined by the weight of what was perceived as professional expertise and the authority that this carried. In addition, within a climate of individualisation and marketisation, where resources were scarce and fought over by different social actors, Swann (1987) argued that parents were accustomed to having to compensate for the lack of resources within the education system.

It is clear to the researcher that the policy in Greece has attempted to modernise its provision for special educational needs, and specific learning difficulties in particular, as a result of pressure by the EU which has proposed a 'technical perception' sweetened by funding. However, this has been little more than a paper or surface phenomenon. By the Director's own admission 25% of those attending the special classroom re-entered the mainstream education; this statement, however, acknowledged two separate frameworks and not one school for all. It cannot be argued, therefore, that this is an inclusive education system.

## Chapter 10

### Learning Support Teachers' Perceptions of Provision

#### Introduction

In this chapter the perceptions of learning support teachers in the primary schools on the provision for children with specific learning difficulties is explored. The predominant place given to the learning support teachers can be justified as they have played the key role in the identification of the case-study pupils and their role in the provision, especially in Greece, is of the greatest significance. Their accounts form the basis against which mainstream teachers', head teachers' and consumers' perceptions will be compared in the next chapters.

#### *Principles of Provision*

Learning support teachers in Greece based the provision for children with specific learning difficulties on principles which were different from those prevailing for children generally in the educational system. Their main concern, as indicated in chapter 7, was focused on the inappropriateness of one of the principles of the Greek educational system, i.e., 'one lesson for all' (lst. 2). It was suggested that:

there is a prevailing 'academicism', knowledge is not linked with praxis, there is an amateurism, and very often an overwhelming zeal, elements that do not lead to a higher quality in education. (lst. 3)

In one or another way all five learning support teachers rejected these principles, and based their support instead upon 'individual learning styles' (lst. 5).

The Greek learning support teachers tried to build up their educational approach on the basis of the fundamental principle that children with specific learning difficulties formed an 'educational problem' (lst. 2), stressing the provision rather than the causation.

In Scotland, learning support teachers expressed many of the same beliefs as their Greek counterparts. They did not share, however, the problem of what the OECD (1996) has characterised as 'asphyxiating homomorphism' in Greece (see Chapter 4), and it was common to put emphasis on motivating the Scottish child with specific learning difficulties to learn, by 'being happy in school' (lst. 7&8). Furthermore, it was stated that the Scottish provision was based on early intervention following diagnosis of the possible problems at as young an age as possible so that the effects of school failure could be minimised.

In the private Scottish school, in addition to all the above, the learning support teacher argued for teaching 'to the deficit, in this age' (in primary school, lst 10), rather than giving priority to access to the curriculum or other environmental issues.

### *Organisation of the provision*

In all state schools in Greece the principle means of providing for children with specific learning difficulties was tuition by a learning support teacher in the special classroom, i.e., a remedial or withdrawal room. As discussed in Chapter 9, there were policy guidelines on the general use of the special classrooms; despite these guidelines, however, there were various interpretations by learning support teachers of how this class should operate.

The significant finding was that in four case-study state schools three different approaches to special classroom organisation were identified, despite existing guidelines from the MNERA (see chapter 9) describing their operation and organisation. The following table

10.1 shows the different kinds of organisation in the provision for children with specific learning difficulties in Greece.

**Table 10.1: Organisation of Greek special provision for specific learning difficulties**

School 1 State	'special classroom' used as 'reception class' for immigrant pupils with the addition of one 'problematic' case
School 2 State	'special classroom' where groups were taught for up to 2 hours, not daily
School 3 State	'special classroom' where groups were taught for up to 2 hours, not daily
School 4 State	'special classroom' as withdrawal for individual tuition
School 5 Private	no 'special classroom', psychological services supporting teachers and parents

In the first case-study school, the special classroom was used by the learning support teacher for only those children who originated from countries where Greek was not their first language, with the addition of one of the two so called 'problematic cases' (although during the observation period the child attended only for one period). Although the learning support teacher identified the other case-study pupil of the school, he did not provide for; the mainstream teachers of the latter case perceived the special classroom as 'unsuitable' and she took full responsibility for the provision.

The second and third schools used special classrooms in a different way from the first. The learning support teachers taught those pupils identified with 'specific learning difficulties', including immigrant pupils, in small groups, up to two periods per day, and not every day. The groups were based on ability, age and type of difficulty:

Yet again, within a group there may be some sub-groups. For example, I had three pupils from primary two this morning, but the two are progressing together, and the third is going at his own pace. (lst. 3)

In the fourth school the learning support teacher was working with the pupils identified on an individual basis. The two case-study-pupils were receiving individual tuition for one or two school periods a day, every week day.

The variations in provision and in the operation of the special classrooms may explain why the fifth learning support teacher, in the private school, perceived the special classroom in the state sector as an environment where:

they have **dumped** together kids who are retarded, kids who have learning problems, kids who have emotional problems, and so on and so forth.  
(Original emphasis, Lst 5)

In contrast, in Scotland the picture of the provision was much more homogeneous. The learning support teachers had the freedom to work either in the mainstream classroom or by withdrawing pupils. However, it was clearly emphasised that their role had evolved through the years:

I started in learning support in this region in 1978 and in those days you withdrew children all the time. So there is a clear difference. In 1983-5 we were encouraged to work in classes with class teachers. (lst. 8)

Although the learning support teachers in Scotland were encouraged to work within the mainstream classes, in some cases, depending on their assessment of the severity of the case of specific learning difficulties, there was a range of provision so that children could be withdrawn for individual work.

A distinct difference from the Greek provision was that two Scottish state schools had supervising assistants, who were not trained teachers or nursery nurses, but provided constant support for the child to whom they had been allocated. A second difference was that learning support teachers tended not to support pupils in the first two years primary of in Scotland; in Greece, however, such support was given, and was perceived as a 'preventative measure' (lst. 10). One could argue that this difference resulted from the



different school entry ages (in Scotland four and a half, and in Greece five and half), but the learning support teachers perceived the circumstances as arising from a lack of resources.

### *Location of Provision*

Learning support teachers in Greece did not use the term 'special classroom' to describe their class. Two talked about 'frontistirio' (cramming centre), a very common term in Greece (see Chapter 4), that children were accustomed to; it lacked, therefore, the stigmatising effects that such a label might have in Scotland.

The school buildings had been designed before the 1980s and long before the first special classrooms were founded in Greece in 1984. As a result, there was no provision in the plans for a special classroom. In the four different state schools taking part in the study, the situation of the special classroom differed dramatically. In the first of these, the size was as big as a mainstream class room and positioned centrally within the school. The learning support teacher of the class, suggested:

It is not a stigma that they are here, that is the reason that there is nothing written outside the door. On the contrary, they are happy to come to Mr. [first name]'s class. (lst. 1)

In the other three schools, the special classrooms were formerly used as storage rooms. In two cases they were situated at the same level as the mainstream classes; in the third, the special classroom was an isolated, dark and cold room. In the private school, there was no special classroom; however, the psychological services department was situated very centrally within the school. This central position reflected the importance accorded to these services by those with responsibility for the running of the school:

The management try to involve us in almost everything, we take part in almost every committee. (lst. 5)

In comparison, the learning support teacher in the school where the class was isolated, suggested that she had serious co-operation problems with the management of her school, something, which will be revisited later in discussion of the perceptions of the head teachers.

In Scotland, the situation was similar to Greece in terms of buildings and rooms. However, in two schools there was no extra provision, and the learning support teachers had to withdraw pupils with specific learning difficulties either into the staff room (school 9) or the library (school 8). In these cases learning support teachers were visiting teachers for two mornings or afternoons per week and so did not serve as central a role as those in the schools where they were available for most of the school week. The association of satisfactory space allocation with good communication and co-operation was evident in both Scotland and Greece.

### *Materials Available*

Greek learning support teachers considered the materials made available to them by the state as inadequate, mainly because the principle means were the 'common-to-all' books. Programmes and work-sheets developed by the learning support teacher were common practice in Greece. The books available from the Ministry were regarded as having shown some improvement during the 1980s, but there was still considerable room for change. In addition, it was suggested that these books were based on foreign models which did not take into account the Greek ways of thinking:

We have adopted from the foreign models many things, because those people who developed the new books, looked at the new educational programmes of England, for example, during their postgraduate studies, which of course have very many nice elements, but here the Greek psyche has nothing to do with any other. (lst. 3)

The learning support teacher in the private school argued that the books had 'some good things in, but they need to sort through all that' (lst. 5).

For example in the first grade language book there is a whole list of spelling words and when we approached KEME [Centre of Educational Studies and Research, within the Pedagogic Institute] to understand how they selected those words there were no specific criteria. A lot of research needs to be done to know what kids can do in every developmental level. We only know universals from abroad, but we need to see what the Greek kids can do. (lst. 5)

These arguments were consistent with the researcher's view of the paucity of educational research in Greece, as discussed in Chapter 4.

In addition, learning support teachers had 30,000 Greek drachmas a year (equivalent to £70 GBP) to spend on books or other materials for their classrooms. They considered this amount as inadequate and estimated they needed '6 times that' (lst. 4). Moreover, it was suggested 'additional [and different] material is necessary' (lst. 3), such as magnetic letters and boards, concrete material for number work, educational and construction toys. In the two 'problematic' case-study pupils the learning support teachers suggested the use of calculators for number work, something that it has not been available in the Greek educational system. Finally, in the private school, the learning support teacher suggested the use of a computer to assist in the word processing.

In Scotland, in terms of materials there was a clear division between the schools that had full-time learning support teachers and those who did not. For example, the learning support teacher in school 6 suggested that:

we are a very well resourced school. We have the reading schemes, the computers and things like that. (lst. 6)

In contrast, those who were visiting rather than full-time in schools had to carry with them their materials; there had to be limited, therefore, to reading schemes, pictures, cards or some board-games. The supply of the materials to those schools was the

responsibility of the learning support teachers even when they were not based in the school. This denied them the flexibility offered to mainstream teachers through extra resources.

As in Greece, reading schemes and books were perceived as an important issue by learning support teachers. Most referred to reading schemes indicating the emphasis put on them. However, they were concerned about problems arising from changing the reading schemes. Such changes tended to produce negative emotional effects on the child. Their way of dealing with this problem was to communicate with the parents and explain to them:

why we are doing it, and it looks that there is not as much reading to be done, and in fact I like children to read the whole book as soon as they get it they have to read the whole book, ... that would motivate them to want to learn a new reading scheme, lower down the scale, to boost confidence.  
(lst. 7 & 8)

### *Methods of support*

As far as methods were concerned, Greek learning support teachers used a variety of approaches to teach their pupils with specific learning difficulties. A learning support teacher from one of the state schools was following methods adopted during her studies in England: objective approach, shared reading and spelling based on photographically memorising the roots of the words, and the major grammar rules like the endings of nouns and verbs.

Another learning support teacher used a 'method of syllogism' as well as the 'analytic-synthetic' method; the latter was the one used by the Greek Ministry in the books supporting the official curriculum. However, the learning support teacher also incorporated along with these two methods, a multi-sensory approach, evident in the following quotation:

We applied this programme which requires the combination of one consonant and one vowel, and vice versa, so that she will understand the process of syllogism. She has to sound the word tapping her fingers in every syllable and to use hyphens with every syllable when she writes. Then by joining the syllables she makes the word. And then she goes to the magnetic board to form the syllables on the board. (lst. 3)

In addition, one of the learning support teachers used puppet playing when he was making the corrections, in order to have a less negative impact on the child's self esteem, and allow time for music and songs intervals to break the intensity of the tuition. All of the learning support teachers tried to be positive, using praise as often as possible. It is important to note, however, that none of the methods presented in Chapter 9, which were advocated by the MNERA (by sponsoring and promoting a conference), were reported by any of the learning support teachers.

In Scotland, learning support teachers did not talk about their methods to the same extent as their Greek counterparts. A possible explanation for this was that learning support teachers in Greece were aware of the fact that their methods and approaches were distinctly different from those of the mainstream teachers. Scottish learning support teachers stated that they often used pair-reading, intensive reading programmes 'to help with the sounds, spelling, letter recognition' (lst. 10); such approaches relate quite closely to mainstream methods.

### *Curriculum*

Curriculum was an area of concern for the Greek learning support teachers as became clear in Chapter 7. Three out of the five considered the prescribed curriculum as 'unhelpful' (lst. 3) for children with specific learning difficulties. Although this was the dominant view, a cautious point was raised by the learning support teacher of the private school:

I think that [mainstream] teachers tend to hide behind that, it is an easy way out, it is an easy way to say I cannot do anything different. But I think what we have discovered, ... is that you can use the curriculum as it stands to identify the goals of the teaching and then you can use the teaching method you want to achieve those goals. So I don't think that the curriculum as it stands is really to blame, I think it is our resistance to try a new method of teaching. We should not modify expectations, or goals, we should modify learning or teaching. (lst. 5)

Another respondent from a state school, went even further rejecting the idea of the curriculum as an obstacle in the provision for children with specific learning difficulties.

The differences evident among the Greek learning support teachers were reflected in their different stances on the degree of prescription in the national curriculum. When learning support teachers perceived that the curriculum allowed for teachers' interpretation in the delivery, then they had a more positive view. Two learning support teachers in Greece suggested, however, that the Ministry of Education should compile a curriculum for special schools and special classrooms. One of the two argued:

There is no curriculum. This is not the alpha and the omega ... in the whole process of learning, nevertheless, it is necessary. ... What are we going to do? Whatever we like? Whatever we think? (lst. 3)

This perception of the necessity of a special curriculum was wide spread in Greece, and it is/was associated with the centralisation of the system, the perceived prescriptiveness of the general curriculum and the degree of professionalism of the teachers.

In Scotland, however, the curriculum was not perceived the same way. All the learning support teachers saw it as appropriate for children with specific learning difficulties. They perceived it as 'best practice' (lst. 6) of what 'in some senses ... has not changed really' (lst. 9), from the time that there were no guidelines for the 5-14 curriculum.

Nevertheless, learning support teachers in Scotland were aware of some curriculum problems, most of them associated with practical issues. For example, the learning support teacher in the private school noted:

Ultimately the way that 5-14 is structured should be ideal, because the children should be able to progress at their own level in the different stages. In practice, because we are in a school that there is a lot of competition, and parents have very high expectations we don't make ourselves follow it very strictly, everything that goes on in 5-14, I think we do our own interpretation of 5-14 for what we like. (lst. 10)

The issue of parents was raised by two other learning support teachers who were concerned about the effect of having a child at the same Level for a very long time could have on the parents and consequently on the child.

The main difference between the Scottish and Greek learning support teachers was ultimately the perceived prescriptiveness and flexibility of the curriculum, which provided the framework for their work.

### *Educational goals*

Learning support teachers in Greece used a variety of means to determine the goals of the provision. All of them used as the main criterion the needs of the individual child with specific learning difficulties. However, in determining those needs the methods used varied, as did their assessment practices (discussed in Chapter 7).

Learning support teachers in Greece believed that the goals set for children with specific learning difficulties should be the same as those for the rest of the pupils. However, they acknowledged that there should be differences in (a) the targets set for different stages and (b) the pace of achieving to the set goals. These steps and the pace were seen as requiring tailoring for the individual pupil; for example, in one 'problematic' case, one of the targets was to be able to:

find the lesson. Now he can find the lesson even in history and maths.  
He knows in which part of the book we are. (lst. 5)

Three learning support teachers in Greece were using the national curriculum goals, but they were repeating those of previous grades. In contrast, one used the goal set for the

age group, the grade of the pupil and the expected knowledge for that grade, but modified the teaching method to an 'objective approach' to achieve these aims.

The notion of pupils' 'contact with the class' (lst. 3) was a common goal for all learning support teachers in Greece. The fact that they were not involved directly with the in-class provision made them concerned about the isolation and stigmatisation that a pupil with specific learning difficulties could feel. As a result of the use of the 'common-to-all' books it was very easy for children to identify any differences in the provision, when use was made of other materials. Consequently, they tried to compensate for this by introducing as early as possible the 'common-to-all' books. It was quite usual, for judicious choice to be made from this common material:

And of course she also writes dictation from her class, which is within her abilities. For instance, if the class's 'think and write' has strings of consonants, like s-t-r-atiotis [στρατιώτης], or dra-ch-m-as [δραχμές], we leave that. We choose one small sentence from the text of the day which does not have any of those. (lst. 3)

In the Greek private school there was no remedial or any other provision from the learning support department. As a result, the means of provision were indirect, either through mainstream teachers or parents. Hence, rather than the goal being directly set for children with specific learning difficulties, the efforts were diverted to emotional support of the pupil and his/her mainstream teachers and parents, in a consultative manner.

In Scotland, as in Greece, learning support teachers agreed that the goals should be:

the same for all pupils but you may have to put some sub-sets, so that you are not just going from here to here [pointing], which a more average child could do more easily, but you want to put the steps in-between. (lst. 7&8)



However, the ideal of a need to introduce a 'common book' was not shared in Scotland and, indeed, none of the children had common books. They might have had common schemes, but even that was not necessarily the case.

### *Emotional support*

Learning support teachers in Greece were concerned about the emotional support for children with specific learning difficulties, especially as withdrawal to the special classroom was the only provision. Even in the case of the private school where there was no direct provision by means of withdrawal, the learning support teacher argued:

He does not like feeling as if he has been singled out in the classroom. So he is not a child that we would have said should be exempted from written exams, because he wants to feel that he is not different than the other kids. ... So you have to be very careful when you offer even the basic special services to these kids. (lst. 5)

These concerns were shared by all her colleagues in Greece, who tried to be positive in their language and interaction with children with specific learning difficulties. There was also concern in Scotland about the effects low or lost self-esteem had on children with specific learning difficulties:

A teacher coming in and facing a pupil who is dyslexic can do more damage in an afternoon by just taking a piece of work and scrambling it up and throwing it in the bin; then you can ever imagine what this does to the child's confidence. (lst. 10)

The distinctive element between the two countries was that in Scotland efforts to boost the confidence of their pupils were made using a 'mature approach' (lst. 10). This was described by two learning support teachers, in the private and state schools. For example:

We actually spoke to [36] and told him that you know that you have difficulties with reading and writing but we know that you are not stupid, and talked it through with him. (lst. 6)

This kind of approach boosted pupil's self-esteem, as they knew that they were not regarded as special cases but only as individuals who had to learn in a different way. Another learning support teacher had introduced a self-assessment report, where her students had to report on how they progressed and how they felt about school, so that she could monitor their attitudes and feelings towards learning. She stated that one of her pupils wrote:

'I like school'; that is important to know, it is important for teachers to know ... I find that a useful way of keeping in touch with what children think about themselves. [However, 67] would have great difficult of putting that down, she would say 'I am not good, I cannot do that, my writing is not good, I don't really like school.' So that you know you need to work a lot on her attitude. (lst. 7/8)

In Greece, in state and private schools alike, learning support teachers suggested that a way to boost self-esteem, which was perceived as equally important to academic provision, other than the constant reinforcement of effort, was through the assessment procedures. They had what they called an 'intentional grade' (lst. 5):

she will get a grade not related to her performance, but to her effort. It will not be an excellent grade, but nor the lowest of the class. Depending on her abilities and effort it could easily be an 8 out of 10. (lst. 3)

Regardless of grading, learning support teachers in Greece supported the implementation of self-assessment. Teachers thought that if pupils with specific learning difficulties were more responsible for their own learning and progress, they would benefit from a self-confidence boost and the sense of being in control. That was the reason that in the private school 'portfolio' assessment was recommended for the future. The emphasis learning support teachers put on grading and assessing was a direct consequence of the society's, and particularly parents', pressure for success in schooling (see chapters 4 and 8).

Finally, learning support teachers in Greece perceived the parental role in building the self-esteem of their children as important, and tried to work as closely with parents on this as they did with the academic support. Two learning support teachers had to talk with fathers in order to convince them not to call their children 'names' (expletive omitted) and not to hit them. However, in the majority of cases, parents were supportive of their children's efforts, although they might not always know how to show their appreciation.

In Scotland, learning support teachers also used their communication with parents to help boost the self-esteem of their pupils, as in the example of the reading schemes referred to earlier in the materials section.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses*

Greek learning support teachers perceived certain advantages in the current system of provision for children with specific learning difficulties. The two strengths most emphasised in their perceptions were the tailored teaching to the children's needs, and their increase of the self-esteem. In addition, the learning support teacher in the private school also acknowledged the support given mainly to parents and to mainstream teachers. In the state schools, learning support teachers identified the benefit of the special classroom provision in the 'work which reflects' (lst. 2) the needs of the pupils with specific learning difficulties. They believed in enhancing the academic performance of the child, which would also become evident within the mainstream classroom:

When she understands exactly what is happening, her self-esteem will be boosted, exactly because she will be able to write things that she could not before. (lst. 3)

Four Greek learning support teachers also perceived weaknesses; only one suggested that there were no disadvantages. The most commonly stated disadvantage of the current system, 'the resource room model' (lst. 5), was the fact that the child had to leave his/her

mainstream class to go to the special classroom. One learning support teacher suggested that the 'different space within the school' (lst. 3) not only isolated the child, but:

as a result, the [mainstream] teacher does not understand, does not learn. I believe that when you have to deal with a child with difficulties you have a chance to learn. So, the following year, when you might have another [pupil], you may say: 'I did so and so, I did those tricks and they had worked, they had helped.' It is an experience that can be tangible, it can be corrective and helpful. (lst. 2)

The last of the weaknesses identified was the lack of support from psychological and social services within the school provision. As suggested in Chapter 9, children with special educational needs should have been assessed by the Medical-pedagogic centre in order to attend a special classroom. Learning support teachers had no communication with this service, however, and argued for better co-operation and communication with even the inclusion of psychologists or social workers on the school staff.

In Scotland, learning support teachers perceived strengths and weaknesses in a similar way to their Greek counterparts: boosting of self-esteem and working with parents were seen as beneficial, whilst the need to withdraw pupils occasionally was seen as disadvantageous. One learning support teacher saw no faults in the provision she provided in her school.

However, there were also differences. Learning support teachers in Scotland perceived as advantageous the rapport they had with their mainstream colleagues suggesting that 'minor adjustments are made without even knowing that you do them' (lst. 7). As far as weaknesses were concerned, learning support teachers in Scotland saw the following distinctive drawbacks were discussed:

the reliance on the supervising assistant is a problem we have to look at all children with supervising assistants. I don't think that a supervising assistant solves the problem, they mask the problems, we are not really getting to the roots of the problems. Class teachers don't see it -unlike me- as a problem as they just want the child's work to be done. (lst. 6)

Even the supervising assistants themselves recognised that the pupils 'get attached' (Sa 6) or 'dependent' (Sa 9) on them.

### *Ideal provision*

The questions in the interview schedule about the perceived ideal provision for children with specific learning difficulties were intended not only to draw a picture of the teachers' notions of 'model' support, but also to illuminate their perceptions of the inadequacies of the current system.

All but one of the Greek learning support teachers suggested that the current system was falling behind their ideal provision. The one who argued that 'the reality, what exists' (lst. 4) was the ideal, was also keen, however, to see a further change in the attitudes of the people involved. The majority of the learning support teachers in Greece outlined a framework for ideal provision as one based on:

- (i) teachers with better initial, postgraduate and in-service training, and a different role for the learning support teacher including in-class co-teaching and a consultative role;
- (ii) implementation of proper assessment procedures;
- (iii) implementation of a tailored curriculum and books for children with specific learning difficulties; and
- (iv) more money for special classrooms and education in general and the establishment of libraries.

The ideal role of the learning support teacher was construed to be of a consultative nature, limiting the use of the special classroom to 'very rare cases' (lst. 2). The learning support teachers built their vision based on their personal experiences and books they had read; one was also influenced by her studies in England. The clearest picture of an ideal provision was described by the learning support teacher in the private school. She stated:

That would be the paradise for education. The inclusive model, which means that we would have a special educator maybe at each grade level, who would co-teach with the teacher so that we would have teachers who

would work very closely with the special educator and they would together devise the programme for these children, and the class in general I think. And [mainstream] teachers who have been using a much wider range of teaching; and I think a classroom system where children were working in groups in certain times, individually in other times; I want to see a lot of movement in the classroom, and a lot of concrete material, and a lot of space for creative activities. But they also need structure. .... And what we have proposed to the school is that we need to do on-going curriculum assessment in order to get the teachers to be more flexible. ... Self-evaluation and of course you can do a lot of teacher evaluation this way, that's what I like to see: the focus more on teacher and curricular evaluation, rather than student evaluation.

It was evident that lack of resources were not particularly salient for her as it was for her colleagues in the state sector, and she was the only respondent to mention teacher evaluation as means to provide better for children with specific learning difficulties. One has to point out that a great deal of what was perceived as the ideal in Greece, was already common practice in Scotland, e.g., movement in the classroom, co-teaching, concrete materials, activities, group teaching.

In Scotland the ideal provision was seen to be less far from the reality. In fact, for three case study pupils the current provision was effectively seen as close to the ideal. Most of learning support teachers, however, perceived that more time, more professionals and more resources would readily transform the current provision to an ideal one. Despite the high regard they had of the current support, there were those who would have liked to see changes, particularly in teacher training:

The support for learning should be support for teachers. It should help change the people's attitudes, to help change the way they look at a learning difficulty. Slowly but surely this is happening. I would like to see a lot more done at the training stage before teachers leave university or training colleges. ... an hour lecture in a year training course is not enough. On paper we are training teachers on learning difficulties, but in reality they are not trained. (lst. 10)

The learning support teacher of the private school suggested also that she would prefer to work only within the mainstream classroom, provided that it was not too disturbing for the rest of the class.

It was characteristic of the comparison between the two countries of the 'ideal provision' for specific learning difficulties that this ideal was seen in Scotland as an extension of what was already in place, whilst in Greece what was sought was quite different from what existed.

### *Communication and co-operation with mainstream teachers*

Communication among staff within a school was a significant issue which could determine the success or failure of the whole intervention programme. Good communication was seen as leading to co-operation, an element of great importance. Learning support teachers in Greece, however, perceived the role of their colleagues in the academic provision for children with specific learning difficulties as less important than their own:

The mainstream teacher has the responsibility to create the atmosphere in her class of the sense of belonging, the feeling of equal member within the team. The responsibility for the progress is mine. (lst. 4)

This was clearly the case in all the state schools, although most of the learning support teachers tried to involve the mainstream teachers in supporting the children. However, learning support teachers perceived that they controlled the programme, the exercises and the expectations and, in the state schools, mainstream teachers followed the homework and exercises that learning support teachers set. Learning support teachers recognised that 'these things are not clear' (lst. 2), and that their role became 'a bit difficult and sensitive'. (lst. 3). In general, they respected mainstream teachers' wishes not to intervene, and the initial referral in all cases had been made by mainstream teachers.

However the learning support teachers had some specific complaints about the role they perceived mainstream teachers to have in the provision:

I ask myself, what is it that the child cannot do in the classroom? Can we help him at all? The first response of the mainstream teacher is that 'I cannot do anything.' ... And I know that in third grade [the pupil] has not yet learned to do addition with carry-over. This is a job for the [mainstream] teacher. I am not here to replace the [mainstream] teacher. (lst. 2)

In most of the Greek state schools, communication and co-operation seemed to be better than that implied in the above quotation, but conflict still occurred. One reason for this conflict was perceived to be the supplementary payment that the learning support teachers had been awarded:

[mainstream] teachers of those pupils who attend the special classroom argue that [the learning support teacher] takes this pupil only one hour per day and I have him for five, why should I not get the supplementary payment? And of course it is not like this, because in his [mainstream] classroom [the pupil] just sits, or at most the mainstream teacher does not spend too much time with him, and he is not supposed to do so. (lst. 3)

Where the learning support teacher's work was recognised as effective, these conflicts were reduced, but in cases where teachers had a reputation of not being committed to their work, this reflected on all of them.

In Scotland, the roles were perceived differently. Learning support teachers supported the argument that mainstream teachers' role was equally or more important than their own. One Scottish learning support teacher argued:

ultimately the classroom teacher has the most influence and it is the way that he/she works that matters. I could give any amount of advise and any amount of good will and I could go in and work with those children for ten days ten minutes a day, but it is what happens in the classroom. (lst. 10)

Moreover, as well as the importance ascribed to the mainstream teacher (also advocated by the policy documentation as seen in Chapter 9), learning support teachers perceived that the two roles (mainstream and learning support) were merging 'each gaining from the



other' (lst. 8), and so indicated an understanding of the importance and interdependence of one another.

The communication between mainstream and learning support teachers in Scotland, as in Greece, was mainly informal. There was less evidence, however, of any conflict and communication was generally perceived as very good. Mainstream teachers often asked for assistance or referred children with specific learning difficulties to the learning support teachers. Although this was done in staff-rooms or other informal meetings, formal means of communication were also in place in one school. This school had a weekly allocation of time for consultation between mainstream teachers and learning support teachers, during which the head teacher covered the mainstream class. In addition, pupil profiles and records were shown to the mainstream teachers at the beginning of the academic year and after any screening tests (e.g. in reading or spelling). In cases where a record of needs had been opened, there were more formal procedures and communication; this included members of the senior management team of the school, usually the head teacher, and of the psychological services and parents.

#### *Factors determining good co-operation with mainstream teachers*

Learning support teachers in Greece perceived a more co-operative mainstream teacher as one who was young, flexible in his or her teaching approach, focused on the individual child, and did not construe the curriculum as prescriptive. In the state schools, the teacher's age and focus on the curriculum were the two factors most commonly mentioned. The learning support teacher in the private school however gave a more detailed description of the mainstream teacher who was involved in the provision:

These are already teachers who are a bit more flexible and more creative in their classrooms. And they are teachers who love their work. They are teachers who if something goes wrong in their classrooms, they ask

themselves 'what am I doing wrong?' They are not teachers who only give the blame to ... the family is to blame because they don't support me, or the child is to blame because he is lazy or indifferent. So they are very aware, very conscious, very sensitive teachers. (lst. 5)

Learning support teachers suggested that the main factors influencing a mainstream teacher's lack of co-operation were the attitudes towards, and understandings of, specific learning difficulties and the teacher's age. Age was associated with the teaching experiences of the past, where the class-size was such that 'it is natural to do your lesson and whoever learns, that is it.' (lst. 2) Learning support teachers in Greece, also suggested that the mainstream teachers' attitudes were important, as those who were open to the idea of providing for a pupil with specific learning difficulties were those who co-operated more. However, the learning support teacher in the private school, believed that some mainstream teachers had difficulties accepting the appropriateness of such pupils being in their school, because they saw it as one of the most elitist and competitive schools in Greece; they argued that the pupils should change school, rather than being provided for in this one. In the following table 10.2 the years of teaching experience, the years in the school, and the years in special educational needs provision for learning support teacher in Greece and Scotland are recorded. It becomes evident from the table that the schools where the learning support teachers had reported difficulties in the co-operation with the mainstream teachers were those where they had been for the least time (i.e., school 2 in Greece, and school 8 in Scotland). Furthermore, as table 10.3 indicates, the training of the mainstream teachers also was a factor in the communication and the co-operation. In Greece, it was evident that mainstream teachers were less qualified than the Scottish counterparts. This, combined with the different initial training (in Greece a two years course in Teachers' Academies rather than the four year courses in the

University Departments of Education) was a significant factor in the level of co-operation, which was highlighted by comparing the two countries.

It has to be noted that the extra qualification in Greece was in-service training in the in-service two years course in the former teachers' academy, whilst in Scotland learning support teachers extra qualifications were obtained in forms of diplomas at higher education institutions.

**Table 10.2: Learning Support Teachers' Characteristics**

Greece					Scotland				
Case	Years school	In SEN	In Ed.	Extra Qual.	Case	Years school	In SEN	In Ed.	Extra Qual.
1	3	5	20	Yes	6	3	5	10	Yes
2	1	16	23	Yes	7	4*	15*	25*	Yes*
3	8	10	26	Yes	8	1*	15*	25*	Yes*
4	3	15	20	Yes	9	2	10	20	Yes
5	10	12	14	Yes	10	5	7	10	Yes

(\*: same 1st was in both schools)

**Table 10.3: Mainstream Teachers' Characteristics**

Greece				Scotland			
Case	Years in school	In Ed.	Extra Qual.	Case	Years in school	In Ed.	Extra Qual.
21	1	27	No	36	12	30	Yes
51	8	28	No	56	Supply	5	No
52	7	34	No	57	7	10	No
62	9	29	No	67	20	28	Yes
13	4	15	No	68	19*	23*	No*
23	8	24	No	69	19*	23*	No*
34	10	24	No	39	14	21	No
54	3	10	No	79	4	24	Yes
35	7	8	No	310	1	2	No
65	27	31	Yes	510	8	20	Yes

(\*: mainstream teacher in compound class)

In addition to age and attitudes, the learning support teacher of the Greek private school perceived the teacher who did not co-operate with the learning support teachers as one:

who does not co-operate, is a much more traditional teacher; ... a teacher who sticks much more to the book, to the text book, gives a lot of written work, works from the board, does not really give attention to the individual student, maybe she doesn't pay a lot of attention to the child's personality as well, so that she can build up on his strengths. I would say in a lot of ways a more frightened teacher. One that is afraid of trying something new. (lst. 5)

Finally, in all schools, private and state, it was common for learning support teachers to suggest they systematically tried to gain the trust and respect of mainstream teachers through their work with the pupils, and to maintain friendly relationships with their colleagues. Indeed, they reported trying to socialise outside school hours by attending social occasions, and to play other supportive roles within the school, like taking the responsibility for the school library.

In Scotland, the main factors influencing the communication and co-operation between learning support and mainstream teachers were the limited amount of time that the learning support teacher was spending in school and secondly the attitudes of the mainstream teachers towards their responsibilities for special educational needs. For example, a learning support teacher who had just started noted:

I am here only two mornings and there was a list of four children in that class 'they are yours, do something with them.' I am just in the early stages beginning to say to teachers, these teachers had them all year ... So perhaps after the summer I feel that I will be ready to say to the next teacher perhaps you could try this or have you thought about that and I will supply materials. (lst. 8)

Scottish learning support teachers, therefore, shared similar perceptions with their Greek counterparts. However, they also identified other important factors such as: i) their own personal credibility and confidence as a teacher, ii) the school ethos and management, and iii) the previous experience mainstream teachers had had with learning support. In cases where these requirements were met, the co-operation was perceived as successful,

mainstream teachers 'adjusted' their teaching styles to meet the individual pupil's learning styles and the IEPs were drawn in co-operation with the mainstream teachers.

### *Communication with parents*

Three out of the five learning support teachers in Greece had very close co-operation with the parents of children with specific learning difficulties. They included them in the provision, and especially in the private school, parents became an extremely important part in the action as the learning support teachers had no direct input. Moreover, in the second state school, the learning support teacher perceived parents as 'the most important' (original emphasis, 1st 2) means of provision.

The communication between learning support teachers and parents in Greece could be characterised as frequent. In most state schools the communication was very regular, ranging from at least once a month to short daily meetings at the school's gate. In the private school, the learning support teacher suggested that 'we have parent-teacher conferences throughout the year.' (1st. 5) All learning support teachers argued that they had no serious problems communicating with parents. Their concern was working fathers, as usually it was the mothers with whom they were making contact. One learning support teacher finally spoke to the father on the phone, as he did not attend any of the meetings, and another tried to organise an evening meeting, something that was very uncommon in Greece where teachers rarely stayed beyond their official working hours (8:30-13:30). In the private school, both parents attended the meetings with the psycho-educational services.

Despite many similarities in all aspects of communication and co-operation, the parental role was perceived by learning support teachers as less important in Scotland than in

Greece. This may have been accounted for by the differences in school hours, emphasis on homework, and perceptions about the importance of education by Greek and Scottish parents as a whole. The fewer hours that pupils were in schools meant that parents had a more salient role to play in the daily preparation for the following day (homework) and to provide their children with extra curricular activities of which the Greek education system was deprived. In contrast, the Scottish school had a broader curriculum beyond the strictly academic, and consequently the parents felt that the needs of their children were met

Communication varied from 'frequent' to 'very little' (lst. 6), or even non-existent. Learning support teachers in Scotland had experienced some parents who they met every day when they picked up their children, and other parents they had never seen; the latter even missed scheduled formal meetings. Where meetings did occur, they could be formal in the case of a recorded child, or more informal, generally during parents' nights. Means of communication could be personal and by phone as in Greece, or in writing, which was not seen necessarily perceived as more formal. For example, one learning support teachers stated:

In [school 7], they have a very open approach to parents, and so parents are invited to come up to the school and ask questions a lot. There are the formal parents' evenings and then for 57's and 67's mothers I say to them just come up any time you want to and sometimes I send for them. (lst. 7)

It should be noted, however, that supervising assistants never had any communication with parents.

Greek learning support teachers perceived the following factors as particularly influential in the communication with parents:

- i) parents' educational level,
- ii) the messages parents received from school,

iii) the respect and trust teachers inspired.

Two learning support teachers in Greece suggested that those parents with more extensive educational experience were more regular and positive in the communication with the school. The learning support teacher of the private school argued that the school should not send 'negative messages' (lst. 5) to parents as these could hinder the co-operation. Another suggested that the lack of social services in Greece resulted in parents feeling gratitude to the teachers:

they are so frustrated and in despair, that by the age their child goes to school they say 'thank you' to the teachers, whatever they do. And this is wrong. (lst. 2)

Finally, the most important factor identified, 'the alpha and the omega' (lst. 3), was the parents' degree of acceptance or level of denial of the fact that their children specific learning difficulties.

In Scotland, factors that influenced the communication and co-operation with the school were seen by learning support teachers as:

- i) parents' acknowledgement of the problem;
- ii) personalities and the experiences of collaboration;
- iii) legislation;
- iv) the development of common ground for communication;
- v) parents' anxiety/expectations.

For example, in the only case where there were serious co-operation problems with the mother, the learning support teacher felt that the cause of this 'non-productive' relationship could be:

because [56]'s mother felt that initially the school would pick up the problem, and the school has put its hands up and said we hadn't picked up the problem early enough. It is just a different type of her acknowledging the problem or her different way of dealing with it. (lst. 6)



Another learning support teacher argued that the Education (Scotland) Act of 1981 along with the Parent's Charter had influenced the relationship between home and school 'for the better' (lst. 7/8, see chapter 5 and 9). She also added, that good communication and co-operation should be based on 'a common ground to work on', and to achieve that she was always trying to become as informed about the child as possible.

In the private school, the learning support teacher perceived as significant the fact that:

Because it is an independent school there was a lot of pressure put from parents: they are paying money and their children are accepted they felt that the school had the moral obligation to provide the right support for these children. In a school like this we have parents that are very anxious, they just want the best for their children. (lst. 10)

Because of their anxiety the school had decided not to ask parents to help out within the school, as many of the state schools sometimes did to enhance the provision.

### *Parents in the provision*

In relation to the provision for specific learning difficulties, learning support teachers in Greece perceived their work with parents as crucial. In the private school, it was even perceived 'as a form of prevention' (lst. 5), especially when parents became involved in the early years. Depending on the needs of the child in the parent-teacher meetings various suggestions of support were made, such as reading books to increase vocabulary, or work with the pencil grip. In all cases, where external assessment proceedings were considered necessary, parents were advised to have them done. Moreover, when special or private tuition was recommended, learning support teachers suggested to parents that they should provide it. This learning support department, however, included all the people involved in the provision in the case-conferences organised by the department.

In the state schools, where the learning support teachers were involved directly with the provision, they tried to have a more direct influence on home support. The principle was

that parents should follow the methods and techniques the special classroom. They managed this by calling the parents in for lengthy discussions, observation of lessons in the special classroom, explanations, and even written instructions on the programmes followed or the methods used:

So, I have contacted the mother, she has come here, we have discussed things very extensively. I have given her instructions and programmes to do at home, how to help him with his reading and how to learn spelling, the known text. These are two programmes I got from one English book, very good. (lst. 2)

However, learning support teachers were very concerned about the quality of the parental role, and tried to compensate for their concern with exercises 'to train them' (lst. 2). In addition, learning support teachers worked with parents on the emotional support of the child, as discussed earlier. In order for parents to be in position to help their children, learning support teachers often had to support them emotionally:

the first thing I say is that their child has nothing serious so that they will not panic. But because learning, and especially in language, is like a chain, and if a chain-ring brakes or is lost then the whole chain breaks, we have to work from the point that the chain broke. (lst. 3)

In Scotland, learning support teachers viewed the role of parents in the provision as complementary to the school's efforts. This was despite the pressure exerted by the political agenda to get parents more involved and to have more saying on the education of their children:

Parents as partners is the catch-phrase. ... If I am to go down a particular line, I would call the parent in and I would say this is what I think, what do you think? How are things working? (lst. 7/8)

In the private Scottish school, the learning support teacher had to act differently from her colleagues in the state schools, because of middle class parental expectations (see table 11.1). She stated:

In some cases actually I have to ask them to step back, it is quite the opposite. I have to say to [310's] mother right whoa! Leave him alone,

let him develop. If he doesn't do that and he feels restricted please close it for that evening and we will do it at school. They are very involved and they are all desperately wishing that their child performs as well as the rest of the children. I have to say 'Whoa, that is it. Get off them.' (lst. 10)

### *Communication and co-operation with head teachers*

Learning support teachers in Greece described the communication and the co-operation with their head teachers generally as good, presenting them with no serious problems. This was the case in four out of the five schools. In the fifth school, one learning support teacher argued that head teachers were initially very negative about the idea of the special classroom; another tried to explain this as being accounted for by their special supplementary payment, which was triple that of head teachers.

In the beginning of the operation of the special classrooms it had been noticed that learning support teachers were regularly taken off their duties to fill in for absent mainstream teachers:

And at the end, the learning support teachers could not get to their own classrooms. Why? What was behind it? 'What you are doing is not worthy. Hence, go there in order for the mainstream class not to be without a teacher, where there are thirty kids and the parents may shout at us.' (lst. 2)

In the private Greek school, the relations were seen to be better, as two important principles were perceived as 'sensitive and flexible' (lst. 5). However, there were some problems with the administration of the school further up the hierarchy:

The school is very well known in Greece, and in the past was considered a school for the very bright children who were selected through exams, and the administration of this school has not yet understood that children who have learning disabilities can be bright students. They are struggling between the ideal of having academically an elite school and the concept of children who would have some difficulties even though they would be bright students. That seems to be the major problem. (lst. 5)

In Chapter 6, the policy of the school was investigated and 'learning difficulties' was an area perceived to need further development. Despite this problem, the tendency was to

include the learning support department 'in almost everything', and as a result, it was perceived as 'a normal' part of the school.

In Scotland, the co-operation with the head teachers was seen as generally good. Joint decision-making exercises or the delegation of responsibility was perceived as common practice.

[In] some schools, the head teachers will have consultation with me at the beginning ... but I have to decide, which children really need additional support. I am free to decide which puts a lot of responsibility on my shoulders. (lst. 9)

There were still some disagreements generated by different views on resources allocation, as in the question of whether provision should be made available from P1 and P2.

In the private school, the rector had more power over the policy of the school including the learning support policy, and at the beginning of every year a senior management meeting reviewed the policy of the learning support department. For example, the rector could decide to put emphasis on an 'induction programme for staff', or 'on more able pupils' (lst. 10).

### *Communication with School Advisors/Her Majesty's Inspectorates*

In Greece the nearest equivalent of an HMI is the school advisor, who before the 1985 change of the Education Act was called school inspector. Only four learning support teachers referred to school advisors, all but one with good comments. It is noteworthy, that two referred to special education advisors and two to mainstream education advisors, indicating the dichotomy described earlier in the thesis.

The two who referred to special education had only good comments to make about the efforts of the special advisors to train, consult and observe special classrooms and special schools. However, learning support teachers perceived that having only sixteen advisors

for the whole of Greece put a tremendous work-load on their shoulders. The special advisor for two of the five schools of this study was also responsible for schools and special classrooms throughout a huge geographical area.

Those who spoke about the general education advisors were from one state and the private school. The learning support teacher of the state school was very negative, as she felt that school advisors were responsible for the perceived rigidity of the curriculum:

The officers can do a lot of harm, or they can do a lot of good. When I call the advisor and he talks rubbish [expletive deleted] in here, i.e., do your curriculum. If another comes and says 'look at your child and think what you can do for this kid'. Now the advisor will come by to drink his coffee and notice his presence in the school and that is all. (1st. 2)

The case in the private school was different. The learning support teacher perceived the advisor as a flexible person who supported the idea that the curriculum did not have to be completed by children with learning difficulties. Nevertheless, she argued that she did not think that one year was adequate time in the school to pass this message to the mainstream teachers effectively. This difference in the perceptions of the advisors could be explained by the fact that they were two different individuals, or that the reputation of the private school might have influenced the degree of freedom that the advisor was prepared to accept.

In Scotland, there were no specialised HMIs for learning support. Furthermore, learning support teachers did not comment on HMI's role on the provision for specific learning difficulties. However, HMI had reported on three of the five Scottish schools (see SOED, 1989, 1991, 1992); two reports were positive and one recommended better support in the middle department (P3-4) of the school. Scottish learning support teachers had to co-operate with a wider range of bodies and agencies than their colleagues in Greece, especially in cases of recorded pupils. These contacts usually

included psychological services and other special educators provided by the region. In terms of provision, however, those services were perceived to have an indirect input:

they are used in an advisory role because of the time factor and they are there if we need resources or if we need help; they just know what to do, but they cannot usually do the actual teaching for us. (Ist. 6)

Finally, as all these services were provided by the region, and because the time of the study coincided with the reorganisation of the Scottish Regions, there was wide spread anxiety about the future of the provision:

with the new regionalisation nobody really knows what will happen in the future. I would like to see the continuation and increase of the provision. But I don't think so, to be honest, in a small council that this would be, I don't see it to be in a viable position, I don't think they will have the finances to support it. But I would like to think that it will happen. (Sa 9)

This view was shared by many writers on the subject and some of the policy agents as seen in Chapter 9.

### *Summary-Discussion*

Learning support teachers in the primary schools, especially in Greece, were the cornerstone of the provision for specific learning difficulties, and therefore a whole chapter was devoted to their perceptions and views. Learning support teachers, in both countries, argued that provision for specific learning difficulties was an educational problem. However, the learning support teachers in Greece, following the official policy, provided for such children within the special classrooms, withdrawing the pupils from their mainstream classrooms. Variations on the use of the special classrooms were identified, indicating different personal constructs of their use by the learning support teachers. The principles of the provision were stated to be the individuals' learning styles, but the use of the common-to-all books, the lack of indigenous research and the prescriptive curriculum hindered their work. They were the most vocal group of

respondents in criticising the prescriptive curriculum, and the 'academicism' of the Greek educational system.

In Scotland, learning support teachers also perceived provision for specific learning difficulties as an educational problem, reflecting the official documentation. The current provision was seen as a development from remedial education, and this was seen as progress, although occasional withdrawal from mainstream classrooms was seen necessary. The flexibility of the curriculum, the different reading schemes and the well resourced schools allowed them to use a variety of materials and methods including pair reading.

In both countries, learning support teachers perceived that the aims set for children with specific learning difficulties should be the same as those for other children, and they argued for the importance of emotional support. In Scotland, they used a 'mature' approach to the difficulties, whilst in Greece, training the parents, who were seen as 'resources', to be positive was seen as necessary in trying to boost self-esteem. Communication and co-operation with parents was seen in both Greece and Scotland as important and frequent. Education, socio-economic background, the level of acceptance of the child's problem were identified as factors influencing the home-school co-operation in both countries. In Greece, however, the societal attitudes to education and disability and the messages received from the school were also seen as influential. In Scotland, learning support teachers identified the legislation and the parental expectations as factors in their relationships with the parents, although the legislation was seen to become more important in middle-class families.

The co-operation between learning support teachers and mainstream teachers was completely different in the two countries. The separate organisation of provision in

Greece meant that the contact between the two was confined in the initial stages of the referral, whilst in Scotland the co-operative teaching and the consultancy role of the learning support teachers maintained a high level of communication. Nevertheless, in both countries the years of the learning support teacher in school and the location of the learning support department were two factors associated with the co-operation and communication with mainstream teachers. In Greece, learning support teachers faced, however, at the beginning at least, resentment or indifference from their colleagues and the head teachers because of a supplementary payment.

The differences between private and state sectors were more distinct in Greece than in Scotland. In the former, the learning support department of the private school had a consultancy role to the mainstream teachers and the parents, instead of getting involved directly in the provision. The learning support teacher of the private school characterised the 'resource model' described by the state sector as a 'dumping ground'. In Scotland, the differences were identified in the amount of provision as the resources were less of an issue.

What comes out of the perceptions of the learning support teachers is that the societal and educational factors influenced the provision for specific learning difficulties. However, it becomes evident that in both countries, and especially in Greece, it was difficult to distinguish whether the respondents had clearly distinguish specific learning difficulties from learning difficulties. In Chapter 9, it was suggested that in Greece the two terms had been interpreted differently and there was no consensus on the distinctive characteristics. The provision of the so called 'problematic' cases, which in Greece were identified by the learning support teachers themselves, supports this argument, as except



of the materials used all the other elements of the provision were similar to those of specific learning difficulties.

## Chapter 11

### Mainstream and Head Teachers' Perceptions on Provision

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter the perceptions of provision of the primary mainstream and the head teachers are examined and compared where appropriate with those of the learning support teachers discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter is organised on a similar way to the one concerned with learning support teachers to allow easier comparisons. The distinctive differences between the two groups, however, were rather few and limited to areas associated their different roles and the different contexts in which they operated.

#### *Mainstream Teachers' Perceptions on Provision*

##### **Principles of Provision**

In Greece, mainstream teachers did not refer to principles of provision to the same extent as the Greek learning support teachers. They shared the perceptions of their learning support colleagues about the 'academicism' of the education system, but they were more concerned about its lack of child-centredness. Three argued that the main principle of the educational system should be that of motivating children to learn:

I believe that education is about motivation for learning, not knowledge. At this age, learning should be about learning how to learn, how to think, how to read, how to learn on your own, how to open your horizons. And less so to teach. Your role as a teacher should be to show ways, paths.  
(ct. 65)

This was seen as especially significant for pupils with learning difficulties.

In Scotland, mainstream teachers did not feel the need to elaborate on their principles as much as their counterparts in Greece. The three who mentioned general principles believed in the motivation of their pupils to learn, the strong belief that education should be child-centred (elements common with their counterparts in Greece) and the need to boost self-esteem; self-esteem was also emphasised by the learning support teachers.

### **Organisation of the Provision**

Mainstream teachers referred to the organisation of their own classroom rather than the general organisation for provision for specific learning difficulties. In Greece they organised their teaching on a whole-class basis. It can be argued, however, that this was imposed, to a degree, by the centralised book-based system controlled by the MNERA. The consequence of a common prescriptive curriculum, with common books and exercises, resulted in less flexibility on the part of mainstream teachers. This was also intensified by the pressure put on them by education officials, who were perceived to be pushing for completion of the material in the books.

In Greece, as a consequence of the whole class teaching, desks were usually organised in rows. One class in the private school and one in a state school had desks in groups, and one teacher in another state school had organised the desks in an open rectangular shape. Even in those classes, however, the lesson was conducted on a whole-class basis. Mavrogiorgos (1983) argued that this was evidence of a clear hierarchical structure of the classroom, which dated back to the beginning of the Greek education system 150 years ago. In relation to children with specific learning difficulties the lack of movement around the room resulted in the initiatives for interaction being in the hands of the teacher rather than the pupils, and reducing the time during which they could seek support or available resources.

In Scotland, however, the organisation was completely different. Mainstream teachers had organised their classes on a group basis, and the groups were formed according to ability criteria. One teacher argued that since she started her career in:

1969, we did have group teaching and we always cared for better ability and lesser ability. You would put in at class level something that they could all understand but you would differentiate the follow up. I never taught any other way and I would never want to. It would be very easy for me to stand and tell them all something, but it would not work, there is no way that it could work. I think is a lot harder to work the group way, but it is the only way that works for the children. (ct. 36)

The seats were also set in groups, but in most cases the seating arrangements themselves did not reflect the ability grouping, and so created a less stigmatising atmosphere. The work, the materials and even the curriculum stage were tailored to the needs of each child, including those with specific learning difficulties, although there were no particular arrangements for those with specific learning difficulties.

## **Curriculum**

In Greece, mainstream teachers construed difficulties in the progression of the curriculum, which was also seen as:

a programme based on knowledge, and less on developing skills, like observation, problem solving, sorting, problem setting, or question setting. All these sharpen the mind and enable the child to learn the necessary knowledge later. (ct. 65)

They were especially concerned about the order and content of the material presented, sharing the view with the learning support teachers that the common curriculum offered an unsuitable programme.

Furthermore they stated that the exercises were difficult and that the pupils with or without difficulties could find them problematic. This generally accepted negative opinion of the national curriculum was taken up by the private school, and alterations had

been made to it. Although the school was generally following the national curriculum, it had published internal guidelines and extra supporting material, that allowed mainstream teachers to focus on specific issues at each grade, and reduce the large mass of material:

In the curriculum there is too much knowledge packed, and the child cannot absorb the important parts. There is no order and the sequence is lost. From one issue to another, which is not right, and that is the reason kids get stuck. This school follows the curriculum but it has reduced the material, because we were very pressured. ... And we go step by step, we build up our teaching. And we moved a step further. We added things that are not in the national curriculum and have reduced the material, we have taken out texts, in order to have time to go deeper in the ones which remain. (ct. 35)

In Scotland, mainstream teachers were talking positively about 5-14 national curriculum guidelines. The major difference in comparison with the Greek system concerned the prescriptiveness of the curriculum. As mainstream teachers, the Scots had the freedom to select the goals, the pace, the materials and the methods of teaching according to their professional expertise and experience, but taking into account the needs of each child. Although Scottish mainstream teachers of this study believed that the references to children with special educational needs, including those with specific learning difficulties, were not adequate (ct. 510), the general feeling was that the curriculum accommodated these children, because:

each child works to his own particular level within 5-14, whether they are at level A or B. It makes sure that children are placed at their appropriate level and are working at their appropriate level. (ct. 79)

However, although the dominant view of the curriculum in Scotland was a positive one, there were some statements which indicated anxiety among the mainstream teachers. First, the 5-14 curriculum was seen to expand the work load of the teachers through the heavy paperwork and, therefore, to reduce their teaching time (ct. 36). And secondly, one mainstream teacher suggested that for children with specific learning difficulties the curriculum may be:

in practice biased towards the writing aspects which do not do them a great many favours... because it is easier for us as teachers to assess the writing than it is an oral talk, or a listening exercise. So, although the curriculum is quite balanced in that, we should be spending a lot of time on listening and talking and reading... So I don't know whether it is the curriculum or us teachers who are biased towards writing. (ct. 310)

### **The Setting of Goals**

In Greece, mainstream teachers were divided in their statements about the setting of aims and goals for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Four suggested that these should be the same as the rest of the population, and the five that they should be tailored. In the private school, a distinctive view point was expressed:

it depends what these aims are. In the US, for example, they are broader, and every state has its own, depending on the experiences of the children in their environments, although the general aim of cultivating the child is common. (ct. 65)

Despite the stated intention to individualise the aims and the goals according to the needs of the pupils it was made clear that what were perceived to be different goals and aims were in fact modifications of the general expectations.

In Scotland, there was a widespread belief among mainstream teachers that the goals were, and should be

common, but they all attain them at a different stage. The goals are the same, the differentiation is the fact that you are working at different goals for different children at different times. (ct. 57)

This was common among policy documentation and policy agents' perceptions (Chapter 9), as well as in the understandings of the learning support teachers. The difference with Greece was that all the Scottish mainstream teachers took up this view, and that they mentioned differentiation which was common practice in Scotland but lacking in Greece.

## **Methods Used in the Provision**

Greek mainstream teachers did not mention methods to the same extent as their learning support colleagues nor did they share details of their approaches. They used of the same methods for the whole class, which included children with specific learning difficulties. Repetition was seen to be the way in which the mainstream teachers provided for these children with difficulties:

I read many, two or three, times the text of the lesson. I repeat it myself because I have the ability to read correctly, and then the children repeat the text. I cannot do anything else. I put them to write some hard words and to pronounce them correctly, to repeat them, two, three even four times. That is all I can do. Especially for him, I read to him one paragraph, to teach him how to read it. I do not manage to do this many times, once a week, not more. When he writes I stand over his head, ask him to read what he writes, what does this word say, what did you intend to write, erase it, correct it again, go to the blackboard and write the word there, what does this mean, make a sentence with this noun, that sort of things. (ct. 52)

In relation to the two 'problematic' cases, the two Greek mainstream teachers, diverted the emphasis of the in-class provision to emotional support, which will be examined shortly.

In Scotland, although repetition was mentioned, more intensively in the private school, there was more emphasis on focusing on individualised learning styles. One mainstream teacher noted that:

I would try anything, ... Basically if I am teaching something I would teach it as a class, and we then try it, we see how we get on, those who get it they would carry on, those who do not get it, they would get perhaps the same method the second time. ... If they still fail, I would then look for a third method and a fourth method, and then I would work one-to-one with the child. But that would go with everybody, not just with [him]. (ct. 57)

## **Materials Used by Mainstream Teachers**

In Greece, the state owned Publishing Organisation of Didactic Books (OEDB) published and delivered the books free in all state schools all over Greece; the private schools were also obliged to follow these books. Greek teachers considered them as 'not suitable' (ct. 54) for children with problems in learning, and one argued:

the books are our problem, we need special books like the ones used in the special classroom, until at least he can follow the pace and the material of the mainstream class. (ct. 34)

To compensate for this, in one state school, a teacher had developed her own worksheets, but no special provision was made for those pupils with specific learning difficulties.

In Scotland, mainstream teachers put emphasis on material, as they perceived that this was the means of educationally integrating the children with difficulties into the rest of the class. Furthermore, the group organisation allowed them to look for material that would be presented to the children and enable them, from then onwards, to work independently. Selection of suitable reading schemes, and/or concrete materials in mathematics was taking a lot of mainstream teachers' time. The importance put on the material was emphasised by the teacher's response in the private sector to the question about the ideal provision:

my ideal would be if it was somebody who would be a learning support and infant specialist, a learning support and middle of the school specialist and then one 5 and 6. And I'd like them to come in go through our stock and build up a bank and a programme for these children. ... For the only thing is that it has to be really a progression through all the prep school. (ct. 510)

In some state schools where the learning support teacher was full time in the school, mainstream teachers were able to visit the resource room and select what they thought to be suitable for their pupils with specific learning difficulties, usually based on previous



experience and consultation with the learning support teacher; this function was stated by learning support teachers to be part of their consultancy role.

### **Emotional Support**

In Greece, mainstream teachers, like the learning support teachers, perceived that emotional support was important to pupils with difficulties. They put emphasis on such support, usually by encouraging pupils' participation in the work and reinforcing any efforts made. They took the actions they saw as necessary in order to create a 'secure atmosphere' (ct. 52) so that pupils with specific learning difficulties did not feel intimidated.

The issue of assessment (continuous, summative and reporting) was of concern to Greek mainstream teachers. Most of them rewarded pupils' commitment to work and compared the performance of pupils with learning problems only against themselves rather than against the performance of others. One teacher had developed her own reward system:

I am lenient, and I have to be lenient to encourage him. I believe that encouragement is boosting the pupil's self-esteem, so I reward him with 'Bravo'. And although the circular [from the MNERA] suggests when we assess a piece of written work to put only a tic [☞], I have introduced different degrees of 'Bravo' so that everybody takes a 'Bravo'. Hence, 'Bravo' with a question-mark, 'Bravo' with dots, etc., so that all could get one, at least some times. In my experience this helps a lot. (ct. 21)

In Scotland, mainstream teachers, like their learning support colleagues, also perceived that boosting self-esteem and supporting the children emotionally was significant for their progress. They tried to 'pick [them] out, but hopefully not too obviously' (ct. 310) and continually to reinforce their efforts to build up self-esteem. What was different from Greece, was that they used a whole battery of methods and materials to help them in their aim.

In relation to the continuous assessment, mainstream teachers in Scotland had two kinds of criteria against which they assessed every child:

Depending on which particular skill you were hoping to achieve from any given exercise you would assess what has actually happened at the end of that actual exercise, and then how that actually was transferred to other work done after the exercise. (ct. 79)

This was in line with the emphasis on skills that was distinctive to Scotland and reduced the pressure on children with specific learning difficulties by putting less stress on the acquisition of abstract knowledge unrelated to practical skills.

Although in Scotland assessment was more focused on children's individual needs and progress, there were two perceived negative elements. In the private school, the children in prep 5 and onwards who had learning support were graded not in relation to themselves and the progress they had made, but 'within the context of the classroom' (ct. 510) which, despite any effort to present the results in a positive way would probably rank the child near the bottom of the class. To soften the blow, however, there was a place to justify and comment on the grades, where the class teacher could be more positive. Finally, mainstream teachers with supervising assistants in their classrooms argued that 'classwork assessment is difficult, because he tends to get everything right' (ct. 56), this was seen as having the positive effect of boosted self-esteem, but suffering from not knowing how much effort was put by the child, and how much by the supervising assistant.

### **Communication & Co-operation with Learning Support Teachers**

In Greek schools, mainstream teachers had to communicate with the learning support teachers as they referred a pupil with specific learning difficulties to them, expecting the learning support colleagues then to take full responsibility for the learning of the particular

pupil. Mainstream teachers reported no serious problems in this communication with their colleagues, except in schools where the learning support teachers were newly appointed, or where the administration of the school was not in favour of this support. However, even in a state school with good co-operation among the teachers, the mainstream teacher had mistakenly perceived that the learning support teacher was using special books for children with specific learning difficulties, but he was in fact using the common-to-all books. This indicated that the degree of communication and co-operation in Greek schools was not altogether satisfactory. Factors that influenced the co-operation among mainstream teachers and learning support teachers in Greece were seen to be the knowledge acquired through training and reading, the change of the ethos of the school in the case of the private school and, finally, the change of attitudes of the class teachers:

Initially I used to put a pupil like this aside. Later I stopped doing that, I recognised that this human being needs more attention. (ct. 52)

The charity discourse investigated in chapter 6 was very much evident in the above quotation.

In Scotland, where in most cases there was in class co-teaching, the communication and co-operation among the teacher was much closer. The mainstream views on this arrangement did not differ from those of the learning support teachers. In addition to informal meetings, the teachers had formal meetings at the end of each year if pupils with specific learning difficulties were to be in their next class, and they were asked to read the files of these pupils. They were also given details about the curriculum and the material that each child had covered. In case of recorded children, then the meetings were extended to include the learning support teacher, parents, psychologists and a member from the senior management.

Where a supervising assistant was involved in the provision, then there was daily communication between the mainstream teacher and the supervising assistant. However, the disadvantage of this was the lack of regular communication between the mainstream teacher and the learning support teacher. Another problem in the communication was identified when the mainstream teacher was a supply teacher. In the private school, one of the two teachers complained about the communication:

The communication varies. For example this morning I was told that he is going to be put in a new scheme, which I knew nothing about it, so that communication channel was not there. On the whole, reasonable. It could have been better. I would rather feel more like a team, rather than occasionally the learning support made the decision that I am not involved in it and I feel obviously when I see them everyday, and I respect that they have great knowledge they are experienced and I am not, and I am very ready to take abroad everything that they might suggest, but just occasionally it would be nicer to have it discussed. (ct. 310)

It was not surprising that she felt that the learning support department had absolute control over the provision for children with difficulties, but that view was not shared by the learning support teacher or her head teacher.

### **Perceived Role of Learning Support Teachers**

Greek mainstream teachers, who saw their role remaining the same over the years, saw the introduction in the state sector of learning support teachers, as having been 'brought [about] by mainstream teachers' demand' (ct. 23). They suggested that learning support teachers had the expertise to provide for children with specific learning difficulties and they were open to follow their advice. However, in one case there was no co-operation between the mainstream teacher and the learning support teacher as the latter had used the special classroom in such a way that the class teacher argued:

that he would not benefit from the special classroom as pupils who attend are those who have a language problem [Greek not native]. There they are pupils who don't know the letters, do not speak the language, so I

thought that he would be better here than in an unsuitable special classroom. (ct. 21)

In Scotland, mainstream teachers also suggested that their own role had not changed over the years. The only difference they saw was the introduction of the learning support teacher which was brought by policy changes and an increase of pupils' needs. They observed that the changed role of the learning support teacher 'is a tremendous input, and takes off a huge pressure of the teacher' (ct. 57). However, one mainstream teacher suggested that:

we are heading backwards at the moment, ... Over the years we saw an extra input appearing in the schools ... I would say that back until 1985 that was increasing, I would say that now we are getting to the stage that we go slightly further back and the amount of the extra input is now being reduced, and this is obviously a financial restriction. ... We are losing in time, last term I had [learning support] for three periods, since Christmas only for two. That is going and I have to do more, certainly, almost a full circle, not quite, but giving another two years, and I will be back where I started. (ct. 57)

The issue of resources was identified as crucial. The official Scottish policy (as seen in Chapter 9), however, saw provision for special educational needs through the extension of learning support into a consultancy role and co-operative teaching. This was a distinctive difference between the implied perception of the policy documentation and the explicit perceptions of the mainstream teachers.

### **Strength and Weaknesses of the Current Provision**

In Greece, most mainstream teachers perceived the existence of a special classroom as an strength. The expertise and the individualised tuition by a learning support teacher was seen to result in academic progress for the pupils with specific learning difficulties. This was more beneficial in classes and schools where the teachers had managed to create such an atmosphere that classmates 'don't look down on' (ct. 23) pupils with specific learning

difficulties. They perceived various weakness, however, some related directly to the learning support provision, and argued:

The disadvantage is that the pupil loses the continuity with the work of the class, and maybe, the other children still perceive that there is this other class where those who are behind in learning go. (ct. 34)

Moreover, one mainstream teacher suggested that the special programme devised by the learning support could make his pupil

feel inconveniently, embarrassed. Finally, she will be worried why do I do a different work, why do I not read the same text with the rest, why do I go elsewhere to learn? (ct. 23)

In the case of the two so called 'problematic cases', the disadvantage of the current provision was seen as arising from the fact that they were in the mainstream provision, and not in a special school.

The other weakness perceived by Greek mainstream teachers was associated by the in-class support. The pupil numbers in a class and the associated time restrictions on interactions with individuals were advocated as the main disadvantageous factors, restricting the in-class provision. One mainstream teacher argued:

In class you do not have the time to provide for such cases, occasionally you can steal some time, five minutes in an hour let us say, and this only if you have the possibility. (ct. 34)

In Scotland, mainstream teachers of the study, like their Greek counterparts, considered learning support teachers 'as the biggest asset to every school' (ct. 36). In addition, Scottish teachers perceived as advantageous the fact that children were able to work at their own level because of the flexibility of the material, and that the class grouping allowed them to share the work of their classmates, and so avoid being labelled as different. In cases where supervising assistants were used, teachers regarded this as:

a great benefit that he has somebody that he can turn to instantly. He does not have to wait for attention, or sit and puzzling over something for a long time. (ct. 79)

Nevertheless, mainstream teachers in Scotland also perceived weaknesses in the current provision. Like their counterparts in Greece, they saw the resources, human and otherwise, as inadequate and found occasional difficulties with the timetable. Furthermore, although they made every effort to make children with difficulties feel part of their classroom by also supporting them emotionally, they acknowledged that most of them were bright enough to understand that their classwork was not at the same level as the other pupils, and that could have damaging consequences for their self-esteem. They also noticed that where supervising assistants were involved pupils tended 'to rely on' (ct. 56) them very heavily, and in the case of learning support 'that there is the danger of spoon feeding too much.' (ct. 310)

### **Ideal Provision**

Mainstream teachers in Greece pictured their ideal provision for children with specific learning difficulties as a different education system altogether. One, being 'disappointed' (ct. 23), suggested a system where pupils would be happier and which would be more child focused. A colleague of hers in the private school stated that he:

would change the system radically, from primary 1 to secondary 3. It has to stop being based on knowledge and should develop the critical thinking of the child, as well as the whole personality. And for these kids, they should remain within their classrooms, within their space with the rest of the children. (ct. 65)

Others argued in favour of lower numbers of pupils in mainstream classes, longer working hours for themselves and a different and more diverse curriculum which would result in a broader understanding of schooling. Some suggested that the material should be changed to provide more suitable books, that there should be more in-service training and higher standard of living for the teachers, and that the initial criteria for the suitability of teachers before their enrolment in teacher training departments should be considered.

One of the teachers in the private school, however, had a completely different construct for an ideal provision:

I disagree with what happens in the state schools, the special classrooms. It does not solve the problems. The child needs something different within the class. I would send some supply teachers into the classrooms. I would have had a double benefit: they would benefit from the gained experience, and the cases that they would be responsible for would progress. (ct. 35)

In Scotland, mainstream teachers shared the views of their Greek counterparts about the need for more learning support teachers, more time for them to teach children with difficulties and lower class numbers. In addition to these, it was acknowledged that some children with specific learning difficulties could:

have someone like that [a supervising assistant] all the time. Attached maybe not to him, but maybe to 2-3 other children, who would be of similar ability. [And to have] somebody who is producing the ideal programme for, who would have been somebody who actually screened him, went away and produced the programme for me to use. (ct. 79)

She argued in favour of more learning support teachers within the schools, rather than the centralised special educators who were consulting her on the provision and material on a bimonthly basis. The trend observed earlier in the learning support teachers' perceptions by comparing the two countries was evident in the accounts of the mainstream teachers also: in Greece the case put forward was for a different system, whilst in Scotland it was for more resources but retention of the existing system.

### **Communication & Co-operation with Parents**

Greek mainstream teachers perceived the communication and co-operation with parents as generally good. Although most of the teachers communicated with the parents of their pupils once a month, some were seeing them on a weekly basis. Usually the communication was informal, except in the case of the parents' nights at the end of



semesters or, in the case of the private school, at parent-teacher conferences. The private school was the only one which had scheduled an hour every week during which parents could visit the mainstream teacher of their child.

Generally the communication was perceived as satisfactory, the problem was with fathers, because usually only mothers visited the schools. Some teachers felt that fathers should have taken a more active role, and participated more in the education of their children.

Mainstream teachers noticed many factors that influenced the degree of co-operation with the parents. One mainstream teacher argued that some parents:

have focused on their careers and they work to increase their standard of living, and offer to their children material goods; they believe that they have done their duty and that is all. (ct. 23)

Three out of ten teachers perceived that parents had changed 'for the worse' (ct. 52) over time. These women teachers argued against mothers going to work, and they saw that attitudes, values and concepts concerned with the family had changed. However, this view was not shared by all. The majority of Greek class teachers accepted that parents were genuinely worried about their children's progress and that:

whatever we say to them they do it at home. They help by any means we tell them to. (ct. 13)

Teachers however, admitted that the extent to which, and the speed with which, parents acknowledge their child's difficulty were significant factors in the co-operation achieved. In the private school there was more resistance from parents in accepting the child's problem, and consequently, 'three years were lost' (ct. 65). Nevertheless, the majority of Greek parents co-operated well with the mainstream teachers, although not so intensively as with the learning support teachers.

In Greece, mainstream teachers expected parents to be positive and reinforce their children:

When the mother comes to see me, I ask her to reinforce always, even if there are mistakes to emphasise the correct answers: 'Bravo that you wrote this word correctly', even if he has ten more wrong. I believe in the principle that at home the negative should not be emphasised. (ct. 35)

Moreover, teachers wanted parents to sit and study with their children, so that they would support the work of the school, because the time allocated to children with specific learning difficulties was not perceived as adequate without good support at home.

In Scotland, communication was seen, as in Greece, as adequate, and parents were regarded as interested and involved. Only an occasional difficult case was cited where the supply teacher had not seen the mother at all. There was an additional formal level of communication in cases where there was a need, or a request by the parents, for a record of needs.

Mainstream teachers in Scotland, as in Greece, identified a tendency for parents to become less involved with their children's education than in the past. In addition, a teacher in the private school construed a change in parental attitudes, which coincided with a change in the parent population of the school, and influenced the co-operation they had:

[Parents] would put their children in the school, and they would say here are our children make them independent and educate them, that was the attitude. We now have a lot more business people sending their children, yes we have the professional people as well ... but perhaps they don't have a terribly academic background. And they want a lot for their children, they want their children to have the education that they did not have. They have a lot of high expectations. (ct. 510)

Scottish teachers did not see the governmental policies as having been an influential factor in promoting home-school relations. However, they believed that parents who were more vocal could take advantage of policies when things were not going according to their wishes. The teachers had accepted the concept of accountability:

It is just a general trend I would say, I don't know whether is due to the government policy. But I think that teachers have to learn to be accountable as we never have been before. I had accepted my teachers as being right all the time, nowadays you are questioned as others are. (ct. 36)

They also perceived that they should be prepared to make accessible to parents any requested information on their child's education. However, they accepted that parents who sought information tended to be from a middle-class background, and they emphasised the catchment area of the school as an influential factor in the home-school relations.

Scottish mainstream teachers had one different perception from their counterparts in Greece; they thought that parents generally were aware of their children's problems and were ready to accept them. As far as the actual provision was concerned, most Scottish teachers agreed with the majority of those from Greece, who suggested that parents were now getting involved in the education of their children. It was clear, however, that the amount of involvement required was different because of the different organisation and nature of the educational systems. Nevertheless, mainstream teachers expected parents to assist in homework to the best of their ability, following the directions, methods as well as the agreed expectations (among teachers and parents) for their children.

### **Communication with External Bodies**

In Greece, there was no direct communication and co-operation between mainstream teachers and any body external to the school. In cases where the child had to move school, the teachers of the new school who would be responsible for the child, usually had not been informed that the child had specific learning difficulties. They were not informed about any reports from or visits to medical-pedagogic units or, in the case of the private school, special educators or clinical psychologists; these reports were seen only by

the psychological services of the school. Only in one so called 'problematic' case had the mainstream teacher along with the learning support teacher of the school called the two advisors so that they would have the official backing 'in case anything happened' (ct. 51).

In Scotland, mainstream teachers' communication and co-operation with external agencies were more common, as psychological services and other special education advisors were actively involved in the provision in a consultative role:

There is a learning support advisor who supervises [his] case, and in discussion with me she and I agree appropriate material we think will support the difficulties or various approaches as tape recording work and somebody writing it up, or him recording it and so on. We agree a programme of resource and types of approaches maybe used. And I see her probably every two months. (ct. 79)

This reflected the organisation of special education at a regional level; such features were not characteristic of the Greek system. It is worth reminding ourselves that the regional special advisor in Greece, in his accounts of the ideal provision, suggested that he would like to see one special class in every municipality.

### *Head teachers' Perceptions on Provision*

#### **School organisation & provision**

Head teachers in the Greek state schools had to have responsibility for a special classroom, if they were to be selected for this research. The first special classrooms were created in 1984 and since that time they had offered 'a great deal' (ht. 4) according to the majority of the head teachers.

The state schools lacked any organisational structure to accommodate the learning support teachers in their operation other than the special classrooms. Head teachers often referred to the operation of the special classrooms as being in parallel with that of

the rest of the school, which lifted the direct responsibility off their shoulders. Indeed, in Greek state schools, head teachers were not allowed into special classrooms as learning support was the responsibility of the external special advisors. However, head teachers had informal discussions with mainstream teachers and learning support teachers to agree on an educational provision.

In one case study school, the head teacher was:

against special classrooms. I think that the children were better in the past. In the [mainstream] classrooms there are teachers, they know about psychology, pedagogy of the child; why did they found the special classrooms? I do not see them to have offered anything. I would like to see a class for those children who cannot behave and cannot be integrated in the mainstream class. (ht. 2)

One has to notice some inconsistencies, however. This was the school where the learning support teacher was facing problems of communication and co-operation with the administration of the school. The head teacher maintained the view that the special classroom should be used in a more segregated manner, i.e., the children should remain in for more hours than the learning support teacher preferred to keep them. This view was in contrast with his statement that he did 'not consider them special pupils' (ht. 2) and with the above quotation. The animosity between, on the one hand, the learning support teachers and, on the other hand, the mainstream teachers and head teachers appeared to arise from the creation of a two tiers of professionals, who were also rewarded unequally. This feature also was mentioned in interviews at national and regional levels.

In the Greek private school, the communication and co-operation among mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and management was much more formalised:

We have an internal organisational structure. The deputy heads, are certainly the centres of this structure; the psycho-pedagogic services and the grade meetings [e.g., the six P3 teachers], or the co-operation among the deputy head, the psycho-pedagogic department, and the particular teacher who has a particular child. Moreover, there are meetings of all the

teachers of the class for a specific child [i.e. mainstream, art, music, p.e., English] and then I get involved too. (ht. 5)

In terms of provision, the head teacher in the private school, in addition to the assessments by and support from the psychological services for mainstream teachers and parents, recognised the importance of the role of the deputy head in the lower department. She had no class duties and her teaching time was devoted to support pupils with difficulties in reading and writing. In this way, she could take preventative measures and prevent the escalation of problems.

In Scotland, head teachers saw the organisation of the provision for children with specific learning difficulties differently. They perceived differently the role of the learning support teachers in the provision, in the same way it was described by the learning support teachers themselves. The most distinctive difference was the delegation of responsibility to the learning support teachers on how the learning support policy of the school would be implemented in practice. Furthermore, head teachers also recognised the importance of the mainstream teachers in the provision for specific learning difficulties. In one state school, in particular, they had:

a learning support liaison time, three times a week, once when there's a general assembly going and twice I cover the class to allow the class teacher out to liaise with the learning support teacher. Just to discuss individual children or to discuss plans for the future or to review things that have happened, and we try to keep that going over the year when at all possible, and I think that is quite valuable. (ht. 7)

The organisation of most of the Scottish schools had put the learning support teacher in the centre of the provision. As well as liaising with the mainstream teachers, head teachers expected learning support teachers to support and teach directly pupils who were either 'in [their] list' or consisted of 'other children who come and go because they need help' for a short time (ht. 8), and to manage the learning support department. This included management of finances, acquiring materials, and liaising with external bodies.

In terms of actual provision, head teachers in Scotland suggested that the learning support teachers decided the extent of the support that each child should get, and whether this support should be provided within the mainstream teacher's class or elsewhere. However, they recognised that the ethos of the school, and the resources of the school as a whole and in relation to the regional guidelines, played an important role in these decisions. The head teacher in the private school also maintained that the learning support teacher

was a primary school teacher who we all acknowledged to be one of the great teachers, she has incredible credibility with the teaching staff, number one, terribly important. ... Her approach to learning support was that there was a lot of things that could be solved with intensive impact on the child over a shorter period ... Those problems might be dealt with as the ambulance arrives: a child is given intensive care for six weeks and then fed back into the system or supported in the system. So there is lots of flexibility in this. (ht. 10)

### **Setting of Aims**

In Greece, head teachers were divided equally about whether the aims and the goals of the curriculum should be the same for all children or not. Some argued that aims should be common as any difference could lead to 'isolation and stigmatisation' (ht. 3), and that differentiated goals would lead to practical difficulties within the mainstream class. In contrast, others suggested that aims and goals should 'not be the same', adding, however:

but they are. The curriculum does not allow any differentiation from the beginning, from its philosophy. We have children with specific learning difficulties and children without, who have to reach fractions, or in RE to finish the book and so on. (ht. 1)

In Scotland, head teachers thought that the aims and the goals should remain the same as those for the rest of the pupils. However, although there was 'not a policy for differentiation as such' (ht. 7) in the schools, there was a clear understanding that within the mainstream teacher's duties was responsibility to 'set appropriate work' (ht. 6) for all

the children. It was also understood that the curriculum was structured in a way that was:

geared towards the needs and abilities of the child. Take the scenario, for example, of a Primary 7 class; the 5-14 is geared to differentiation, you might be teaching levels A to E in the class, so 5-14 works in that way. (ht. 9)

Finally, they all maintained that the long term aim was to benefit the children with specific learning difficulties and to succeed in that they had to make whatever 'remedies' were (ht. 9) possible, stressing the importance of flexibility of provision.

### **Curriculum**

In Greece, the curriculum was perceived by head teachers as not suitable for children with specific learning difficulties. Their main concern was the amount of material that the mainstream teachers had to cover, which was set by the MNERA in the national curriculum guidelines. The demands of the curriculum on mainstream teachers were seen as another of its negative elements:

When by June you should cover a certain amount of material, and I am not talking about it in a qualitative manner, rather a quantitative. The curriculum is a stress to pupils without specific learning difficulties, because the mainstream teacher has anxiety about the completion of it. He is worried and pushes the children to the next and the next with only some revision lessons. Furthermore, he does not have any time for any specific child. So the curriculum and its philosophy is very negative, not just negative. (ht. 1)

In the private Greek school, they had developed a different curriculum but based on the national version (as the school was obliged by law to follow the national course). The main aim was to relieve the mainstream teacher of the negative impact described above, and to give some structure to the whole programme:

There is no part that we have left out, but we have allowed teachers to relax as they have smaller curricular load, and we work on the



methodology with the co-ordination of the grade meetings. This allows more time to deal individually with some children. (ht. 5)

In Scotland, head teachers had mixed feelings about the curriculum. One suggested that it was too heavily loaded for pupils with specific learning difficulties, and had negative implications for the time table. Another, however, recognised that although the 5-14 initiative had 'been one of the biggest changes as far as the curriculum is concerned' (ht. 7), it was appropriate for children with specific learning difficulties, because

it is not so prescriptive that you must do this at this stage and this, and this, and this. You can use it as a framework and as long as you are aware of what your children need and the stages that the children are at, then I think it is useful to have this wider framework, without being pushed too much. (ht. 7)

The head teacher of the private school suggested that the curriculum's academic nature was consistent with the culture of the school, which was seen as 'the best of Scottish teaching recorded' (ht. 10). She also emphasised the management implications of the 5-14 programme describing it as 'massively helpful' as it gave a structure and reference point.

### **Materials Used**

In Greece, head teachers perceived that the nationally prescribed books needed amendment if they were to become suitable for children with specific learning difficulties. Their construction of common books was too difficult for these children, despite the examples that were offered within the books. In the state schools, and in line with the views of the learning support teachers and mainstream teachers, they strongly supported the need for extra materials and books designed for the special classrooms,

as it has a role to play with its own material, until the child can cope with the books that we all have. (ht. 4)

One head teacher in a Greek state school even blamed the books for the appearance of 'dyslexia'. In the private school, they had published their own booklets to support the modified curriculum which they used.

In Scotland, head teachers did not refer to material to a great extent, other than to mention that they followed the recommendations of the learning support teachers. In addition, they were aware of the variety of materials used for children with specific learning difficulties, like mathematical games and tape recordings.

### **Emotional Support**

In Greece, head teachers perceived the role of emotional support to be as important as academic support. That was the reason why in talking about the advantages they emphasised praise and the consequential boosting of self-esteem as one of main benefits. Furthermore, head teachers suggested that on-going assessment could be understood only as providing a means for improving motivation. They argued in favour of the 'intentional grade' which was elaborated earlier.

In the Greek private school, the head teacher had planned a totally different assessment scheme for the future, which would allow a child to be assessed on different skills rather than the current knowledge-based system:

it is proposed to have successive assessment throughout school from a special office of assessment with special tests that can be developed, and which could assess many skills. Moreover, we want to take into account the many types of intelligence that Garter has proposed, which is a new tendency. To assess children not only as units, but within a team exercise, as a group; and the results of this assessment, will be evaluated and analysed in the United States by specific institutions in such a way that the teacher can be helped in points where he needs to pay more attention on each child. (ht. 5)

Head teachers in Scotland, like in Greece, gave the same emphasis to emotional support as on the academic provision. Two were worried about the fact that children with specific learning difficulties did not want their classmate to know:

the level they are working at. They always say can we get harder spelling and it is really quite difficult to explain why that they won't be able to do it. I think they only want harder stuff to either impress their peers or their parents. I think there is pressure from parents to work a bit harder. (ht. 8)

In relation to assessment, although most of the Scottish head teachers referred to the Levels A to E of the 5-14 curriculum, they also claimed that they used alternative and informal ways of assessment, like observation. Children with specific learning difficulties were sitting the national tests but:

We have to be 100%, not 100 but 99% certain that he will succeed, before we let the child to sit the test. (ht. 6)

This was supported publicly in Scotland by parents and teachers.

### **Role of Mainstream Teachers & Learning Support Teachers**

Head teachers in Greece argued that the role of mainstream teachers has not changed over the years, other than the introduction of the special classrooms. They perceived that this gave the opportunities to mainstream teachers to send the pupils with difficulties to the special classrooms. They did not believe, however, that this had brought salient changes in their role. In the private school, where there was no special classroom, the head teacher suggested that their role had remained the same and that the only addition was the advice they could now get from the psychological services, as well as the school's own curriculum. However, there was a common perception among head teachers in private and state schools, that:

the mainstream teacher does not have the necessary time to devote to these children. All they can do is to show them support, and give them some

time, but not in expense of the other pupils. And there are some needs regarding the curriculum that must be met. (ht. 1)

In Scotland, head teachers saw the role of the mainstream teachers as virtually the same over their years within the teaching profession. In contrast they saw the role of the learning support teacher as evolving from the remedial teacher who would only withdraw 'the thickies' (ht. 6), to a teacher who

is now a team teacher and comes in and works co-operatively with the classes, still retaining the ability to take small groups out when she feels that's necessary, or individuals as well, but basically she is there as a support to the class and also it is not just that she works with the children who have learning difficulties. (ht. 7)

The factors that brought about these changes were identified as research, policy, individuals in key roles within the education establishment and the increased awareness about the knowledge around special educational needs in general.

### **Communication with Parents**

In Greece, most head teachers characterised their schools' policies as 'open' (ht. 3) and maintained that their schools as a whole tried to always welcome parents, because 'co-operation is necessary' (ht. 4). Although some considered communication as difficult and some as good, they all agreed that the main criterion which determined whether the communication was easy or not was the acceptance of the difficulties by the parents:

the first [difficulty] is to persuade the parents that the child has a learning difficulty. They are negative, they react, we wait them to mature until they accept it. (ht. 5)

As a consequence, head teachers suggested that many parents were initially opposed to their child attending the special classrooms. Some suggested that they were afraid of 'stigmatisation' (ht. 2), because head teachers observed the tendency among parents to

show to all their neighbourhood, to use the success of their child's education as a measure of social status. (ht. 1)

Even in cases of children with specific learning difficulties where there was little or no success in schooling, parents were reluctant to accept that their child had any difficulty. One should also note the social context and attitudes towards disability as a whole explored in Chapter 4, to understand better the stress and the anxiety that the parents were experiencing. Head teachers argued that only a few parents had different attitudes towards specific learning difficulties, and those were the ones who were informed and knowledgeable about them.

Head teachers in Greece also perceived that the education level of parents played an important role in the home school relationships. On the one hand, this was beneficial for the private school; on the other hand, in the state school a head teacher suggested:

How can every parent who has finished the secondary school or the university criticise a teacher? This is a negative attitude, towards the school and education in general. How do they intervene? Have they studied child psychology, do they know what we have to teach, do they know calligraphy? How do they intervene? The MNERA should publish guidelines on the duties and responsibilities of parents' unions. (ht. 2)

Most of them, however, agreed that parents, especially those who were not educated, perceived the teachers as experts and usually were easily persuaded of the need for their child to be provided in a special classroom, although two head teachers argued that they were seeing only parents who there was no need to see; parents of pupils with difficulties tended to be afraid that the school would be critical of them and so avoided the school visits.

In the private school parents attended parents' nights and came whenever they were called. The head teacher, however, had another difficulty, which was seen as parents' intervention to the school's work:

they ask for special treatment, but as they conceptualise special treatment: to award a good grade, not to push him, not to pressure him. ... (ht. 5)

In Scotland, head teachers perceived the communication with parents of pupils with specific learning difficulties as generally good. There were, however, differences according to socio-economic factors. In the state schools there was generally an 'open door policy' (ht. 8) with its most characteristic example a small rural school where parents were eagerly encouraged to play different roles as:

helpers... working now on a playground games initiative. ... There is an environmental committee that parents are on as well. They can come in and discuss ideas for planning. Workshops from the school have been organised with relevance to the 5-14 programme and parents are invited along. At the moment we have two parents' evenings at the beginning and the end of the year and hopefully in the middle, an open evening where parents can come in and walk around. (ht. 9)

This head teacher, however, perceived that despite the encouragement to participate in the various school activities, parents generally failed to do so as they maintained 'the attitude that total responsibility is on the teacher.' (ht. 9)

In contrast, the private Scottish school had tried to keep parents at a distance from the school. It was a very competitive school, and being situated in a small community meant that whatever happened in school tended to become community knowledge.

Head teachers in Scottish schools, were divided about the role of parents about the decisions about the provision. One maintained the view that the decision was left in the hands of the parents, who 'at the end of the day would have the veto over that' (ht. 9); another characterised the decision as 'a collective one' (ht. 6) and a third suggested that parents:

They don't actually have any decision making powers as to what is going to be done, but having said that, if they were not happy about what was being done, they would be able to come in and discuss that with us. (ht. 7)

The last perception was close to the official documentation. In terms of expectations that head teachers had regarding the role of parents in the provision, there was a common

understanding that they had to support the child with homework. Head teachers maintained that schools tried to encourage that by asking parents to assist, in some cases, with pair reading, or simply by 'a wee jotting' (ht. 6) by the homework. One state school had 'an assessment diary' which parents had to sign over the weekend, and where all the week's work was highlighted. In the private school, the head teacher emphasised, as had learning support teachers, the fact that they had to do quite a lot of 'parent training' (ht. 10).

Finally, in relation to the governmental policy on parents, head teachers in Scotland argued that its influence was dependent on the catchment areas of the schools:

I don't think in this area [the governmental policy] has played any role. I think in some areas undoubtedly it does have a lot of factors about how teachers and parents get on with one another. ... Teachers have their jobs, parents have their jobs. They do on occasions use the school board, because when the whole issue of testing arose in the first place there were quite a number of parents who had worries about that and who went to the school board to try to get the school to do something about it. So they know that the facility is there if they have any worries, but they don't tend to do anything in this area. (ht. 7)

In the private school the head teacher acknowledged, however, that five parents had referred to the policies, whilst in the rural small school, the parents were indifferent as members of their families for generations had been going to the same school, and they could not afford 'the hardship' (ht. 9) that a change of school would mean.

### **Strengths & Weaknesses**

In Greece, head teachers perceived that the main strengths of the current provision were the special classrooms. The majority also referred to progress in reading and writing. However, the emotional consequences of the children going to the special classrooms was cited as the main weakness.

In Scotland, head teachers saw the only drawback of the current provision to be the budget cuts which had had effects on the learning support. As strengths they cited the fact that children with specific learning difficulties were working within small groups, at their own level, achieving according to their abilities, and simultaneously, feeling part of the mainstream class.

### **Ideal Construct**

In Greek state schools, the head teachers perceived a variety of pictures of the ideal school for children with specific learning difficulties. One supported the special classroom as having 'the right balance between provision and isolation' (ht. 3) and being ideal for these children. His colleagues, however, argued in favour of a 'mix of ability' (ht. 2) to be withdrawn on occasions into the special classrooms so that the potential stigmatisation of the less able children would be removed. Another suggested that there was a need for psychologists and social workers to visit the schools regularly. Moreover, she believed in more in-service training for mainstream teachers, as she thought that knowledge was a factor in becoming an ideal teacher, who 'would provide for every child individually' (ht. 2). Other head teachers wanted to see more resources in the special classrooms.

In the Greek private school, the head teacher had a clear view of his ideal provision for children with specific learning difficulties:

I see, first of all, helpers in the lower grades, so that we could make more individualised teaching and the provision of support within the framework - the environment- of the classroom. Second, better staffed psycho-pedagogic department which is not going to be confined to the assessment, but also in cases where we send for consultation outwith the school, we will be able to provide it here; or to lead the teacher to make the special exercises that a learning difficulty might require during the class lesson, or -certainly- the special teacher who might do that in some different hours. It is not clear in my mind yet, whether they should be out of their



classroom too often in order to receive the support. I strongly believe that the support can be given within the classroom, however, practically it is impossible to provide all the support in the classroom, something must be done out of it. And there we should have special people to do it. (ht. 5)

Head teachers in Scotland, construed the ideal provision for children with specific learning difficulties in a similar way to the current provision. They all emphasised, however, the need for extra resources, especially extra people and time. This would allow them to intervene from an earlier stage and throughout the school, with more pupils giving them more time. One head teacher argued:

If it was total devolved management I would like to have a full time learning support teacher. I would like to have Supervising assistants for each of these children, hopefully to keep them in the mainstream.. (ht. 9)

Once again, comparing the two countries, it was clear that in Greece the ideal perceptions led to ideas of qualitatively different provision, whilst in Scotland they led to enhancement of the current circumstances.

### **Communication with External Bodies**

In Greece, head teachers perceived as one of the most serious problems of the educational provision the fact that they could offer little to children with specific learning difficulties in the way of communication and co-operation with external bodies and agencies. The only people they could refer to were the adviser and, to some extent, the special adviser who were called whenever they needed either advice or to have a person of authority to confirm one of their decisions (like the one to keep the so called 'problematic' cases in their schools). One head teacher stated:

This is the big disadvantage of our schools. When we want to assess a pupil with learning difficulties we don't have any co-operation with any unit. The two which are closer to the school, assess usually dyslexia than any other difficulty. Parents are very reluctant to go to these units. (ht. 1)

In the private school, the head teacher acknowledged that they recommend parents to make use of the private clinics in relation to diagnostic assessment and/or provision.

In Scotland, head teachers perceived the co-operation and communication with external bodies and agencies, such as the regional authorities or the psychological services, as 'fine' (ht. 8). Their main problem was with the regional authorities' cuts in their finances:

It is a matter for the head teacher to sort out. Send letters out to the various heads of psychological services, to the outreach services, seeing what their response is what you get from there. If you can get some extra help. We know the people to contact. But at the end of the day everyone is fighting for their own corner. We would all like extra time, extra staff, and extra resources but [the region] dictate the times and resources. (ht. 9)

In the private school the head acknowledged that although they had no input from national or regional agencies, they could 'buy training, skills, materials or buy ourselves onto courses' (ht. 10). The school had to purchase everything perceived necessary and the parents eventually were paying for it, which emphasised the competition over the resources, and what has been characterised in the literature as 'marketisation' (see Riddell et al., 1994).

### *Summary - Discussion*

Primary mainstream teachers in both countries emphasised the need to be child-centred and to boost the self-esteem of their pupils. However, in Greece they saw the prevailing 'academicism' and knowledge-based curriculum as hindering their efforts to be child-centred. Their teaching was whole-class, with no movement allowed by the pupils, where the prescriptive centralised curriculum with the associated common-to-all books dictated their approach. In Scotland, however, teachers had organised their class in

groups, where pupils were able to move in the classroom and the teachers tried to differentiate the materials and methods according to pupils' aptitude and learning styles.

These views were also shared by the learning support teachers and the head teachers. However, mainstream teachers stressed the importance of repetition, especially in Greece and in the Scottish private school. Another difference from the perceptions expressed by the learning support teachers was the mainstream teachers' construct of ideal provision; as some of them, in both countries, envisaged more supervising assistants or helpers within the mainstream class as beneficial, whilst the learning support colleagues saw the child's dependence on supervising assistants as a weakness. Furthermore, in Greece mainstream teachers perceived that the responsibility for the provision for specific learning difficulties rested, at the end of the day, with the learning support teachers, whilst in Scotland they saw that this as being shared between the two.

In Greece there were clear distinctions between the official documentation and the provision provided by mainstream teachers. Although circulars and the Director of Special Education emphasised the need for 'internal differentiation' mainstream teachers did not differentiate according to the pupils' learning styles. This, along with the different role of the head teachers in the management of the provision for specific learning difficulties, were the two distinctive differences between Scotland and Greece. Head teachers in Greece considered that the special classrooms of their schools operated in a parallel administrative framework, that of the special education, and that they were not directly responsible. In contrast, in Scotland head teachers were responsible for the finances, staffing and school policy for learning support, although they delegated some of these responsibilities to the learning support teachers.

The degree of centralisation of the two educational systems had clear influences in the provision for specific learning difficulties in Greece. Once more, the general conclusion, supported by learning support teachers as well, was that in Greece mainstream teachers and head teachers would like to see a different kind of provision, whilst in Scotland teachers sought more resources to enhance the current provision.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Consumers' Perceptions on Provision**

#### ***Introduction***

In this chapter the characteristics of the consumers as well as their perceptions about provision at home and at the primary school are investigated. Their views will be compared with the views of the educators presented in the previous chapter, as well as among themselves, so that the distinctive elements of their accounts can be highlighted.

Parents' perceptions on provision were obtained by asking them 'how does the school provide for [the child's] difficulties?' Probing and prompting of their initial response in areas of drawbacks, benefits, their involvement, communication and co-operation with mainstream teachers and learning support teachers were undertaken.

#### ***Characteristics of Case-Study Pupils***

The following table 12.1 outlines the characteristics of the case-study pupils giving a brief account of their family background, based on parents' education and employment. It is evident from the table that parents with higher educational experiences tend to send their children to the private sector, which is related to their economic circumstances. Furthermore, the differences between Scotland and Greece in divorce rates or single parent families is also indicated. This was indicative of the importance of the family in the Greek society, discussed in Chapter 4. There were three households in Scotland where the father of the case-study pupils was absent. Only the head teacher of the private school, however, suggested that divorce in Greece impaired provision.

**Table 12.1: Characteristics of case-study pupils.**

(dark area: Greek case-studies; light area: Scottish case-studies)

No	Sex	School	Grade - age		Father education	Mother education	Father's work	Mother's work
21	Boy	State 1	2	7	primary	primary	skilled labour	house-wife
51	Boy	State 1	5	11	primary	primary	skilled labour	house-wife
52	Boy	State 2	2	10	gymnasium	primary	civil servant	house-wife
62	Girl	State 2	6	11	lyceum	drama sch.	sales rep.	unemployed
13	Girl	State 3	1	6	technical gymnasium	primary	skilled labour	house-wife
23	Girl	State 3	2	7	primary	primary	skilled labour	house-wife
34	Boy	State 4	3	9	lyceum	primary	civil servant	house-wife
54	Girl	State 4	5	11	gymnasium	gymnasium	civil servant	house-wife
35	Boy	Private	3	8	post-grad.	University	self-employed	self-employed
65	Boy	Private	6	11	university	lyceum	self-employed	self-employed
36	Boy	State 6	3	7	university	secondary	IT	house-wife
56	Boy	State 6	5	9	*	university	*	professional
57	Boy	State 7	5	10	O levels	secondary	sales rep.	asst. shop manager
67	Girl	State 7		11	*	secondary	*	p/t non-manual
68	Boy	State 8	6	10	FE college	secondary	taxi driver	house-wife
78	Boy	State 8	7	11	*	secondary	*	house-wife
39	Boy	State 9	3	7	FE college	secondary	bar-tender	house-wife
79	Boy	State 9	7	11	secondary	secondary	unemployed	house-wife
310	Boy	Private	3	7	university	university	self-employed	house-wife
510	Boy	Private	5	9	university	university	professional	PE teacher

(\*: not in the household; gymnasium/secondary: end of obligatory education at 16; lyceum: last three years of secondary schooling after gymnasium)

If one examines the individual cases it becomes clear that those parents identified by teachers as 'vocal' were all from a more advantageous economic background. These were the families (52, 65, 56, 57, 510) which raised the most serious concerns about the teacher's methods and were more ready to look to the school for factors contributing to their children specific learning difficulties. Those in the private school included case-study pupil 510 who was for the 3 first years of his schooling in state school. His parents felt that 'the school was failing him', and so sought private provision. The only parent who complained in writing about the provision her boy was receiving was the mother of 56 who again had the economic and educational advantage and was prepared to challenge what seemed to her to be unsatisfactory.

Three pupils in Greece and two in Scotland had repeated a grade. This was decided in close consultation with the parents who followed the advice of their children's teachers. It was recommended as a consequence of evidence of school failure and lack of progress; with pupils' age and their school readiness taken into account. In one further case in each country teachers recommended the repeat of one year but the parents refused to accept the suggestion because of the likely emotional consequences for their children.

### *Parents' Perceptions of the Provision*

#### **Principles and Organisation of the Provision**

Greek and Scottish parent's views on the organisation and the principles of the provision had commonalties and differences. The common element was the value that they put on withdrawal from mainstream classrooms and their view that provision was mainly on the hands of the learning support teachers.

In Greece, parents acknowledged that 'we are behind in these matters' (mother 54) suggesting that the state had not given very much attention to special education and specialised provision, such as speech therapy or psychological support. It was not surprising that even in the private school a father suggested that:

I am pleased that they are interested in the matter, that even one person is involved in providing for, and here there are more than one. (father 65)

Parents in Greek state schools recognised that the provision was implemented principally through learning support teachers, and that mainstream teachers had only a supportive role to play. Their perspective reflected the views expressed by the learning support teachers and was articulated by parents throughout the socio-economic spectrum. As one parent suggested:

Most of the support comes from [the learning support teacher]. The mainstream teacher has just supported her emotionally, to participate in all the programmes, in whatever happens in the school, to give her to copy something, to read a line from the text. Her time is limited and she cannot get involved more. I believe that the special classroom has offered a lot. (mother 54)

Moreover, in the state schools, it was understood that children with specific learning difficulties 'are just present' (mother 13), rather than completely integrated in the mainstream classes. To ensure that their children should go through and succeed in their education four Greek parents acknowledged the importance of the family role in provision:

the general school without the amount of support we provide is not suitable for him. (mother 21)

In both private and state schools in Scotland, parents perceived that the support for children with specific learning difficulties derived mainly from the learning support teachers. However, the organisation of support was different from that in Greece as the



learning support teachers were co-teaching in class as well as withdrawing pupils with difficulties. A mother stated:

She goes to [the learning support teacher] three times a week. She has a small room where they go and they sit just maybe two or three of them and it is a more intense teaching and sometimes [the learning support teacher] just goes into the classroom and sits with them as in the class so it does not make them feel different. (mother 67)

This indicated the two different ways in which learning support teachers were operating. In addition, parents in two cases were aware that their children had been assigned to supervising assistants who, it was suggested, spent most of the time with their assigned children but also helped their classmates.

From the above accounts it becomes clear that whilst in Greece parents perceived only a single pattern of organising provision (the special classroom), their Scottish counterparts understood three different ways (co-operative teaching, withdrawal from mainstream class, supervising assistant). In addition, in Greece parents were totally dissatisfied with the provision within the mainstream classes, and they commented negatively on their attitudes.

### **Curriculum, Goals and Material**

There was a common tendency among Greek parents to associate the curriculum with the common-to-books, which were seen as:

unsuitable generally for pupils. The books are not straight forward. They are vague confusing the child. (mother 62)

This view was characteristic of all the respondents in Greece. Furthermore, in the private school, parents perceived the school programme as over-loaded. It was also seen, however, as providing a wide range of subjects and activities, which their children were believed to benefit from and enjoy.

In relation to the aims and goals of the curriculum, parents in Greece, except in the two 'problematic' cases, agreed that they should be common with the rest of the children provided that they get extra support. Parents of the two children with severe difficulties recognised that their children's needs were totally distinctive from those of the rest of the pupils, and they needed a different curriculum, which was not available.

Parents in Greece also referred to other material apart from the books prescriptively associated with the curriculum. They looked to the learning support teachers to provide suitable material. They assumed that learning support had a much richer range of material, which would be helpful to their children, including among others magnetic letters and toys. Three also mentioned their own need to buy similar materials to those used by the learning support teachers, or whatever was recommended by them, such as concrete materials for mathematics. In the private school, both parents mentioned the importance of computers, as children were accustomed the use of such equipment.

In Scotland, parents thought that the goals and aims of the curriculum were in general terms, appropriate for their children. What was distinctive from their counterparts in Greece, however, was the clear difference in the views between the middle class parents and those of working class. Parents from working class families wanted their children to 'have enough to get them through [school]' (mother 68) whilst, in the private school, the expectations of parents were much higher.

Scottish parents were not aware of the details of the curriculum and this was reflected in the different views they held. Four argued that the curriculum was appropriate and their children were progressing satisfactory with the support given. Four others were, however, less satisfied and one expressed this in the following statement:

this child has special needs; he needs special instruction. So the pressure on him to follow the curriculum is immense. I just think it is a shame. He gives 100% of himself and it is not enough to keep up with the others.  
(father 36)

In relation to the materials used, most parents in Scotland were happy. The objections raised related to the use of calculators as they were perceived to cause problems in mathematics, and some of the text books which were seen as boring and might have led to lost interest in reading. What was widespread, however, was the view of how important it was to enhance the availability and access to computers.

### **Emotional Support**

Parents in Greece gave emphasis to the emotional support of their children with specific learning difficulties, as the educators had done. They suggested that the effectiveness of co-operation between their children and their teachers was depended on the emotional bonding that they could form. They appreciated the effects of a more supportive environment for their children within the school brought about by the different approaches of the learning support teachers. For example, one mother noticed:

The first day after she went to the special classroom, she came home very happily and she said 'I got a bravo in the dictation', and you could see that she changed, and every time she writes something right now I reward her with a bravo. ... Now she tries a lot. (mother 13)

Parents also referred to a change in their own behaviour regarding their children, which was brought about by following the recommendations of the learning support teachers. There were cases where this change was dramatic, from an earlier emphasis on pushing the child to write and study by pressure and threats, to one which stressed the importance of having a positive approach and rewarding every effort. Parents in the private Greek school, also suggested that this was also common among the mainstream teachers too, who:

told me to find and focus only on the correct answers: here is correct, and here is correct. (mother 35)

Furthermore, following suggestions from the psychological services department, aimed to increase the self-esteem of their children, parents enrolled them in sports activities, like basketball and sailing.

Parents in Greece saw grades as indicative. In most cases grades were not seen as representing the actual performance of their children, but as having a boosting effect on the self-esteem in cases where they were higher than the child was expecting. The emphasis on assessment, even in primary schools, was a direct result of the national emphasis put on the Panhellenic exams, as elaborated in Chapter 4.

In Scotland, parents in general had similar beliefs to those in Greece. They understood the role of praise in dealing with the children with specific learning difficulties, and they took on board the recommendations of the learning support teachers in relation not only to emotional support but also other elements of the provision, like organisation skills. For example, in the Scottish private school it was recommended to the parents of 510 that they should ensure that he had a routine, which would help him with his organisation of time. Parents also recognised the impact that the tailored school provision and emotional support had on the child:

so I think the support is really good and it tries to build her confidence as well, where in the normal classroom if she finds problems she sometimes maybe gets a wee bit upset or that because she is not catching up or somebody's on a bigger reading book or something. Whereas when she is in the support class she is quite confident because she is managing to get through the work and she gets a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of praise when she does things. (mother 67)

In Scotland, as in Greece, parents regarded as 'bad teaching' (mother 36) circumstances where a mainstream teacher did not responding positively to the efforts of a child with specific learning difficulties.

## **Communication with Mainstream Teachers**

In Greece, parents suggested that the relationships among themselves and the teachers was characterised by 'a change of attitudes; we have moved from the conservative relationships' (mother 62). Parents were more free to communicate with teachers in a way that when they were pupils would have been unimaginable:

Whenever I have something to say to the mainstream teacher I go and say it directly to her. She is friendly and I am not negative, but decisive. So I have said to the teacher that she is not right to take her nerves to the children. (mother 52)

The above mother together with eight of the others, suggested that the communication they had with the teachers was very good, open, friendly and frequent; this view was shared by the educators.

In relation to the referral of their children with specific learning difficulties to the 'special classroom' or the psychological services, parents were happy with the approach that mainstream teachers followed. They were asked for their views and the final decision was for the parents to make. In all cases, parents reported that they happily accepted the teachers' recommendation.

She told me that the learning support teacher will come to work with some pupils, including my son, and I accepted it immediately, and I never raised any objections. (mother 52)

However, this was a clear point of difference between the perceptions of the parents and those of some of the educators who had argued that parents were reluctant to allow their children to attend the special classroom.

In Scotland, the same attitude changes in relation to home-school co-operation were also noted: 'it is a lot better now: school was school and home was home' (mother 76). Most

parents in the study felt that they were involved in decisions about learning support provision.

In relation to communication, however, there were variations in parental perceptions within Scotland. Although the majority recognised that schools could be visited if so wished (open door policy), there were three cases that indicated a lack of communication. In one case-study school, both parents of the children with specific learning difficulties were unaware of the provision arrangements made for their children; this could be explained, to some extent, by the way they saw their educational role. For example, one suggested:

he is a good child and I never have any bad reports of him, he is well behaved, not really at any trouble; I just see them at parents' evenings.  
(mother 78)

In another case, where the child was seen as having a specific language perception difficulty, the mother (from higher socio-economic background) was disappointed by the communication she had with the school:

I was absolutely furious that the school had taken two years to tell me they had problems with him, really annoyed. So much so that I reported them to the department of education. By talking to the head teacher she defended the nursery teacher and the class teacher and I thought there was no defence in those circumstances. If the problems were as severe as they were telling me, as severe as hiding in corners and he would not talk and would not do anything anyone asked him to do, ... I felt it was inexcusable for them not to have contacted me. (mother 56)

However, as indicated in the previous chapter, the perceptions of the providers were different, suggesting that the parent was not responding to their initiatives to contact them.

## **Co-operation with Mainstream Teachers**

In Greece, parents perceived the role of the mainstream teacher as very important, suggesting that it should be 'like a second parent' (mother 54). However, there was a tendency among parents in the state schools to notice that mainstream teachers failed to fulfil this role as the children with specific learning difficulties were

just [physically] present in the mainstream classroom, nothing more.  
(mother 13)

Parents in Greek state schools had the view that teachers were not 'bad teachers' (mother 23), but that they had an attitude to do 'their work, the public sector' (mother 62). The reference to the public sector, should be understood in a context where the public sector is the biggest employer in Greece and for generations is considered to be a safe employer, with all civil servants being permanent employees. Indicative of the number of employees in the public sector is the Table 12.1, where one can see that three out of ten fathers were employed by the state. The parents believed that mainstream teachers did not always have the knowledge and the necessary awareness to support the child, and in cases where teachers had a different attitude, they lacked resources. There was a distinctive difference between the state school and private school teachers; the latter were seen as getting more involved with, and devoting more time to, children with specific learning difficulties.

In Greece, the view that parents had of the mainstream teacher's approach to provision in the classroom was typical of their own experience as pupils, with a great deal of reading, writing (i.e., dictation) and assessing. In addition, the general view was one that the mainstream teachers were not particularly helpful, and parents:

would like different support in class, opportunities to explain to him any queries he may have. I have told him to ask immediately when he does not understand something ... Of course the mainstream teacher has many

kids, and she does not offer private lessons in class. But she should not just write page after page so that the child is bored and falls asleep at the end. (mother 52)

Their views were consistent with the emphasis put on the learning support teacher's role.

In the case of the two problematic cases, parents had fewer complaints as they were happy that the child was able to be present in the mainstream school.

In Scotland, parents in general perceived that mainstream teachers were supporting their children, not only emotionally but also academically. Their role was seen as important as in one case 'a personality clash' (father 510) was perceived as a possible cause of specific learning difficulties. In this case, the parents felt that they had to change schools, because, although they were told by the mainstream teacher that their child was failing, they saw the school as having failed to provide for the child; this view was supported by the learning support teacher and the head teacher of the private school to which the pupil was subsequently sent.

In six of the cases, Scottish parents argued that their children could not be taken care of in the mainstream class as the teachers had too many other pupils; provision within the classroom was seen as inadequate:

She just teaches her within the normal class. She gets the same work as the other children in the class and it is really up to [her] whether she can do it or not. I don't think she makes any difference, like she does not give her easier work or you know she gets the same as everybody else gets. (mother 67)

This was seen to put pressure on the children to catch up with the rest of the class, which was perceived as undue emotional strain. Although this view was shared up to a point, the mainstream teachers argued that through differentiation they could provide a curriculum within the mainstream class which met the children's needs.



## **Communication & Co-operation with Learning Support Teachers**

In Greece, parents had a very clear view that the support for their children with specific learning difficulties derived mainly from the learning support teachers; this view coincided with the policy (Chapter 9) and the educators' perceptions (Chapter 9 and 10). All parents regarded the learning support teachers highly and thought that they were extensively involved in their children's education. Moreover, they made the distinction between, as one mother put it, 'a simple person, [and] an expert.' (mother 54) Some recognised that they had changed their perception of their own child:

I thought I had a problematic child, like being sick. Then I changed when I saw the system of work the [the learning support teacher] followed.  
(mother13)

Hence, they were seeking to communicate as often as possible; one mother saw the learning support teacher 'every second time I go with her to school' (mother 23), characterising the communication they had as 'very good' (mother 51). On average, the frequency of meetings with the learning support teachers among Greek parents was once a month.

Although parents in the private school shared the general view of good communication, in one case when:

we are five or six people [in the case-conference] gathered to discuss his case, and you see that there are six different views. We have not agreed on something, and we may never do. Even the two psychologists have differentiated opinions. We agree only that he has progressed. (father 65)

However, the particular father was the one who, in the learning support department's view, had refused to accept that his son had difficulties. More generally, it could be argued, parents from higher socio-economic groups were more inquiring about the provision and had a more direct and, in at least three cases, 'decisive' (mother 52) ways of communication with learning support.

What made the communication and the co-operation between Greek parents and learning support teachers distinctive was that, in all but one case, they had lengthy discussions on how they could help their children at home. Parents acknowledged that their children 'co-operate better' (mother 54) with the learning support teachers, and were more open to recommendations about materials and behaviour relating to emotional support. In addition, parents followed these recommendations on methods of home study and its duration, as verified by the learning support teachers. A mother noted:

she gave me some things on how to read, and we discussed ways on how to write a composition. (mother 52)

Furthermore, two Greek learning support teachers had allowed parents to observe how they worked with their children with specific learning difficulties so that they could follow the same methods and use the same materials at home.

In Scotland, most parents had similar perceptions to those of the Greek parents of the communication with the learning support teachers and saw them as 'approachable' (mother 36) and 'experts' (mother 67). In the three cases where communication was difficult, parents had problems with communication with the school in general. For example, the professional woman, who reported the school to the local authority education department, noted:

I have never met his learning support teacher - I do not know what she is like. She could be nice, she could be terrible and I don't know if he is making the kind of progress you would expect with or without a supervising assistant. I don't know where he is in the scheme of things, miles behind the other children or catching up. (mother56)

The other cases where parents saw as problematic the co-operation with the learning support teachers occurred where the children came from disadvantaged backgrounds.

These parents saw the decisions about the provision for their children as based solely on the views of the learning support teachers: 'I did not get a say in anything' (mother 78).

However, the general feeling was that parents were consulted about the extra provision. The only difficulty that one family faced in a state school was with the use of the term dyslexia:

The school was not keen to call [him] dyslexic. As soon as I mentioned the term people said 'Oh don't put a label on the child he is too young to be labelled'. If someone had said to me at the beginning [he] is dyslexic and you could get help and support from a Dyslexia Association I would have gone to them and asked for any information, advice but because we were told not to label him, quietly told he could grow out of this ... let's not do anything. (mother36)

The same response of the above school, was used in several cases to postpone an opening of a record of needs. Parents perceived that their children were catered for without a records of needs, although they would preferred to have one initiated. This will be investigated further in the co-operation with the external agencies, such as psychological services. In the private school, not only was the learning support department happy to adopt the term dyslexia, but it also provided relevant books for parents to read and so raise their awareness.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of current provision**

In Greece, parents perceived as the main advantage of the current provision the progress made in academic terms by their children with specific learning difficulties. One father was pleasantly surprised by the progress of his child:

I saw two of his tests, one in geography and the other in physics. They were wonderful. For me, if he did not copy from the book or a classmate, which he did not as the teacher was present and I asked him, they were beautiful. We see results so I am not disappointed. (father 65)

Looking at the provision as a whole, and not commenting on the mainstream teacher's role individually, five of the parents did not identify any disadvantages. Those who perceived disadvantages, referred to the withdrawal from the classroom, as they objected

to the idea of their child missing his/her lessons in the mainstream class. In the private school, parents commented negatively the lack of a common attitude towards specific learning difficulties, as 'some teachers ... do not accept dyslexia' (mother 65); this concern was shared by the learning support teacher and the head teacher.

Two parents were worried about the reliance that their children may have developed on the private tutors they had at home. In close relation to this, was the fear of one mother that her son might react adversely to the pressure at home:

Because he has a lot of work for the teacher, for the speech therapist who gives him exercises to write too, he gets tired, and he tells me: 'mummy I have had enough, a teacher at school, a teacher at home and a teacher there.' (mother 21)

Furthermore, parents in Greece, especially those of the 'problematic' cases, were very concerned about the lack of alternative education after the completion of primary school. The latter was a common perception among all the respondents: the regional special adviser, the learning support teacher and the mainstream teacher.

In Scotland, parents associated the advantages of the current provision with the learning support teacher and the progress that their children had made. One-to-one attention, the secure environment, the constant praise and the appropriate level of work were seen as the main benefits of the current provision which resulted in academic progress. One mother suggested that the drawbacks were linked to the mainstream class:

If she was just been left in the classroom in the mainstream class she would just fall behind and fall behind all the time and she had get so far behind it would be just impossible to get her back up to the level where she is. Whereas you are getting the support where they are constantly monitoring her so she doesn't fall too far behind. (mother 67)

Other parents referred to the need to 'weaned off of [the supervising assistant]' (mother 56). Parents in the Scottish private school, however, rejected the association of

disadvantages with inclusion in the mainstream class believing that the children with specific learning difficulties had

not been singled out as having problems and they are unaware that [he] has not been achieving what they have been achieving. It is quite normal and quite natural for him to go in and out at various times so there have been no drawbacks. (mother 310)

This emphasised the importance of the school ethos and how the provision was presented, so that there was no stigmatisation for those pupils with specific learning difficulties receiving special provision. These views were common among both parents and educators.

### **Ideal Provision**

In Greece, parents had a variety of views regarding ideal provision for children with specific learning difficulties. The most common view was the one which described the current provision as excellent, and capable of becoming ideal with additional resources, human and materials. For example:

I would like more things. The current situation is helpful, along with the help I provide at home. I would like more special classrooms or more hours in the special classroom, as she only goes for two hours a day; if we doubled this ... More learning support teachers in other schools, more informed mainstream teachers, better and expanded services. (mother 54)

Other parents suggested the need to change the books, the classrooms and the playgrounds to form a better atmosphere in which the education of their children was taking place. Others wanted to see professionals, like psychologists or social workers, within the schools even if only on a peripatetic basis.

Although this was the dominant view, in two cases parents saw as ideal a special school or special classroom designed for children with difficulties similar to their children's. This, however, was rejected by other parents who strongly put their arguments:

The separate provision would be racist. I see it in the class, because the problems derive from there. He must be in the class, but three days a week. Every other day, some expert should take him off and teach him, step by step. In two years, whatever the child, if he has no other problems, he would have overcome everything. (father 65)

Finally, one mother argued in favour of a general change in the education system. She supported the notion that education was failing all the children, and opposed strongly the 'bombardment of messages that we must pay to have them educated.' (mother 52). She, along with the fifty percent of the parents in this study, paid for private tuition in two different subjects throughout the academic year, and she was expecting that her child would have to go to one of the cramming centres in the future (cramming was investigated more extensively in Chapter 4). Greek parents' constructs of the ideal provision were, therefore, similar to those of the teachers.

In Scotland, parents' perceptions of the ideal provision were similar to those of the Greek parents: more resources human and material, especially more computers; more teachers, smaller classrooms, more professional people involved. This petition for more resources was common, of course, among the regional planning officer, the head teachers, the learning support teachers and the mainstream teachers. In addition, one parent suggested the need to 'incorporate personal development skills', and

maybe once a month or every six weeks an interview with the school. At least 15 to 30 minute sessions to come up with a programme for the next six weeks. They could tell me about what they are doing and going to try to do. They can identify if there is anything I should be doing to help, and then reviewing and seeing if it works. (mother 56)

This mother was not the only one who suggested closer links with the school in relation to the home provision.

## **Home Provision**

In Greece, parents' means of providing for their children with specific learning difficulties was mainly by private tuition. One mother suggested that this arose from arguments, which were quite common due to the pressure put on the child, and her own lack of expertise. In the private school it was suggested that the school recommended the extra tuition and, as suggested in the previous chapter, the learning support department used the private tutor who was involved in the case-meetings.

In addition to the private tutor, or in cases that there was none, parents (mostly mothers) helped their children with homework. One father said:

I see her mother being over her head, trying with her like a second teacher.  
(father 13)

This was the norm, and mothers were spending up to two and a half hours a day helping with their child's homework. If one looks at table 12.1 it can be seen that the mothers were available at home, as those with children in the private school were either housewives or self-employed allowing them to be present when the children came home (state school finishes at 1:35pm; private school at 4:10pm).

The duration of the homework was longer than that recommended by teachers, and it was especially long in the private school, where homework often finished at nine o'clock. Dictation, history, RE, geography were only some of the areas where children needed support from their mothers; fathers helped to a lesser degree, mainly with mathematics. There were clear differences between teachers and parents, however, in their understanding of the use and the methods of homework.

In addition to regular tuition, three of the families had also provided help from a special educator:

I don't have time to help him personally because I work all the time to provide him with the help he needs. I send him to a specialist twice a week and I have a private teacher at home every day. (mother 21)

Parents felt that their children's self-esteem could be boosted by providing extra curricular activities, and five families sent their children to sporting or music activities privately.

In Scotland, parents were less involved at home with the education of their children. One even suggested that 'he will not bring anything home' (mother 39). In general, however, Scottish parents supervised the homework of their children in a 'pleasant atmosphere' (mother 57), but as we saw earlier they wanted to see closer co-operation with school. They believed that 'the system does not encourage them to help' (father 36) and one mother argued that:

I do not do a lot on the education side as I am never quite sure if the methods I use would contradict the methods he gets at school. In the past I have had a row because the way I would write an 'a' would be different from the way the school teaches him, the way they write '7' is different. (mother 56)

In families with higher socio-economic backgrounds it was recognised that apart from homework they played a lot of board games, chess, sports and activities.

### **Communication with External Bodies**

In Greece, parents were divided into two groups according to their views about the external agencies and bodies. One of these groups supported the idea that:

there is no need to go elsewhere, the school with the learning support teacher does it all. (mother 13)

The other group wanted to visit external units, or were sent by the school, for diagnostic assessment of their children's difficulties. As indicated earlier, this study has shown a lack of screening and diagnostic assessment in the Greek schools. Moreover, it must be noted that according to the Greek policy documentation children with special educational



needs and specific learning difficulties were required to be assessed by the Medical-pedagogical units, but in reality this had not happened. Only two cases, the two which have been called 'problematic', had attended such an assessment; even in these cases, however, neither the teachers (mainstream and learning support teacher) nor the head teachers had any knowledge of the outcome of this assessment.

Parents who sought support outwith the school went to medico-pedagogical units, set up by the MNERA, or to private clinics, set up by individuals who usually had some training or had studied abroad. However, these clinics were not regulated and quite often parents were confused:

We went to a private diagnostic medical centre, and [the expert well known in the literature for his work on dyslexia] told me that he had severe dyslexia; and then I went to another and they said that they cannot see any problem, or whatever it is, it is very mild. Wherever I went they told me that he has a mild one, and [the expert] saw it as a huge one. Initially I thought to go to the children's Hospital, but when I called and they told me about psychologists, my husband said that we should not make the child crazy ourselves. Leave it and go privately. (mother 21)

The above quotation illuminated two elements of Greek attitudes: the lack of trust of the state sector and belief that because you paid for private provision it was more valid, and the negative attitudes towards anything that has to do with 'difference' (for example, psychologists were associated with mental illnesses and/or problematic families). As a result of this, in Greece there was minimal communication with external agencies beyond the initial diagnostic assessment.

In Scotland, parents did not seek communication or co-operation outwith the school to enhance the provision for their children. In one case where the child had language perception problems and emotional difficulties the mother sought help initially from the doctor who then referred her to the psychologist, psychiatrist and speech therapist for diagnostic purposes only. However, most of the parents were invited by the school to sit

in meetings with the psychological services, who carried a major responsibility for the record of needs and the available resources within the region. As was suggested in Chapter 5, the 'system' of recording was not perceived as parents would have wanted it.

For example, one set of parents complained:

we tried to get a record of needs established for quite a long while but we have been fobbed off. The psychologist tried to put you off. Money, I suppose, resources. We felt after the meeting we should have spoken up - expecting to dismiss it as they did. (mother and father 36)

The main distinctive difference between Scotland and Greece as far as the communication with external bodies and agencies was concerned, therefore, was that in Greece parents sought private units and centres to enhance the provision, whilst in Scotland the contacts were through the school channels and part of the provision procedures.

### *Pupils' perceptions of school provision*

Pupils were asked to respond to the questions 'what does the teacher do to help you?' and 'who else helps you in the school? What does she/he do?'. In doing so their perceptions regarding the provision that they received were sketched. However, there were limitations in the data gathered from children as young as six or seven years of age being interviewed by a man they did not know.

### **Mainstream Teachers' Provision**

In Greece pupils perceived their teachers as providing for them in two ways: academically and emotionally. Eight of the Greek respondents indicated that mainstream teachers helped them academically by repeating what they had said to the whole class to them individually. Whenever they faced a difficulty with their tasks in the classroom, the most common action of the teacher was to go to them and 'explain' once more:

When I don't write the mainstream teacher comes and shows me. She comes over my shoulder and shows me what to write. (pupil 21)

This was confirmed by the mainstream teachers' accounts. As it has been argued throughout this dissertation, the nature of the general educational system in Greece and the corresponding books and exercises have been characterised as 'blind-folded' and 'asphyxiating'. There is also the pressure put on mainstream teachers to finish the curriculum. 'Explanation', therefore, frequently consisted of giving the answer to the pupil, often by underlining it in the text; hence, a child with specific learning difficulties had only to copy it. This was confirmed during the observation period of this study.

In addition, pupils suggested how important 'exercises' were in helping them to overcome their problems. One stated that his 'mainstream teacher gives me exercises ... and so I understand' (pupil 35). This seems to be indicative of the importance that repetition had in the minds of the pupils in the Greek educational context.

In Scotland, too, pupils perceived the role of mainstream teachers in providing for children with specific learning difficulties on as mainly academic. Even at this common point, there was the difference of the direction of the movement in the classroom: in the Greek class the mainstream teacher went to the pupil, where in Scotland the pupil, who had greater freedom of movement, was able to go to the mainstream teacher. Mavrogiorgos (1983) argued that in the Greek school the movement was of the submissive (the pupil) to the sovereign (the teacher). Most of the children with specific learning difficulties in Scotland perceived the nature of their provision differently from those in Greece. They were able to identify specific skills that their mainstream teachers were trying to enhance:

She sounds it out, and ... she makes it easier... We ... all go around the pages and if somebody is reading you have to point on the words on your book all over the page. (pupil 36)

It is clear that this pupil had understood the importance of following the text with his finger and he was aware of the significance of phonics (also emphasised by the teachers). In addition, one pupil suggested that 'if I get a word wrong she tells me to read it and write it again' (68), which suggested a different approach to mistakes; the notion of self-assessment and self-correction were in this case present, something which had been advocated by the learning support teachers.

Although 'clues' and 'skills' were provided by mainstream teachers and seemed important in the pupils' minds, repetition also had a significant role to play in their provision, especially in the private school where:

they just go over things, and over things, and so if it doesn't get into my mind first time they try to get it in my mind. That's what they try.  
(pupil 510)

This could be explained by the more academic approach of the private school, which was seen during the observation period, to be characterised by more whole class teaching. Having said that, however, group organisation and differentiated material were never abandoned. The only case in Scotland where a pupil perceived that his mainstream teacher was providing him with the whole answer (which was often the case in Greece), was a case-study pupil for whom the teacher had low expectations, as became clear during the observation period:

I have to ask [my teacher] for a sentence. How to write 'I was playing with Brian.' She writes it down in a paper and I copy it. (pupil 39)

Although the majority of the Greek pupils perceived the provision for specific learning difficulties as academic in nature, there were three who suggested that emotional support was equally significant:

the other [mainstream teacher] takes me close to him to his desk. That helps me very much. (pupil 34)

The proximity to the teacher, in a classroom organisation where all the pupils were in rows facing the teacher's desk and the blackboard, and where the teacher was not very mobile, except in the cases where he was going over to the desks to correct children's work, gave to the pupil a sense of security and importance, enhancing his self-esteem. In addition, it had practical academic implications, as the child with specific learning difficulties, who might have been easily distracted was closer to the teacher and hence more likely to pay attention, and the mainstream teacher could be quicker in responding to questions and hesitations. The significance of the emotional support and teachers' expectations were also picked up by a Scottish pupil who argued:

In my old school down in [the village], they just accepted that I am not going to go along with it and that I am not a good pupil of theirs. Well they were just saying to my parents 'this little boy is not bright, we cannot do anything to help him'. They were not doing anything. If you did one or two mistakes they just shouted at you. (pupil 510)

The importance of self-confidence was picked up, of course, not only by pupils but by all the groups interviewed in both countries, and most emphatically by the learning support teachers. It can be argued, based on the observation data as well as teacher's accounts, that the main aim of the provision within the classroom was to enhance self-esteem and a sense of belonging to the team. Only in the private school had Greek pupils been helped by their classmates, to achieve the aim of 'belonging to the team' (mainstream teacher 65), and these were in the classes of the two mainstream teachers who were the strongest advocates of emotional support. It can be argued that this was a reason why these two pupils were being helped by their colleagues. As one said:

I ask them sometimes if I have not understood something, or if I haven't heard something. That sort of things. (pupil 65)

In contrast, in the Scottish private school one of the two pupils suggested that he did not ask his classmates because he felt embarrassed to do so. He explained why this was happening in terms of the private school being very demanding academically:

[in the old school] they did not really push you in your work, you had an hour on this work and that work, but in this school, you have to push your work so that you work harder here to get you better. (pupil 510)

This supported the perception of his parents who regarded the old school as failing him, and sought the change to the private sector.

### **Learning Support Teacher's Provision**

The data gathered in Greece were not as extensive as in Scotland, since fewer pupils were being taught directly by learning support teachers. In the private school, the learning support teachers had consultative role with mainstream teachers and parents, and they were in contact with the pupils only during assessment exercises. In two public schools, two case-study pupils were not attending the learning support teachers' class (one for administration reasons and the other as a result of the perceived role of the special classroom). Hence, the data gathered on learning support teachers' provision were from six Greek children only, two of those being what have been characterised as 'problematic cases'. This difficulty in obtaining data is, itself, an important finding indicative of the lack of consistency in the provision for specific learning difficulties. From the data which were gathered, it appeared that the provision from learning support teachers, like that from mainstream teachers, was perceived by Greek pupils, as both academic and emotional.

The different teaching methods and approaches that learning support teachers used with their pupils with specific learning difficulties were appreciated by the pupils who were happy with the special classrooms:

I like going to the support room. In the support room I like reading, I play with the toys ... Now we don't play because I have to read and as soon I finish I go to my classroom. (pupil 34)

The notion of 'play' was common in the accounts of Greek pupils in relation to learning support teachers, which was indicative of the different teaching approach. An approach which, according to the learning support teachers themselves (see chapter 10), was tailored to the needs of the children. References to 'toys' and 'play' also indicated that the pupils recognised the different materials used by learning support. This approach was distinctive from that of the mainstream teachers', which was dictated to a large extent by the national curriculum and the common-to-all books.

This distinction was clear in the mind of one pupil who stated that:

With the learning support teacher we learn some words and we do and the [lesson of] language [of the class]. (pupil 62)

In the mind of the above pupil, the 'language' lesson and the 'words' they did with her learning support teacher were two distinctive 'lessons'. It can be argued that the pupil made this distinction from the perspective of someone accustomed to such knowledge-oriented education system that fragmented knowledge into academic periods, rather than teaching reading skills.

Emotional support was also recognised as provided by learning support teachers. One of the case-study pupils with 'severe learning difficulties' (learning support teacher 51), was the most explicit regarding the emotional support:

Since I was young, the learning support teacher has been reading to me, writing to me, embracing me and taking care of me. He tells me that we are friends, and he still takes care of me. (pupil 51)

This was not the only case, as several pupils recognised implicitly the emotional support.

A child, with experiences of school failure and behavioural problems because of his

learning difficulties, after one and a half year with his learning support teacher had the self-esteem to say:

My difficulties are, were in primary 2. (pupil 43)

In Scotland, eight case-study pupils were taught by learning support teachers directly, either within their classrooms or by being withdrawn. In the state schools, according to the pupils, they went to the learning support teacher's room 'twice a week' (39), but there were occasions when the learning support teachers went to their classrooms. In the case of the Scottish private school, there were two learning support teachers specialising in different subjects, mathematics and language, and the pupils saw them more often than in the state schools. The other major difference between the countries was that in Scotland two pupils had a supervising assistant providing continuous support for them within the classroom. This was something that was not found in Greece, and was consistent with the range of provision which has been highlighted in Scottish policy documentation and literature (see Chapter 9).

Scottish pupils perceived the learning support teachers' provision as academic. Again the tendency of pupils in Scotland was to be more specific in describing their provision, as they were with the description of their difficulties. They regularly referred to concrete material and extra resources provided for them:

She has got a computer and some times she puts a game up. It's just a square and you put all the numbers up, one is in the very middle of the box and two are under and you must put them in the right order. (pupil 67)

Furthermore, the majority of the Scottish pupils with specific learning difficulties suggested that their learning support teachers were giving them 'work sheets', based on different reading schemes, like the Wellington Square. Although developing skills, like 'matching' (pupil 57), were identified by pupils, repetition was also seen as important.



Pupils in Scotland in the state schools who had supervising assistants to provide the extra help they required perceived their academic role as being simply a watching eye:

Well, when I am writing a story and if I get a word wrong she helps me and corrects it. When I am doing my sums wrong, she goes 'that is wrong' and I am doing it until I get it right. Sometimes when I am doing my sums she goes too fast and I don't like it. She sits next to me to help me. (pupil 56)

The above quotation showed that the nature of provision offered by a supervising assistant, even in the eyes of the pupil, had problems. Moreover, both pupils with supervising assistants seemed to be concerned about an adult sitting continuously next to them. Both referred to the other 'duties' of a supervising assistant:

she does other things with other people; she does things like when the teacher says all the kids in class draw pictures, she puts them on the wall, she does all sorts. (pupil 56)

This, nevertheless, indicated the anxiety (shared by policy, parents and teachers), that pupils with specific learning difficulties had about being identified by other classmates as needing continuous assistance. However, both pupils who had been assigned to supervising assistants acknowledged that this was helping them. These perceptions have to be set beside the risks identified in the policy (see Chapter 9), of dependency on supervising assistants.

### **Parental provision**

Pupils in Greece perceived the parental role as important, devoting a significant part of their accounts to their home provision. Homework, was demanding of pupils' time; as one pupil said:

I usually finish homework around eight thirty to nine o'clock. I start about ten past six. (pupil 65)

In addition to the length of time, Greek pupils referred to the way that their parents helped them in similar terms to the way they described their mainstream teachers' help:

At home, for the difficulties I have, I ask my mother or father. They solve it or they tell me and I understand it. (pupil 62)

This approach to 'help' was typical in the Greek pupils' accounts, and in those of the majority of the Greek parents. The perception that this was the same help that the mainstream teachers were giving them was confirmed by the observation data. In the researcher's experience as a teacher, there was only one case where a pupil came to class with mistakes in his homework, and he was the best student in class. This can be linked with the understanding of the Greek family regarding homework as something that should be without mistakes and in which they had a role; this was a manifestation of national attitudes to school failure and the role of the family in education (see Chapter 4). The pressure put on children to produce work without any mistakes can be understood if one considers the way education was perceived by the majority of Greek parents (see Chapter 8). However, the actual methods of helping the children was in some conflict with those methods advocated by the learning support teacher and assumed by them to have been adopted by the parents.

The most significant finding was that half of the case-study pupils in Greece had private tuition at their homes or elsewhere. One pupil when asked how do your parents help replied 'they work.' (pupil 21) These parents provided for a paid tutor every weekday for two hours a day, and for a further two hours a week with a special educator. The socio-economic background of the five children who had private tuition, was the highest among the Greek case-studies: two were in the private school and the other three were pupils of the two schools with mixed class catchment areas. The pupils from the predominantly working class areas did not have any private tuition, although in one case they had in the past.

It seemed that children appreciated the work they did with their tutors; for instance one stated:

Last year I had my primary one mainstream teacher as a private tutor. That helped because it reminded me of some things better, and I located some things that I did not know so well. (pupil 26)

In terms of the academic approach, again repetition and over-learning seemed to play the most important role, as the above quotation shows; this differed from the methods used by the learning support teachers.

Another issue was raised by another pupil, who said:

I have a tutor in maths every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for an hour. He helps me in maths, if I have not understood something with my mainstream teacher, he explains it better, more explicitly. That sort of things [and] some games. (pupil 65)

The comparison that the pupil made could be understood by the fact that the mainstream teacher had little time available for breaking down the concepts to meet the needs of the child with specific learning difficulties. However, the tutor using a different approach on a one-to-one basis and using 'some games' had helped the pupil to understand. In the mind of the child, being explicit seemed to be of great importance.

Greek pupils did not refer explicitly to emotional support. It seemed that they perceived the provision by parents as being only academic. The pupils had perceived emotional support as important in the case of teachers, but since the teachers' role was primarily academic, anything else was explicitly regarded as an addition. In the case of parents, however, children took for granted their emotional support. However, in one case-study of a pupil characterised as 'problematic cases', the issue of emotional support was put by his teachers as a major concern. The researcher asked him whether he was praised by his parents for his effort in writing. His response was the following:

He [father] asks me why you don't write correctly and my mother tells me 'again brick!' [And when you make a mistake?] Zero bricky head he says to me. (pupil 51)

The educational level of the parents (see table 12.1) and the quality of communication with the teachers were probably two of the factors that influenced their behaviour. These parents were not aware of constructive ways to help their child, and no provision was available to educate them in such matters, despite discussions between the mother and the learning support teacher.

In Scotland the provision at home was completely different. The accounts of Scottish pupils with specific learning difficulties illuminated a distinctive picture. Pupils did not have homework everyday, as one said:

If I don't finish everything she will give that to do it as homework. (pupil 310)

In addition, on some days pupils with specific learning difficulties had to do some spelling or columns with sums. However, the time allocated to homework, in the views of the pupils, was calculated in minutes:

It depends how much homework we get, sometimes if you get a lot it gets half an hour, if you get quite easy you get five minutes, seven minutes. (pupil 510)

Parental help was also different in Scotland. Although some parents gave answers to their children, predominantly from lower socio-economic class, most of them tried to make their children to think about the answers:

If it is spelling and I am stuck with something they say another word that sounds like the word. (pupil 310)

Pupils usually associated parental help with reading, something which was consistent with the emphasis put on reading by parents and teachers in Scotland (see Chapter 7). Parents used other reading material to enhance the reading skills of their children:

she sometimes gets me to read the newspapers to her, and my reading book after we have dinner everyday. (pupil 68)

Several pupils referred to elements of home provision not directly associated with school.

For example, one child listened to stories on tapes (pupil 67), another had extra work set by his parents (pupil 510), or

she sometimes get me to write letters to my cousins because they are in Australia. (pupil 78)

Finally, no Scottish pupil of the study had private tutors, or any other form of provision outside school.

### *Summary - Discussion*

There were commonalities and differences among the consumers, i.e. parents and pupils of primary education, in Greece and Scotland. In both countries both parents and pupils suggested that the emphasis of the provision for specific learning difficulties was put on the learning support teachers rather than the mainstream teachers who were seen in a supportive role. In both countries parents perceived that mainstream teachers, because of the methods and the materials used as well as the number of pupils in the class and the time allocated to individual pupils, could occasionally be considered as a the weakness of the provision. Furthermore, one distinct difference between parents and teachers in both Scotland and Greece was that parents maintained that they accepted their children's specific learning difficulties immediately, while teachers argued that many parents had problems accepting this and objected to the extra special provision.

The distinctive elements in the perceptions of the consumers between Scotland and Greece were influenced by the different societal and educational factors. Parents in Greece had to deal with the societal pressure to succeed in education, and the view that school failure was a family affair. They also highlighted that certain attitudes held by

mainstream teachers in particular, in conjunction with insufficient training, caused difficulties in the provision for their children with specific learning difficulties. Furthermore, the Greek educational system was seen as unable to adapt to provide for special needs because of its rigidity, expressed by the curriculum. This resulted in Greek parents suggesting that their children were 'just present' in mainstream classrooms. These views were reflected in the views of the pupils, who suggested the distinctiveness of the learning support teachers' methods in comparison with those of the mainstream teachers. In addition, both pupils and parents in Greece argued that the amount of homework that they had to do was excessive.

Parents in Scotland understood the different types of provision (withdrawal, co-operative teaching, supervising assistant) as resulting in progress. However, there were differences between parents of middle and working-class backgrounds. Those from middle class had higher expectations for their children (a view supported by the teachers as well) and were more critical of the teachers. They were also the only ones who used official complaints procedures and stated that in trying to open a RoN they were 'fobbed off'.

Finally, the most distinctive characteristic between the two countries was the use of private tuition. In Greece, half of the case-study pupils had private tuition and/or specialist support, whilst in Scotland, none of the pupils had. In addition, most of the parents resented going to external bodies (such as medical-pedagogic units) and although the state official policy obliged pupils who attend special classrooms to be assessed by such a unit only the two so called 'problematic' cases had made such visits; even these had not reported the results of the diagnostic assessment to the school. In contrast, in Scotland parents had generally good co-operation with the psychological services and saw

that the provision given within the school system was such that they did not feel that they had to seek help external to the school.

## Chapter 13

### Review of the Findings

#### *Introduction*

The focus of this research has been on the nature of and the provision within primary education for children with specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece. This was undertaken through a study of the perceptions of those involved. To achieve this, perceptions of different groups including mainstream teachers, learning support teachers, head teachers, parents, pupils and policy agents were sought, as well as the embedded understandings of specific learning difficulties within the Scottish and Greek literature and policy documentation. A second aim was to investigate the EU's impact on the policy making and any influence it might have on perceptions about specific learning difficulties. However, the main goal of this thesis was to explore how and why the different groups, or the same groups across the two countries, construed specific learning difficulties and the provision for pupils who faced such problems in similar or different ways.

To some extent this research was conducted following ethnographic principles of investigation. However, because it maintained a specific focus on areas of interest to the research, there was rather more structure than would be expected in a traditional ethnographic study. A relatively holistic approach was used so that wider contextualisation of the issues could be facilitated. As the nature of this project was comparative this approach allowed the investigation of broad cultural, political and educational factors. Nevertheless, in ethnographic tradition, it put the interviewees in prime position and distanced the researcher as much as possible to allow their perceptions to come through.



The research was based on 20 case-study pupils, 5 pairs of pupils in each country, with 1 pair in each of the 10 case-study schools. Even at the stage of the school selection the views of policy agents were used; in Scotland a list was provided by the regional authorities, and in Greece a publicised list of units of special education providing for specific learning difficulties was used. The identification of the case-study pupils was made by the learning support teachers of the schools or, in two Scottish case-study schools, the head teachers. When the cases had been selected the pupils, parents, mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers were interviewed using as far as possible examples and references from the observation period of the case-study pupil.

### *Policy and Literature on Specific Learning Difficulties*

Policy for the provision for children with specific learning difficulties was investigated as a distinct concept from that of implementation; this distinction was a 'natural' (Clough, 1996) perception of the respondents in this study. However, the concept of implementation as 'enacted policy' (Fulcher, 1989) gained in validity as this research progressed, since different 'social actors' perceived and interpreted the written policy in different ways.

The similarities between the Greek and the Scottish policies regarding specific learning difficulties were fewer than their differences. One common element, however, was that specific learning difficulties' policy was seen as part of the more general special educational needs' policy, something that was also a feature of the EU. In addition, the special educational needs policies were integrated into the overall educational policies. In Greece, however, this happened only recently, with the 1985 Education Act.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that the EU and the Scottish policies seemed to be much closer than the EU and the Greek.

The differences between the Greek and the Scottish policies became apparent as one looked more closely at them. In Greece, free education for all children in accordance with their aptitudes was a constitutional right. In Scotland, things were expressed differently but the wider political environment (Conservative governments for 18 consecutive years) from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s formed a culture where individuals could, and some did, appeal for their parliamentary right to appropriate education. This kind of approach has not happened in Greece despite the specified constitutional right. It seems that the political context was a stronger factor than the existence of a Constitution.

Furthermore, in Scotland and generally in the UK, policy makers facilitated the rights discourse presence in the literature to 'introduce' choice in education. However, one could argue that some aspects of this choice were available mostly to those parents who were traditionally voters for the Conservative governments. It was not surprising, for example, that more use of the appeal procedures embedded in the Educational Acts was made by middle class parents, ensuring the allocation of extra resources to their children. In this study, it was significant that the only Scottish parent who had used official complaint procedures against a school was someone from a professional occupation.

Policy documents and Education Acts in Greece and Scotland were distinctively different in their embedded understandings of specific learning difficulties and the discourses used. In Greece, specific learning difficulties were perceived as a distinct category, one of ten that identified special educational needs with causes intrinsic to the individual's pathology. It was indicated that 5% of the pupil population (about 88000) had 'specific learning

difficulties' during the time of the Socialist government, or 'dyslexia' during the Conservative administration. Assessment was to be carried out in **medical-pedagogical** centres, where doctors and psychologists had the dominant role to play.

In contrast, Scottish policy documentation perceived specific learning difficulties as primarily **curricular** difficulties, ranging in degree and caused by a developmental delay triggered by various factors, including a mismatch between the curricular expectations, teaching methods and the individual's learning style and level of attainment. It was clear that 20% of the school population was expected, at one time or another and for a different duration, to need some kind of learning support (though a much smaller proportion would experience specific learning difficulties). In the Scottish documentation, specific learning difficulties were perceived as **underachievement** in a specific curricular area, compared with the overall attainment of the child. The assessment was to be carried out initially by the school and only when seen as necessary by external agencies, where regional specialist teachers and psychologists had the strongest voices. Special educational needs were perceived as a **continuum** of needs, in contrast with the distinct categories in Greece. The circulars and supportive documentation to the Education Acts in both countries amplify their differences. It can be argued, that in Greece the construct of specific learning difficulties was influenced by the dominant position of the **medical** and the **charity** discourses, whilst in Scotland this position was taken by the **rights** discourse of an educational entitlement for all which, along with the strong presence of educational approaches, decreased the medical influence.

In the EU policy documentation, there was no reference to specific learning difficulties as such, and learning difficulties were defined in general terms. Emphasis was put on

general definitions of impairment, disability and handicap, but the latter term allowed for social considerations. However, it was made clear by talking to the expert in education within the HELIOS programme, that the EU was prepared to accept the constructs as perceived by the policies of the Member States. It was acknowledged, nevertheless, that these could vary according to whether the national policy followed a medical or an educational discourse. Greece joined the EEC in 1981, the first 'special classroom' was piloted in 1984 and the new Education Act incorporating special education for the first time was passed through the Parliament in 1985. In addition, the whole of Greece has been characterised as a high priority area for funding. This study has indicated that the EU was perceived (by the majority of the respondents in Greece) as having more or less unlimited funds and an 'expert' role, and that it has achieved a greater impact in Greece than in Scotland.

The literature specifically for specific learning difficulties was limited in both countries. The vast majority of writings were about special educational needs in general. Comparing Greece and Scotland, however, one could notice a substantial difference in the amount of literature relevant to special education. The Scottish literature compared with the Greek was much more extensive, covering many perspectives, including educational, psychological and sociological. The latter was almost non-existent in Greece, where most of the work was concerned with the nature of, the diagnosis of and provision for special educational needs, and was based often on foreign work with indigenous educational research being rather limited.

The major part of the literature in relation to the relevant discourses applicable to specific learning difficulties has been derived from work focusing on special educational needs. This has posed a problem as the issues concerned with specific learning difficulties were

often on the periphery of such analyses. A major distinction between literature concerned with special educational needs generally and that with specific learning difficulties in particular arises because the former can often emphasise normative and well defined difficulties, whilst the latter generally offers no set (with consensus) criteria allowing a clear definition and identification. Furthermore, central issues for the Scottish literature on special educational needs such as stigmatisation, isolation, parental and individual rights, integration and inclusion, were often secondary to children with specific learning difficulties as they were already within the mainstream classes and generally taught by mainstream teachers. In addition, another issue investigated in the Scottish literature, but not in Greece, was the role of the middle class parents, in an environment where resources were scarce, in pushing for extra provision for specific learning difficulties at the expense of the provision for special educational needs in general.

### *People's Perceptions of Specific Learning Difficulties*

Policy agents, head teachers, learning support teachers, mainstream teachers, parents and pupils in both countries associated specific learning difficulties with difficulties in language; this view was also reflected within the policy documentation. References made to mathematics were rare and used only as examples to indicate difficulties in other areas, like memory or concentration. Despite this common element, however, there were differences among the constructs of the different groups within the national boundaries and between the two countries.

Although the constructs differed on which characteristics the emphasis was put, or which causes were seen as more important than others, there were some commonalities. For example, there were two ways in which specific learning difficulties were interpreted: (a) as a series of difficulties of mainly intrinsic nature and (b) as a delay in development

arising mainly from causes extrinsic to the individuals. All the groups involved in this research, in both countries, had members with views in both categories. The numbers and the emphasis, however, among policy agents, head teachers, learning support teachers, mainstream teachers, parents and pupils varied according to different factors, which will be addressed here.

There was a considerable difficulty throughout this study, but most evident in Greece, of distinguishing which references were being made to **specific learning difficulties** and which to **learning difficulties** generally. The researcher, from the stage of the selection of the schools through to the interviews with the various groups, maintained his focus on specific learning difficulties by constantly asking about 'specific learning difficulties'. However, as was discussed in Chapter 6, at least in the Greek literature, there was an inconsistency in the use of the terms 'specific learning difficulties' and 'learning difficulties'. This lack of a clear understanding may have played a role in the inclusion of the three 'problematic' cases (two in Greece and one in Scotland) where children identified as having specific learning difficulties did not, in fact, display the characteristics which that term usually implies.

It must be noted that throughout this study there were no clear, distinctive perceived characteristics for 'specific learning difficulties' which could single out specific learning difficulties from general learning difficulties, other than the association of the difficulties with language. In other words, there were no consistent qualitative differences distinguishing the case-study pupils from either pupils with learning difficulties generally or those categorised as 'normal'. For this research a child with specific learning difficulties was one who has all, or a number of, the characteristics identified by the respondents in this study (and including both intrinsic and extrinsic factors as possibly

causing these kinds of difficulties). This study, therefore, did not offer a clear shared understanding of specific learning difficulties. In looking at two different countries so that different factors could be illuminated it made use of the constructs employed by the professionals in the individual contexts.

### **Policy Agents**

Policy agents at a national level perceived specific learning difficulties in the two countries differently. In Scotland, they were perceived as mainly curricular in origin, reflecting the official policy view, although it was recognised that for a small minority of children there was a 'whole constellation of difficulties' which were associated with dyslexia. In Greece, the understanding of specific learning difficulties was similar to the latter, which also reflected the national policy. At the regional level, the distinctiveness of the concepts was clearer. In Scotland, the regional planning officer for special educational needs argued that specific learning difficulties could be seen as a range of difficulties of mainly curricular origin, although the region had accepted the use of the term 'dyslexia'. In contrast, in Greece, the regional special advisor perceived specific learning difficulties as a collective term for dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia or dysphasia.

### **Learning Support Teachers**

At school level the perceptions of specific learning difficulties among the social actors varied between the two countries in the emphasis put on different characteristics and the understandings of the primary causation. The commonality, however, was the link of specific learning difficulties with language, although in Greece more emphasis was put on writing and spelling, whilst in Scotland reading and writing were seen as equally important by all the groups involved.

All but one of the learning support teachers in both countries associated specific learning difficulties with written language. The one case in Scotland where this was not the case was linked with 'oral language' as the child was not following oral instructions. However, the emphasis put on writing and spelling was different across the two countries; the Greek learning support teachers stressed those two elements of language more than their counterparts in Scotland. The language used to describe the characteristics of specific learning difficulties by learning support teachers in Greece and Scotland displayed differences. The Scottish counterparts were more aware of the 'trade' terminology, as the co-operation in assessment exercises with the psychological services and their specialised training had influenced their discourses.

Learning support teachers generally understood the causation of specific learning difficulties as mainly intrinsic to the child. In one case in Scotland and two in Greece, however, this was seen as arising from immaturity. Other commonalities were in the emphasis on the family as possible causes of the problems (parental expectations, stability and stress). In Greece strong emphasis was put on certain factors extrinsic to the individual (i.e. the nature of the education system, the curriculum and the societal pressure, issues which will be explored in the 'cultural and educational distinctiveness' section) which were not shared by the Scottish counterparts.

### **Mainstream Teachers**

Mainstream teachers without exception perceived specific learning difficulties as difficulties in written language. They could be divided into two categories; those who understood specific learning difficulties as lack of ability and those who viewed them as underdeveloped skills. In both countries there were mainstream teachers in both groups, but the ability group was slightly stronger in Greece. It seemed, that in a similar way to



learning support teachers, the Scottish mainstream teachers were more aware of the language used in the literature than their Greek counterparts. In both countries, mainstream teachers shared with their learning support colleagues the view of the importance put on the parental role and previous educational experiences.

The distinctive difference between the mainstream teachers and the learning support teachers arose from their references to 'skills'; learning support teachers did not articulate the difficulties as lack of skills. Across the two countries, however, there was a clear difference with the Scottish mainstream teachers giving more detailed accounts of these skills, and mentioning organisational skills, while their Greek counterparts did not. Furthermore, Scottish mainstream teachers referred to memory more than the Greek did, despite the perceived nature of the Greek educational system as academic and knowledge based and heavily dependent, therefore, on memory. In Greece, however, mainstream teachers mentioned problems of concentration as characteristic of children with specific learning difficulties; as concentration is, of course, more important in the whole class teaching conditions which are a feature of the Greek classrooms. Finally, Scottish mainstream teachers mentioned in their accounts the levels of attainment of their pupils, something that the learning support teachers also did to some extent; no such references were made by Greek teachers.

### **Head Teachers**

Head teachers in both countries perceived specific learning difficulties as difficulties of an innate nature associated with language. However, in addition to the problems caused by 'impairments in the [individuals'] construction' (Gr. ht 5), in both countries head teachers looked to parental expectations, especially in the private schools, in order to explain the emotional pressure put on pupils with difficulties. One Greek head teacher, however, had

a completely different point of view. He rejected the existence of such difficulties as 'dyslexia' and argued that the 1982 replacement of 'the books' (caused by the 1981 change of government, but still common-to-all), the method of teaching and the language used by parents at home all contributed to some pupils presenting difficulties in learning.

Comparing the head teachers with the other educators, it was clear that they shared their views with those who held the 'lack of ability' understanding of specific learning difficulties and were closer to the psycho-medical paradigm in the literature rather than the educational.

### **Private and State Sectors**

Comparing the teachers between the private and the state sectors, it was evident from the data gathered that there were some differences. In both countries the learning support teachers in the private schools were more ready to accept a discrete nature of specific learning difficulties than their colleagues in the state schools. This was confirmed by the language used which was closer to the psychological approach, an approach which was adopted clearly in the assessment procedures within both schools.

### **Parents and Pupils**

Looking at the perceptions of the consumers, i.e. parents and pupils, similar patterns to those identified among the teachers were observed. Parents in both countries had the same views on the characteristics of specific learning difficulties. They differed from the mainstream teachers who put emphasis on skills, but had in common the understanding of specific learning difficulties as either lack of ability or immaturity. They also shared the views on the intrinsic aetiology with a number of mainstream teachers and learning support teachers and accepted the teachers' view on the importance of the previous

educational experiences. However, they emphasised the role of the mainstream teachers and the methods used in class, the materials or the 'clash of personality' as possible causes for specific learning difficulties. It was not clear from the data gathered whether the emphasis on environmental factors within the classrooms, or even at home, were construed as causes for specific learning difficulties or as features which exacerbated the child's problems.

Differences in the perceptions of specific learning difficulties among the parents were found to exist across the two countries, between working class and middle class families, and between fathers and mothers. Fathers were more reluctant to accept the reality of the difficulties of their children, which often were seen as 'laziness' or 'careless[ness]'. In two cases, one in each country, this resulted in punishment by the fathers. Socio-economic background was an important factor not only in the way that the difficulties were articulated (awareness of 'trade' terminology was evident in middle class families), but in the understandings of the causes. The four case-studies where immaturity was referred to all came from a middle class background. In addition, it was the middle class parents who were more critical of teachers and were looking to the school for contributing factors (in one case in Scotland, the parents decided to remove their child from the state sector and send him to the private school).

The most salient distinction, however, was between the two countries and arose from references to disability. Greek parents linked specific learning difficulties with the negative attitudes to disability in their country and suggested that the cultural context influenced the way that teachers perceived their children. However, one has to note that they themselves also used language associated with the medical discourse, which was linked with national attitudes towards disability.

Pupils' understandings of their own difficulties were comparable with the rest of the groups, despite the fact that very careful questions avoiding stigmatisation were asked. Pupils in Greece perceived their difficulties in a general manner as lack of their own ability, and the language used indicated a self-awareness of specific learning difficulties as residing within themselves (e.g. 'I cannot read'). However, the education system where they had to 'learn by-heart' was also regarded an important factor. In Scotland, pupils understood their difficulties rather differently as they indicated external factors contributing to their problems (e.g. 'the language is sometimes too hard'). In addition, pupils in Scotland understood that social conditions within the classroom (e.g., disruption) could contribute to their difficulties.

### *Policy and Literature on the Provision for Specific Learning Difficulties*

Policy on the provision for specific learning difficulties was more extensive and focused in Scotland than in Greece. These differences were reflected in the volume of work in the literature. The only common characteristic among Greece, Scotland and the EU was their formal commitment to **inclusive** education and the inclusive school. The notion of integration, and in particular for specific learning difficulties functional integration, was starting to fade and was replaced by the term 'inclusive' which had broader connotations. However, although this was the stated policy aim, the means to achieve the aim were explored only in Scotland and the EU, where specific recommendations had been made. In contrast, in Greece the recommendations presented in the circulars were inconsistent with the specified aim. For example, in an inclusive system the identification process, especially for specific learning difficulties, should be constrained as much as possible within the school, where the mainstream and the learning support teachers have the dominant voices. In Greece, however, the identification and assessment was carried out

in medical-pedagogic centres (the fact that only two pupils had visited such a centre and the schools had no reports from the visits will be discussed later).

The role of the learning support teachers as articulated in the Scottish policy, and as perceived in the EU, was dual: co-operative teaching and acting as consultant to the mainstream teachers and the head teachers. One of their primary tasks was to help mainstream teachers in developing material and strategies (identified in the policy as differentiation, individualisation, adaptation and enhancement) to access the curriculum that was common to all. This was consistent with the ideas of inclusive education. In addition, the fact that specific learning difficulties were construed in the policy documentation as arising from a range of curricular difficulties was also consistent with the provision.

In Greece, specific learning difficulties, however, were perceived as one distinct category, although no clear criteria had been set and there was no recommended provision. The proposed provision (other than leniency by the mainstream teachers) was the 'special classroom' which was inconsistent with the idea of inclusive education, as was the decision to give the responsibility to the learning support teacher instead of the mainstream teacher. Furthermore, the 'internal differentiation' (director of special educational needs) was inconsistent with the nationally prescribed curriculum, the common-to-all books and the emphasis on the knowledge that an 'average child' should acquire. The argument by the Director of special education in Greece that the majority of children with special educational needs (out of 175000 only 15000 were accounted for in units of special education) were properly provided for in the mainstream school was rejected by the regional special advisor, who argued that even those 12000 in special classrooms were not provided for by appropriate specialists.

Another issue that was different in the two countries was the extent to which policy and literature were devoted to matters concerning parents. In Scotland, and to a lesser degree in the EU, parents were seen as 'partners'. This was regarded by the literature as part of the general political framework of individualisation and choice in education as well as part of accountability to the consumer, issues of great importance to the Conservative government. Swann (1987) has argued, however, that this was a partnership (i.e. further involvement of parents in provision, for example as helpers within schools) to compensate for the reducing allocation of resources to education.

In Greece, mention has been made of the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the state policy and, on the other hand, the reality as perceived by the regional advisor. The second major issue raised was the dichotomy in the management of the education system between the administration and the pedagogy, and between general education and special education, and its bureaucratic nature with its implications for provision. The third issue, reflected also in the teachers' accounts, was the difficulty in achieving co-operation among learning support teachers, mainstream teachers and head teachers.

### *People's Perceptions of Provision*

#### **Teachers' General Priorities**

At school level, those involved had clear views about the provision for children with specific learning difficulties. Learning support teachers in both countries had in common their belief that specific learning difficulties consisted of an educational problem and that provision should be based on individual needs and learning styles. Furthermore, both Scottish and Greek learning support teachers put emphasis on the importance of emotional support, which was a common characteristic of the accounts of all those

involved in this study. However, whilst in Scotland the general principles understood by the learning support teacher were reflected in the policy documentation, this was not the case in Greece where the system was described as suffering from an 'asphyxiating homomorphism' (OECD, 1996). In Greece, learning support teachers (most strongly), mainstream teachers, head teachers and parents all indicated that this had implications for provision for specific learning difficulties. For example, mainstream teachers stressed the pressure put on them by the educational administration to finish the prescriptive curriculum and the consequent lack of time to allocate to pupils who could not follow the pace tailored to the 'average' child. In addition, parents and teachers alike characterised the common-to-all books as unsuitable, and not allowing differentiation and teaching to individual learning styles.

Mainstream teachers, in both countries, put emphasis on raising the self-esteem and motivation for learning of the pupils with specific learning difficulties, and claimed that their teaching was child-centred. However, in Greece, this was inconsistent with the perceived national system comprising 'academicism', the prescriptive 'knowledge based' curriculum, the 'common-to-all' books and the whole class teaching with lack of movement permitted in the classroom. In Scotland, in contrast, the organisation in the class was group based, allowing some differentiation according to each pupil's attainment.

### **Organisation of Provision**

The organisation of the provision in Greece was based on the 'special classrooms', i.e. withdrawal rooms, while in Scotland there was a range of provision. There was sufficient evidence in both countries to indicate some isolation of the learning support teachers and this had implications for the provision for specific learning difficulties. There were clear differences, however, as in Scotland the learning support provision had

evolved from a remedial model to co-operative teaching and consultancy for mainstream teachers. Occasional withdrawal of a pupil from the class was evident and two cases had supervising assistants within the mainstream class. In Greece, the only means of provision was by withdrawing the child to the special classroom. The observed operation of the latter indicated three different types of special classrooms: i) withdrawing children to such an extent that the effect was like forming another class; ii) withdrawing for only 2 hours and that not on a daily basis; and iii) withdrawing children for individual tutoring. Furthermore, the Greek private school had no special classroom and the support (e.g. consultancy, modified expectations) was given to mainstream teachers. The first type of special classroom was considered by the state mainstream teachers as 'unsuitable' for pupils with specific learning difficulties and the learning support teacher in the private school perceived the special classroom in general as 'a dumping ground'.

### **The Curriculum**

The curriculum was a major distinctive characteristic in the perceptions of all those involved, distinguishing clearly the differences between the two countries. Although the majority of learning support teachers, mainstream teachers, head teachers and parents perceived that aims and targets should be common to all, the curriculum which incorporated those aims in Scotland was seen as 'best practice' and appropriate for specific learning difficulties, whilst in Greece the curriculum was regarded as 'unhelpful'. The materials linked with the prescriptive Greek curriculum and the common-to-all books, were seen as unsuitable and based on foreign models without the backing of specific research in the Greek context. In Scotland, material was differentiated by using different levels within the national schemes or different schemes altogether.



Although all those involved in the study in both countries valued the importance of emotional support, the difference was that whilst in Scotland a 'mature approach' was facilitated, in Greece, a major role was given to the 'intentional grade'. All teachers in Greece believed that this had positive results, whilst parents considered it as meaningless. One could argue, that the difference between the two countries was caused by the fact that in Scotland assessment was seen as an integral part of the educational provision (reflected in policy documentation as well), whilst in Greece assessment was understood as reporting final grades to parents.

### **Weaknesses in the Providing Systems**

Learning support teachers in Scotland perceived the weaknesses of the provision as the lack of extra resources (a view which was shared by head teachers, mainstream teachers and parents). In addition, in the two cases where a supervisory assistant had been allocated, the perceived reliance on her was seen as another risky element of the provision. In Greece, their counterparts shared the view of the need for extra resources, but emphasised disadvantages in the resource room model of the provision with its emotional consequences (stigmatisation from withdrawing). In addition, they viewed as a weakness the inflexibility among the mainstream teachers who were not able to benefit from the enlightened approaches of the learning support teachers as the latter were not co-teaching in mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, the lack of co-operation with any other external body, like the medical-pedagogical unit, was also seen as a problem, not only by learning support but also by head teachers, mainstream teachers and parents.

The ideal development of provision was construed in Scotland, as one which supplemented the 'support for learning' with 'support for mainstream teachers'. In

Greece, it was seen as a change of the whole educational system to one adopting the inclusive model.

### **Relationships between Professionals and Parents**

Communication and co-operation among educators and the parents was seen as important in both policy and literature in Scotland, and this view was shared by the people involved at the school level. In both countries communication among learning support teachers and parents was regarded as frequent and good, with the exception of two cases in Scotland. Learning support teachers, especially in Greece because of the characteristics of the Greek education system, perceived parents as 'resources' in the provision, a view that has been evident in the Scottish literature. In both countries, parents' education, socio-economic background and level of acceptance of the child's difficulties were seen as factors influencing the co-operation with the school. In addition, in Scotland policy was an important factor, whilst in Greece various societal factors (which will be discussed in the next section) were seen as particularly salient. Parents were expected in both countries to be positive about, reinforce and conform with the schools' methods, but in Greece learning support teachers felt the need to train the parents.

Parents, however, rejected the view that they did not accept their children's difficulties, and that they posed problems in co-operation with the school. Furthermore, in Scotland they viewed weaknesses in the provision as deriving from the teaching methods or materials used and the number of pupils in class; in Greece, the problems were seen as arising from the 'public sector' attitude of the mainstream teachers (indifferent towards their work) and their traditional ways of teaching. In both countries, parents claimed that learning support had resulted in progress and the ideal would be to have more, even on a one-to-one basis, with greater resources allocated. In addition, Greek parents argued

that the societal pressure to educate privately (through private cramming centres or tuition) should change with a change of the educational system; in Scotland the parents emphasised that they should not be 'fobbed off' when applying for a RoN.

### **From the Pupils' Perspective**

Finally, pupils' perceptions in Scotland construed a provision where both academic and emotional support were important, although the nature of the academic was by giving 'clues' rather than 'answers' (as in Greece). Greek pupils reiterated the importance, put by mainstream teachers, on repetition. From this perspective, the learning support teachers' methods were seen as different and using 'play' and 'toys'. Differences, derived from the different educational and cultural identities, in the amount of homework and the involvement of parents were evident: in Greece homework was counted in hours whilst in Scotland in minutes; half of the case-study pupils in Greece had private tuition (one 10 hours a week) compared with none in Scotland.

### **Conclusions**

This research focused on the perceptions among policy agents, head teachers, learning support teachers, mainstream teachers, parents and pupils on the nature of, and the provision for, specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece. It was made clear at the end of this study that there were no significant differences among the perceptions of the different groups within the same country. Some differences in the importance of various issues, like the emphasis between parents and teachers on the significance of the teachers' role, or the emphasis that mainstream teachers put on the organisational skills when the learning support teachers did not, were well documented in the relevant chapters. However, further research is needed to clarify the differences between the two

identified constructs of specific learning difficulties in this research (intrinsic lack of ability, or developmental delay caused by extrinsic to the individual factors).

In contrast, there were distinctive differences between Scotland and Greece in the perceptions of the various professionals, parents and pupils. Some important features in the explanations of these differences could be organised at three levels: (i) differences in the societies; (ii) differences in the general education systems; and (iii) differences in the special education systems.

### **Differences in the Societies**

In Scotland, during this study no respondent in any group referred to disability when talking about specific learning difficulties. Scottish society has had a more 'inclusive' attitude to disability, and this has been noticed by Greeks when visiting Scotland. It is not unusual for them to express surprise at the presence of handicapped people in daily activities, and to wonder whether this indicates that the proportion of disabled people is greater in Scotland than in Greece. Their own preconceptions of and attitudes to disability, tend to focus on 'exclusion' rather than inclusion. In addition, since the family has full responsibility for the handicapped child in Greece, there is a tendency to 'protect' and isolate the disabled person from the general public. The stigma of being 'different' rather than 'normal' is very strong in Greece, and as a result children with specific learning difficulties have had to overcome pressures imposed on them by society, which has influenced perceptions of professionals and parents about the nature of, and provision for, specific learning difficulties.

Another difference between Scotland and Greece, with implications for the provision for specific learning difficulties, was the notion of rights within the societies. In Scotland,

during the 18 unbroken years of Conservative government a culture of consumers' rights and of accountability of professionals was developed. In education this meant first that consumers, i.e. parents and pupils, had rights that the professionals should try and fulfil, and secondly, that these rights were manifest in 'choice' in education, with opportunities for placement requests and various appeal procedures. For some parents of children with specific learning difficulties, this was understood as pressing for extra resources for the education of their children. In the most extreme cases judicial resolutions were sought, even compensation, against the local authorities if parents believed that the needs of their children were not met. In contrast, in Greece, despite the existence of Constitutional rights for free education according to aptitude, those rights were not present in any form in the parliamentary Acts. In addition, the lack of procedures to make professionals accountable, left the parents with the only choice of investing privately and seeking provision for their children through their own means.

Furthermore, Greek society puts very great emphasis on education; because traditionally it has been seen as the only means of social mobility families have invested heavily in education. As a result of this, failure of the school has been perceived as family failure, not just the individual child's. For children with specific learning difficulties this has had the negative consequences of extra emotional pressure in order not to fail the family. In Scotland, this has not been evident.

### **Differences in the Education Systems**

The emphasis on consumers' rights in Scotland has passed into the area of education. As indicated earlier, parental rights have been strengthened by the various Charters, the policy of 'choice in education', placement requests and appeal procedures. The empowerment of parents and devolved school management, as well as the regional

organisation of the education system, has allowed the government to raise local accountability. In contrast, in Greece, the highly hierarchical and centralised system has distanced the centre of power from the consumer. This, along with the lack of means to exercise choice in education (other than private education), has meant that parents could not exert the same pressure on the state to meet the educational needs of their children with specific learning difficulties. As the Greek statistics indicated, the vast majority (91%) of pupils with special educational needs either were within mainstream education or not accounted for. Although the state recognised that about 88000 had 'specific learning difficulties', within the special classrooms (the recommended provision) there were only 12000 and parents lacked the power to demand additional provision.

The lack of a clear picture of the reality within the schools on the part of the state, was a characteristic of an over-centralised and bureaucratic system, lacking educational research. In Greece, educational research was rather limited and the state lacked the resources (and/or the will) to commission research. This was evident by the numbers of educationists who had studied abroad, and was reflected in the literature which was often based on foreign models. However, the most significant consequence, was the fact that policy formation was not contextualised in the indigenous particularities of the Greek society and problems, but tended to be imported from abroad. The latter has happened in the case of 'specific learning difficulties'; the term was imported from Britain without, however, adopting the coherent policy and provision observed in Scotland.

Whilst in Scotland education reflected the inclusive society, in Greece the education system was a reflection of the exclusive nature of the Greek society. Education was geared towards the acquisition of knowledge, targeting the average child; the knowledge was centrally determined by the MNERA in a prescriptive curriculum with the

accompanied materials being described in the common-to-all books. For children with specific learning difficulties this meant that there was no space for differentiation to meet their educational needs. In contrast, in Scotland the inclusive curriculum was not prescriptive and was perceived as guidelines supporting 'best practice'. In addition, the national curricular guidelines included sections for pupils with special educational needs and there was a dedicated document entitled 'support for learning' (SCCC, 1994) aimed at indicating to teachers strategies to enable children with special educational needs to access the curriculum. Furthermore, the nature of the education system in Scotland was task-oriented, where different transferable skills were the end aims. For children with specific learning difficulties this allowed them the opportunities to succeed in areas which were not academic (in a restricted definition), something that was not present in Greece.

Another characteristic of the education system which had significant implications for pupils with specific learning difficulties was the assessment procedures in the two countries. In Scotland, as stated in the policy and reflected in practice, assessment was seen as part of the pedagogic practice, whilst in Greece it was understood only as grading the children (grading classwork, or final grades). This, in conjunction with the common-to-all books and the whole-class teaching, did not allow the mainstream teachers in Greece to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the child, nor the effectiveness of their own teaching strategies. In contrast, in Scotland, with the help of the learning support teachers, the assessment results were used to inform mainstream teachers how a pupil with specific learning difficulties could be taught more effectively and, in a sense, assessment was the basis of the Individualised Education Programme (IEP), endorsed by both the Scottish and the EU policies.

Finally, another distinctive difference between the Scottish and the Greek education systems which influenced the provision observed in this study was the professional status of the teachers. In Scotland, all teachers had been trained in higher education institutions, and many had additional qualifications. In Greece, none of the teachers interviewed in this study had been trained within the university departments of education; they all had attended the two year course in the now closed Teachers' Academies; only those in the private school had additional qualifications. The difference in the teachers' training was reflected in their status compared with other professionals in special education provision (psychologists and doctors), and it was further diminished by the tendency of the MNERA to treat them as technicians who were employed to follow the teachers' books. There was, however, some self-awareness of the lack of training, as the teachers themselves asked for teachers' handbooks to be published, and the learning support teachers requested a curriculum for special education. This lack of training and professional status had implications for children, including those with specific learning difficulties, as teachers were reluctant or lacked the confidence to deviate from the prescriptive curriculum to accommodate individual needs or respond to individual learning styles.

### **Differences in the Special Education Provision**

In both Scotland and Greece, the structures of special education provision were a reflection of the societies and the general education systems. In Scotland, the inclusive society, reflected in the general education by the common curriculum for all, was also reflected in the provision for special educational needs which was based on the principles of inclusive education. In Greece, however, the tendency to focus on the norm and exclude from the society those who deviated from that, was carried through into ideas



about special education. Pupils with special educational needs were taught in special schools and, those who were considered able to be in mainstream schools, were taught in special classrooms. In addition, the administrative and pedagogic hierarchies, in Scotland were common for general and special education (exemplified by the SCCC); in Greece, however, there were distinctive advisors for special education and separate from those with responsibility for general education.

Furthermore, in Scotland the responsibilities for the provision for specific learning difficulties was shared among mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and head teachers, but in Greece the responsibility solely lay with the learning support teachers. The implications of all these factors for pupils with specific learning difficulties were that in the Greek system, education was fragmented into special and normal modes, whilst in Scotland, the provision was based on a clear school policy providing a coherent and continuous support system. The lack of responsibility for the head teachers in Greece led to a lack of initial support by the school administration when the special classrooms were first founded (the first in 1984). This put the learning support teachers in a defensive position. In addition, it resulted in a lack of communication and co-operation among learning support teachers and mainstream teachers which further distanced the special provision given by the learning support teachers from the work of the mainstream classrooms. In Scotland, however, the explicit guidelines for the role of the learning support teacher in providing support as a consultant to the mainstream teachers in the area of access to the curriculum, as well as co-teaching in the mainstream class, enhanced the notion of the inclusive school.

It was not surprising that the majority of the respondents in Greece, including pupils, raised their concerns about the system itself: weaknesses were identified in the

management (overcentralised, dichotomised), in the philosophy and principles (knowledge for the average child), curriculum and materials used (prescriptive, common-to-all books), teaching methods (whole class teaching, no differentiation) and the remedial model of the 'special classrooms'. In Scotland, however, the common concerns among the different groups were all focused on the resources. There was a universal petition for more, rather than different, resources.

The two distinctive constructs of provision for specific learning difficulties observed in the two countries were influenced by the perceptions of the difficulties per se. In Scotland, special educational needs were seen as a continuum of needs emphasising an inclusive concept: from those with severe difficulties to those who for a short period cannot follow the pace of the classroom, there is a common dimension of need. Furthermore, specific learning difficulties were seen mainly as curricular in origin, which diverted the focus from the individual pupil to the social environment (learning environment: e.g., a mismatches between learning and teaching styles). In contrast, in Greece special educational needs were understood as the aggregation of ten different categories of impairment, and specific learning difficulties were perceived as residing within the child. This was a reflection of the Greek society where the dominant discourses were those of a medical and charity kind, both putting the locus of the problem in the individual, rather than the social environment. In contrast, the rights discourse was dominant in the Scottish literature, which put emphasis on equality and stressed that the provision should be based on the consumers' perceptions of needs.

Finally, in evaluating the findings of this research, one can see distinctive differences in the current perceptions of and provision for specific learning difficulties in Scotland and Greece. The stated aims of 'inclusive' education and 'one school for all' and the reality

in both countries differ dramatically in the degree of implementation. Different socio-economic, cultural, historical, political and educational factors have influenced the distance between stated aims and reality. In Greece there was a gap between the two, whilst in Scotland policy and implementation were much closer.

However, the situation in Greece shows recently a different dynamic. There is much progress as a result of the influence of the EU. Since Greece joined the EU in 1981 many steps have been taken: the Education Act included special education; the first special classrooms were founded; learning support teachers were trained; and Greek initiatives have been sponsored by European funds. Therefore, one can conclude that the EU has had an impact in the Greek policies. However, the EU policies were much closer to the Scottish than the Greek, as they shared the same constructs of the recommended provision and allowed environmental factors in the general definitions of 'learning difficulties'. The proximity in the underlying understandings between the Scottish and the EU policies meant that the additional impact of the EU in Scotland was minimal, and this could explain the indifference and even the hostility of the respondents to suggestions of any EU intervention. It was not surprising that the European treaties explicitly maintained that no form of harmonisation in education was in the aims of the EU.

In this research I have shown that perceptions of specific learning difficulties are heavily influenced by cultural and societal factors, which influence professionals and consumers alike. Furthermore, the influence was of such significance that the differences among the different groups of respondents within the same country were very slight in comparison with the differences between countries. In addition, the provision for specific learning difficulties was also a reflection of the societal values and attitudes, and followed the same principles as the country's general education system. Hence, it is important for policy

makers to understand that policy and provision cannot be cut off from their context, nor that imported policies or concepts, albeit successful or useful in their country of origin, can have the same results in another context. John (1994), whose understanding of comparative research suggested it was simply an exercise for raising awareness, has found another advocate.

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# Appendix 1

## *Teachers' interview (& HT)*

As you know by now, I am interested in exploring how do you perceive the learning problems that X has and provision that is made for him/her. Furthermore, the purpose of this interview, is to seek your views on the role of your colleagues and parents in X's provision.

### 1. Nature

I would like to initiate the discussion with your views on the nature of the problems that X faces.

1.1\*\*. Could you tell me about the nature of X's problems in school?

1.2. What are his/her difficulties in learning? Could you describe his/her strengths?

1.3. Do you see children with such problems as forming a discrete group?

1.4. If you were to use one term to describe X's problems, which would that be?

1.5. How did you become aware of X's problems?

1.6. Did you notice the problem yourself? When did you learn about it? Does he/she have a record of needs?

1.7. In your view, what are the likely factors that led X to experience these problems? Innate? Environmental? Curricular?

## 2. Provision

- 2.1. *How would you describe the administrative framework of the provision? By administrative framework I mean the staffing implications for your school, the relations with the region and other services, the delegation of responsibilities within the school (e.g. monitoring the provision), etc.*
- 2.2. Is there special provision for X? What does consist of?
- 2.3. Do you make special arrangements for the assessment of X? Do you differentiate teaching methods/practices/techniques? Do you record X progress continuously? What extra resources do you have? Do you receive outwith school support to provide for X?
- 2.4. What are the benefits and drawbacks that X faces in receiving this kind of provision?
- 2.5. How would you conceptualise an ideal 'good practice' in relation to the provision for children with similar difficulties?
- 2.6. Do you have any evidence that there are some elements of this account going on in other places? To what extent do you think that the reality measures up to this ideal practice? How did you formulate your ideas of good practice? (through guidelines, training, outwith input?)
- 2.7. How has your role in implementing the provision changed since you started teaching? Have you perceived any change in the role of your colleagues (special teacher/mainstream teacher, child psychologist, HT)?
- 2.8. What factors do you think influenced these changes?

2.9. Could that be external such as: greater parental involvement? HMI reports? Unions input? Voluntary Association influence? Or internal: the presence of a number of children in class? the severity of the difficulties? disruptive behaviour? staff development? size of class?

### 3. Curriculum & Assessment

3.1. Do you perceive the breadth and the flexibility that 5-14 curriculum offers as appropriate for X's difficulties?

3.2. In your view, does the philosophy embedded on the 5-14 curriculum influence the education of X?

3.3. In your opinion, to what extent are the attainment outcomes of 5-14 appropriate for children facing similar difficulties with X?

3.4. What is the role of assessment in the education of X?

3.5. Given the nature of his/her difficulties how do you assess X? Do you follow the 5-14 recommendations in assessment?

3.6. In case where X uses special means (e.g.: PC, scribe), how is this accounted during the assessment?

3.7. *Having acquired parental permission, could I be granted access to the pupil's Records of Attainment and Assessment?*

### 4. Parents

4.1. What role do you think X's parents have played in the identification of X's problems? and in the decisions about the provision for X?

4.2. Do you think there has been a change in this role since you started teaching?

4.3. Would you describe for me how you communicate with X's parents about his/her difficulties?

4.4. Formal? Friendly? Open? Frequent?

4.5. How do you encourage parents to get involved in the provision of their children?

Are all responsive to the same degree? Why do you think that these differences occur?

4.6. In your opinion, do you think that the emphasis on parental power has influenced the relationship between them and you? If so, how?

## 5. Policy

I would like, now, to understand the way you see policy (by this I mean the national legislation, the HMI reports, like the effective provision for special educational needs, the consultative document of the region, or the school policy) as having -or not- an impact to X.

5.1. Are you aware of any policies (regional, national) that have implications for working with children with these kinds of difficulties?

5.2. Do you think that these are implemented in practice? Why/How?

5.3. Do you believe that the national legislation provides for children with such difficulties?

5.4. What do you see as the main characteristics of these policies?

5.5. What kind of policy would you put in place in this area if you had the power to do so?

5.6. What is the school policy regarding children like X?

- 5.7. *Do you perceive the Regional Policy, as described with the Consultative Document, as providing adequately for children with problems like X's?*
- 5.8. *Do you see any differences between the regional and the national policies?*
- 5.9. *How would you describe the co-operation between the school and the Regional Authority in terms of policy making in this area?*
- 5.10. *To what extent in this school do you think the policy in all three levels -national, regional, school- is carried out in practice? Why/how?*

6. EU and future

- 6.1. What do you foresee as the future developments in policy and provision for children like X?
- 6.2. Do you believe that the EU has a role to play in the future of policy or the provision for children like X in Scotland? How/Why?
- 6.3. Are you aware of any EU policies in the area of special education? Do you have in mind a model provision used in an EU country? What kind of assistance would you seek from the EU? Do you believe that Brussels should enforce a unified policy for all EU Member States?

7. About your self

- 7.1. How many years are you teaching in this school?
- 7.2. Do you have qualifications or extra training in special educational needs?
- 7.3. Is there anything you would like to add?



## Appendix 2

### *Parents' Interview*

The scope of this interview is to understand how you see X's problems. Your views on the provision that he/she requires and the way that his/her needs are met, will be significant to my study. In addition, I am interested in the communication you have with the school, and/or other services or bodies. Furthermore, I would like to gather information about the way you feel about the impact -if any- that national or regional policies had in meeting X's needs.

#### 1. Nature

- 1.1. Could you describe X's problems?
- 1.2. When did you become aware of X's problems?
- 1.3. Are you aware of other children facing similar problems with X?
- 1.4. Do you see these children as forming one discrete group?
- 1.5. In your opinion, what are the likely factors that led X to experience these problems? Are these the same in the other cases you mentioned?
- 1.6. If you were to use one term to describe X's problems, which would that be? Why did you use this term in describing X's problems (as respond to question 1.1)?

#### 2. Provision

- 2.1. Does the school provide for X's difficulties?
- 2.2. Did you or the school make special arrangements for the assessment of X? Does X have a record of needs? Has he/she secured any extra resources?

- 2.3. Do you seek outwith school support to provide for X? What does that consist of?
- 2.4. In your view, what are the benefits and drawbacks that X faces in receiving this kind of provision?
- 2.5. How would you envisage an ideal provision for your child?
- 2.6. To what extent do you think that the reality measures up to this account? How did you formulate your ideas of good practice? (meeting with other parents, voluntary associations?)
- 2.7. What was your role in the identification, assessment and the decisions about the provision for X?
- 2.8. Do you get involved in the provision for X?
- 2.9. Do you seek any expert advise outwith the school?
3. Curriculum & Assessment
- 3.1. In your opinion, to what extent is the 5-14 curriculum appropriate for children like X?
- 3.2. Do you believe that X should have a different curriculum? In terms of outcomes, strands, targets?
- 3.3. What would you consider as progress for X?
- 3.4. Can you describe for me how the school assesses X? Do you believe that this is appropriate for X?

#### 4. Teachers

- 4.1. What role do you think X's teachers and/or other professionals have played in the identification of X's problems? and in the decisions about the provision for X?
- 4.2. Would you describe for me how you communicate with X's teachers about his/her difficulties?
- 4.3. Formal? Friendly? Open? Frequent?
- 4.4. In your opinion, do you think that the emphasis that governmental policies put on parental power (through the parent's charter, the appeal committees), has influenced the relationship between them and you? If so, how?

#### 5. Policy

- 5.1. What information do you have about national or regional policies in relation to your child's provision? Do you believe that these are implemented in practice? Why/How?
- 5.2. Do you know whether the school has a policy regarding special provision? How does this care for your child?
- 5.3. If you were in a position to make policy, what changes would you make in the current one?
- 5.4. It has been argued, that through the parents' charter, devolved school management, and school boards parents have increased their power over how schools are run. Do you share this view? Have these changes influenced your participation in the interaction with the school?

## 6. EU and future

6.1. What do you foresee as the future developments in policy and provision for children like X?

6.2. Do you believe that the EU has a role to play in the future of policy or the provision for children like X in Scotland? How/Why?

6.3. Are you aware of any EU policies in the area of special education? Do you have in mind a model provision used in an EU country? What kind of assistance would you seek from the EU? Do you believe that Brussels should enforce a unified policy for all EU Member States?

## 7. About your self

7.1. Can you tell me about your and your husband occupations?

7.2. Could you tell me about your and your husband's education?

7.3. Is there anything you would like to add?

## Appendix 3

### *Pupil's Interview*

I have spent some time in your school. You must have noticed me around by now, being in the classroom, in the playground, or talking to the teachers. I am here to see and to talk to teachers and pupils about their views on some things in school.

1. - What do you enjoy in school?
  - 1.1. - What do you enjoy in the class?
  - 1.2. - What things do you like in the lessons?
  - 1.3. - What do you find particularly hard in the lessons?
  - 1.4. - Do you know any other child who finds the same thing(s) hard?
  - 1.5. - Do your friends find the same things hard?
  
2. - What does the teacher do to help you?
  - 2.1 - Who else help you in the school? What does she/he do?
  - 2.2 - Do your friends in the class help you at all? How?
  
3. - Do you have a lot of homework to do? Every day?
  - 3.1. - Do your parents help you with the homework?
  - 3.2. - Do they do other things to help you with the things you find hard?
  - 3.3. - Do you go to any other place than school to get help?

## Appendix 4

### *Interview Schedule for a member of the Directorate of Education in [the] Region with responsibilities to special educational needs.*

#### 1. nature of sp.l.d.

- 1.1. - In your view, what is meant by specific learning difficulties?
- 1.2. - Are there any particular reasons that led you to use this term along side with the term 'dyslexia' in the consultative document?
- 1.3. - According to this document, children with specific learning difficulties form a discrete group. What are the distinctive characteristics of these children?

#### 2. policy issues

- 2.1. - For the preparation of the consultative document eight sub-groups were formed to consider eight different areas of special educational needs. What led you to this division?
- 2.2. - Do you see, the formation of these sub-groups in the regional document as being in any kind of conflict with the concept of the continuum, that Warnock introduced and national policy has adopted?
  - 2.2.1. - What are the advantages of having a policy like yours, with defined 'areas' of interest?
  - 2.2.2. - Would you see any advantages in having a different and more general kind of policy towards special educational needs, such as in the national policy?

2.3. - What were the factors that influenced the region's decision to follow this model of specific areas?

2.3.1. - How important are resources in the formation of educational policy for [the region]?

2.3.2. - Do you consider your organisational structure as centralised or decentralised?

Being Centralised/Decentralised, does it influence your decision to follow the model of specific areas?

2.3.3. - To what extent do you consider the recommendations of pressure groups?

2.3.4. - Do you regard the 1996 local government changes as an influential factor to your policy?

2.4. - Do you think the paradigm of 'specific areas' of consideration could lead to the re-introduction of categorisation of pupils with special needs?

### 3. provision

3.1. In your opinion, what would be the appropriate provision for children with specific learning difficulties?

3.1.1. - In your opinion, what is 'good practice' in the provision for a child with specific learning difficulties?

3.1.2. - What are the characteristics of a 'good learning environment' for a child with specific learning difficulties?

3.1.2.1. - Do you see this as provision of positive learning opportunities?

3.1.3. - What do you understand by "the least restrictive environment" for children with specific learning difficulties?

- 3.1.3.1. - Do you see this as the removal of negative constraints?
- 3.1.4. - How can the principle of "increased integration" be implemented in practice for children with specific learning difficulties?
- 3.2. - What changes in the provision for children with specific learning difficulties have taken place during the last decade?
- 3.3. - How the initiative of designated schools impinges on the provision of sp.l.d.?
- 3.3.1. - What was the evidence which led [the region] to say that the initiative of 'designated schools' "has been applied with some success"?
- 3.3.2. - Is the practice of designated schools consistent with the principal of increased integration?
- 3.4. - To what extent do you think that the reality measures up to this account?
- 3.5. - Could you tell me about the management of the provision?
- 3.5.1. - How is structured and staffed at school and education authority level, what are the staff development programmes?
- 3.6. - What are the factors which might inhibit or facilitate the delivery of your policy?
- 3.7. - What do you consider as the prerequisites for a teacher to become a 'specialist'?
- 3.8. Curriculum
- 3.8.1. - Should the goals/aims of the curriculum be common for children with specific learning difficulties and the majority of children?
- 3.8.1.1. - (In case of common goals) How do you overcome the difficulties that might result from the common learning aims?



3.8.1.2. - (In case of different goals) In what ways and why should be different?

3.8.2. - How, in your opinion, should a differentiated curriculum for a child with specific learning difficulties differ from those of his/her classmates?

3.8.3. - What is the appropriate curriculum for children with specific learning difficulties?

#### 4. philosophy

4.1. - Can you elaborate the philosophy of the document?

4.2. - Can you elaborate the principle of "closeness to the customer"?

4.2.1. - Who is the customer?

4.2.2. - What is meant by 'closeness'?

4.2.3. - What in practice do you do to achieve this 'closeness'?

4.3. - It is argued, that 'customer' is a word that comes from the business-economic world, but this type of language appear increasingly in the educational literature and documentation. What are the advantages, or the disadvantages, using such a word?

#### 5. parents of children with sp.l.d.

5.1. - From your perspective, could you describe the nature of the partnership with these parents and how it has changed over the last decade?

5.2. - What provision do you make in order to enable parents to contribute to the Advisory Meetings?

5.2.1. - Do you think that this provision is adequate?

5.3. - How would you describe the atmosphere during these meetings?

5.4. - Do parents make use of complaint and appeal procedures, and how successful are they in conveying their wishes?

6. EU & future

6.1. - Are you aware of any EU policy referring to specific learning difficulties or special educational needs more generally?

6.2. - Is there any way that EU policy influences or might influence in the future the regional policy?

6.3. - How would you like to see regional policy and provision develop in the future?

## Appendix 5

### *Interview schedule for a Greek Regional Special Educational Needs Advisor.*

#### 1. nature

- 1.1. - In your view, what is meant by specific learning difficulties?
- 1.2 - What are the factors which might lead a pupil to experience sp.l.d.?
- 1.3 - Do these children form homogeneous group?
- 1.4 - What are the distinctive characteristics of the children with sp.l.d.?
- 1.5 - According to the ministry's statistics 70% of the school population with special educational needs have learning difficulties. What is the % of pupils with specific learning difficulties in your region?

#### 2. policy

- 2.1 - The 1566/85 law suggests that children who have special educational needs fall into 10 categories. What do you believe that are the advantages and the disadvantages of such policy?
- 2.2 - The Director of special education argued that special education in Greece is in a 'crucial developmental stage'. What are the characteristics of this stage?
- 2.3 - He also said that the current situation has led to the 'multiplication of problems and deficiencies'. What are these in your region?
- 2.4 - What are the positive developments within your region?

### 3. provision

3.1. - In your opinion, what would be the appropriate provision for children with specific learning difficulties?

3.1.1. - In your opinion, what is 'good practice' in the provision for a child with specific learning difficulties?

3.1.2. - Could you give some evidence of 'good practice' regarding children with specific learning difficulties?

3.1.3. - How can the principle of "increased integration" be implemented in practice for children with specific learning difficulties?

3.2. - What changes in the provision for children with specific learning difficulties have taken place during the last decade?

3.3. - To what extent do you think that the reality measures up to this account?

3.4. - Could you tell me about the management of the provision?

3.4.1. - How is structured and staffed at school and education authority level, what are the staff development programmes?

3.5. - What are the factors which might inhibit or facilitate the delivery of your policy?

3.5.1 - What is the role of the family in the provision?

### 4. Curriculum

4.1. - Should the goals/aims of the curriculum be common for children with specific learning difficulties and the majority of children?

4.1.1. - (In case of common goals) How do you overcome the difficulties that might result from the common learning aims?

- 4.1.2. - (In case of different goals) In what ways and why should be different?
- 4.2. - How, in your opinion, should a differentiated curriculum for a child with specific learning difficulties differ from those of his/her classmates?
- 4.3. - What is the appropriate curriculum for children with specific learning difficulties?

## Appendix 6

### *Interview Schedule for the Director of Special Education in the Ministry of Education of Greece.*

#### 1. nature

1.1 - In your view, what is meant by specific learning difficulties?

1.2. - As you know, the law 1566/85 commenced with the clause "To the individuals who have special needs special education is provided ..." However, the law retains ten categories of handicap including one for 'specific difficulties in learning (dyslexia, speech disorder etc.)' ("όσοι εμφανίζουν επιμέρους δυσκολίες στη μάθηση (δυσλεξία, διαταραχή λόγου και άλλα", Άρθρο 32, δ.1, 1566/30-9-85 FEK 167/30-9-85 δ.Α') In your opinion, do you think that there is a conflict between the system of categorisation and the use of the general term of individuals with special needs?

1.3. - What are the likely factors that lead children to experience specific learning difficulties?

1.4. - You have accepted the 10% figure as the percentage of the school population with special needs, which means that 180,000 pupils need some kind of special provision. However, the tables you have presented in your report covers only 12,383 pupils. This represents only 6.8% of the population in need. How are these tables compiled? What has happened to the rest? The 70% of this number is categorised as children with 'learning difficulties'. What percentage of this is with specific learning difficulties?

## 2. policy issues

- 2.1. - You said in your report, that special education in Greece has entered the third decade of its contemporary history. What are the characteristics of this new era? How does it differ from the early ones?
- 2.2. - You stated that the development so far in the field, has led to the 'multiplication of problems and deficiencies'. What do you mean by this? Why have they risen? What has changed in these three decades which led to the appearance of more problems? Which factors influenced you in order to expand the breadth of your investigations?
- 2.3. - You have argued that the expansion of special education in Greece is in a 'crucial developmental stage' ("κρίσιμη αναπτυξιακή φάση", p. 12). Could you explain what you meant by this? What will determine a future successful development?
- 2.4. - In Article 32 of the 1566/85, the third aim of special education is said to be 'the mutual acceptance of individuals with special needs within the society'. What led you to incorporate such an aim in the law?
- 2.5. - Would you briefly describe the way in which special education is administered in Greece?
- 2.6. - To what extent has the Council of Special Education (F.E.A.) influenced the developments of special education in Greece? How seriously are their suggestions taken into consideration? Could you give an example of where a particular view has been adopted?
- 2.7. - According to the law the Regions have to play a part in the provision. How does this work in practice? Is the funding still in the hands of the Ministry? Can you

foresee any problems in your collaboration with the new regional leaders who are not appointed but elected?

2.8. - The law states that the only responsible body for special education is the Ministry of Education. However, the medicopaedagogical service which does the assessment belongs to the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Social Security. Does this indicate that the medical profession has a dominant role in the identification and the recommendations on provision for children with special needs?

2.9. - You have argued in favour of the 'modernisation of the legislation' in all levels of the provision (εκσυγχρονισμός της ισχύουσας νομοθεσίας για την ειδική αγωγή και εκπαίδευση των παιδιών με ειδικές ανάγκες σε όλες τις βαθμίδες της εκπαίδευσης, p. 14). What do you mean by modernisation? What changes would you like to see in the legislation? What factors will determine the orientation of the new framework?

2.10. - Could you explain how the Law 1566/85 provides adequately for children with Sp.L.D.?

2.11. - What factors are likely to influence policies for children with sp.l.d.?

2.12. - In the document you have mentioned several times the European Communities (Union now) and the HELIOS programme. How much has the E.U. influenced the development of special education in Greece?

2.13. - Would you like to see more intervention of the E.U. in educational matters in the future? In what areas? How do you envisage such intervention?



### 3. provision

- 3.1. - In your report you have mentioned that 'we have to multiply our successes' in the provision we offer (πολλαπλασιάζοντας τις επιτυχίες μας, p. 13). What do you consider as 'our successes'?
- 3.2. - How does a pupil with specific learning difficulties secure special provision? In your view, how successful do the identification and the assessment procedures operate?
- 3.3. - During the academic year 1991-92 there were 520 'resource rooms' and 8,782 pupils attended these 'rooms'. Of these 8,723 have 'learning difficulties' and the 99.3% of the population of the resource rooms. To what extent do these children have similar difficulties? What is the nature of these difficulties? Do you know what proportion of these have specific learning difficulties? Are there separate statistics gathered on this?
- 3.4. - If a child with specific learning difficulties has been allocated in a specific school with a resource room, does this school take more money to cater for the extra needs of this child?
- 3.5. - Regarding these resource rooms (ειδικές τάξεις) within the mainstream schools you have argued that 'in every case their operation is inadequate, due to organisational deficiency, insufficient collaboration of the responsible bodies, inadequacies in resources and expert-scientific advice by the advisers of special education'. Could you explain to me with some examples what do you mean with these? I there any evidence of change and what form should it take?

- 3.6. - You have mentioned in the report the need for new specialised curricula. How do you envisage such a curriculum for children with specific learning difficulties? How would this differ for children with moderate learning difficulties?
- 3.7. - You also suggested the need 'internal differentiation of the learning process' (εσωτερική διαφοροποίηση της εκπαιδευτικής διαδικασίας). What do you mean by this in general terms? How does apply with children with sp.l.d.? (tasks, skills, aims, goals, method, approach, assessment) Are any implications on the validation of the certificates that these children obtain?
- 3.8. - Some resource rooms have been characterised by 'excellent practice' (άριστα αποτελέσματα) . Can you give some examples of such practice?
- 3.9. - What is the role of the family in the provision for children with specific learning difficulties?
- 3.10. - In your view what changes should take place in the provision for such children in the future? -Administrative, Organisational, in Content, other.

## Appendix 7

### *Interview Schedule to the HM Inspector responsible for Special Educational Needs.*

#### Introduction

Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) is an area of continuous research and policy interest. This research project, which is sponsored by E.S.R.C. and "Aristotelis S. Onasis" foundation of Greece, aims to compare policies and provision between Scotland and Greece for children with specific learning difficulties.

I would be grateful if you, as a key figure (or as an expert) in the educational provision for these children, could assist this project by providing some information. The interview will be strictly confidential and anonymous and the information given will be used only for academic purposes.

#### 1. Perceptions of S.L.D.

1.1. - In your view, what are the contributing factors of learning difficulties in general?

1.2. - What does the term 'specific learning difficulties' mean to you?

1.3. - In your opinion, what are the contributing factors of specific learning difficulties?

#### 2. Perceptions on Policy

2.1 - The very first section of the amended Education (Scotland) Act 1980, states that is 'the duty of every education authority to secure that there is adequate and efficient' (S. 1, 1) ... 'provision for special education needs' (S1, c), where a child with special

education needs is defined as the one who 'has significantly greater difficulty in learning' (S1, d).

- 2.2. - Can you tell me something about how decisions are made on whether the child has 'learning difficulties'?
- 2.3. - What kind of criteria are used in the identification?
- 2.4. - Some argue that 'learning difficulties' are congenital. Can you comment on this?
- 2.5. - Knowing that in Greece the legislation is explicit for each category of learning difficulties (1566/85, s.32), what are the advantages -in your opinion- of having legislation for special educational needs in general?
- 2.6. - The 'support for learning; special educational needs within the 5-14 curriculum' document, identifies specific learning difficulties as a group of pupils. In your opinion, is this a change towards the re-introduction of categorisation?
- 2.7. - Do you think that the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, provide adequately for Sp.L.D.?
- 2.8. - How important do you believe are the resources in determining the policies towards special education?
- 2.9. - Do you believe that a Record of Needs is appropriate for a child with Sp.L.D.?
- 2.10. - In your opinion, what priority should such children have in the Recording process in comparison with those who have other special educational needs?
- 2.11. - In your view, how is the current general policy implemented in practice?
- 2.12. - Do you see any inherent weakness in the current policy?

### **3. Provision**

- 3.1. - In your view, what kind of specialised provision do children with specific learning difficulties require?
- 3.2. - What are the factors influencing the provision for these children?
- 3.3. - How do you see the role of the education authority in the provision for children with sp.l.d.?
- 3.4. - How do you see the role of the family in the provision?
- 3.5. - In your opinion, to what extent are the attainment goals of 5-14 appropriate for children with sp.l.d.?
- 3.6. - if they have to be modified, how should this be done?
- 3.7. - What are the implications of differentiation for a child with sp.l.d.?
- 3.8. - Do you think that the national policy should make education authorities responsible for providing children under school age with sp.l.d.?
- 3.9. - Do you see any weaknesses in the current provision for children with sp.l.d.?

### **4. Teachers & Parents**

- 4.1. - In your opinion, what is the parents' role in the identification of children with sp.l.d.?
- 4.2. - How would you describe the role of the parents in the assessment of their children?
- 4.3. - Should the parents be more powerful in relation to final decision for the provision of their children?
- 4.4. - Do you see that the role of parents during the last decade has changed?

4.5. - Do appeal committees ensure the parental rights?

4.6. - What are the criteria on which the composition of an appeal committee is based?

4.7. - What is your opinion about the private arrangements that parents might make to provide for their children with sp.l.d.?

4.8. - Do you think that some of their arrangements can be perceived as pioneering for the state provision?

4.9. - Do you think that the role of teachers has changed over the last decade?

4.10. - Do you think that the empowerment of parents has influenced the relationship between them and teachers in relation to children with sp.l.d.?

4.11. - In the same context, have the relationships of teachers and authorities changed?

## 5. EU & future

5.1. - Are you aware of any EU policies influencing the national policies for children with specific learning difficulties?

5.2. - Do you believe that EU will have an influence in the provision for these children?

5.3. - What do you foresee as the future policy and provision of children with specific learning difficulties?

5.4. - Is there anything you would like to add?

## **Appendix 8**

### ***Interview schedule for the European Union Interview.***

#### **1. Concepts - Definitions**

- 1.1. Could you give me some examples of the involvement of EU in the area of disability? Do you consider that this involvement is becoming wider and broader?
- 1.2. Does the area of disability incorporate specific learning difficulties?
- 1.3. What does the term 'specific learning difficulties' mean to you?
- 1.4. Are you aware of any differences or commonalties among the MS (Member States) on the way they conceptualise specific learning difficulties? Could you give any examples?
- 1.5. Does the EU consider the concept of the continuum of special educational needs or does it follows the concept of discrete categories of disabilities?
- 1.6. If there are diverse constructs, do those pose any kind of difficulty for the organisation that you represent? Please can you explain in more details?
- 1.7. If there are differences is this because of language or conceptual differences?
- 1.8. Has the EU played a role in the development of common concepts? If yes, how?

#### **2. European policy issues**

- 2.1. Jacques Delors argued that it is unattainable to see the implementation of a single market without some harmonisation of social policy. How does this apply to the areas of education and disabilities? What is your view, regarding the harmonisation of the policies concerning specific learning difficulties?

- 2.2. It seems evident that one way of influencing or complementing MSs' policies is through selective funding of activities. How do you decide what will be funded?
- 2.3. The Maastricht Treaty states that the community aims to develop "quality education". What does this mean to you in relation to children with specific learning difficulties?
- 2.4. Article 126 of the Treaty on European Union, states that the Union shall contribute to "developing exchanges of information and experience" on common issues in education matters. In your opinion, what is the framework of these exchanges and how successful are they?
3. provision
- 3.1. The Council conclusions on 14 May 1987 (C211) suggested that to achieve the 'maximum possible integration of handicapped children into ordinary schools' teacher training and development of school curricula is needed. Could you tell me about any progress in this direction?
- 3.2. The Council of the Ministers of Education supports communication between home and school stressing the importance of the family. How do you perceive the role of the family in the case of children with specific learning difficulties? Do you see any difference in emphasis within MS on the family involvement in the provision for these children?
- 3.3. In your view, as an expert, what kind of specialised provision do children with specific learning difficulties require?
- 3.4. Among the MS, do you see any major differences in provision for children with specific learning difficulties?



3.5. The document C 162 makes reference to the 'good practice' in the provision of these children. What do you understand as 'good practice' in relation to specific learning difficulties?

3.6. In relation to specific learning difficulties, is there any one model of provision presently in use in MS towards which you would like to see others move?

#### 4. Impact - Effect

4.1. My examination of EU policy has led me to the opinion that the EU tackled the peripheral educational issues (such as access to buildings) before moving gradually to more general educational issues (such as curriculum). Do you share this view? In your view what will be the final position be?

4.2. The field of education is very difficult to direct centrally, because of the wide diversity of values cultures and civilisations among the fifteen MS. However, the Treaty on European Union, which incorporates a chapter for Education, has been ratified. Some argue that this happened because the Treaty remains at a very general almost diffuse level. Do you agree? Do you think that the Treaty on European Union is too diffuse to be useful administratively or conceptually?

4.3. In your view, how long will it take for this Treaty to influence the administrative actions of MSs?