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Early Work By Student Researchers

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Contents

Editorial

Welcome to Issue 6 of **Spark**. We will be showcasing a range of student work from Education and Early Childhood Studies at LJMU. We have included a variety of topics that we hope you will find stimulating. We have kept all work close to their original format, allowing for individual differences. We hope you find this edition interesting and look forward to hearing any comments you have about this issue of Spark. If you have any queries feel free to contact us at V.L.Moss@2012.ljmu.ac.uk or S.Scott1@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Victoria Moss, Samantha Scott, Ellie Webb, Ashling Dodds, Sarah Yearsley (Student editors)

Spark continues to grow as a publication for students of Education and Early Childhood Studies. We have a strong group of student editors who have done a great deal to promote Spark among their peers. They have also shared their experiences with staff across the University about the processes and value of a having student work published. If you would like to get involved as a student editor, or submit to the journal, please contact us via A.Daly@ljmu.ac.uk or D.C.Gallard@ljmu.ac.uk

Angie Daly and Diahann Gallard (Coordinating staff editors)

Laura Clancy
Education Studies and Early Years student

Exploring quality in the early years curriculum

This article will explore the much debated notion of 'quality' seeking to find an appropriate definition and also applying it to early years settings, aiming to gain an understanding of the characteristics of a setting deemed as a high quality effective setting, taking into account the varying perspectives of quality from stakeholders in the field. These stakeholders can be anyone involved in the education system from the government to the children themselves. As a result of the varying perspectives the concept of 'quality' becomes very hard to define and can be seen as a very subjective concept. This essay will also explore the ways in which certain groups of people attempt to measure quality in early years settings, which can be done both internally and externally. A focus also is to examine the rationale behind the prominent discourse of what constitutes quality in the early years qualifications of staff.

When attempting to define 'quality', questions come to mind instantly, for example: "what does quality actually mean to me?" and "what characteristics do I search for in something for me to depict it as being quality?" These questions highlight the complexity of defining quality on a personal level and portrays on a broader level the opportunities for tension and conflicting ideas on the topic as a result. It is this that makes 'quality' such a subjective notion. The Oxford dictionary definition of quality is: "The standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something." (Oxford University Press, 2014). This suggests that there are certain things, more desirable/preferable, that set one thing apart from another and thus making it of a higher quality. When relating this to quality in early years settings therefore, it could be assumed that there must be a universal model or set of characteristics that are associated with high quality practices and thus create criterion for

defining quality. However problems arise with this assumption, Duffy and Pugh (2014) state that there cannot be a universal definition for quality as it may not be representative for all children in all contexts. For example, what is deemed desirable in one country may not be in another. In addition the views and needs of all the stakeholders involved need to be taken into consideration (Katz, 1993). It could be argued that characteristics such as effective pedagogy, varied curriculum and stimulating environments are seen to contribute to reaching the 'standard' or 'quality' of an effective early years setting, however, highlighted in research, some characteristics seem to carry more weighting than others (Sylvia et al, 2004).

Perhaps the most influential piece of research in early years education, The EPPE Research was a longitudinal study with aims to determine the impact of preschool on a child's social and behavioural development and also to search for characteristics of an effective setting. The study concluded that children attending preschool provisions would gain better all-round development than those who did not attend, thus portraying that the early years are the most crucial time for children's development and that early years settings should accommodate this with quality care (Sylvia et al., 2004). The EPPE research found that "Quality makes a difference to children's development" and showed a "significant relationship between the quality of a preschool centre and children's outcomes", (Sylvia et al, 2004:3). Then, based on their findings, they came to a conclusion that there is a strong connection between the qualifications of staff and perceptions or ratings of quality, therefore somewhat advocating that the 'desired' characteristic of quality is highly qualified staff in early years settings. This was confirmed in their key findings, where they state that "settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress" (Sylvia et al., 2004:1).

The EPPE research is the underpinning research behind the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), the statutory document that all settings have to abide by, with the content of the document shadowing the findings of the

EPPE (DfE, 2014), which are instrumental in Ofsted's inspections as they measure quality against settings' adherence to these documents (Ofsted, 2014). As a result of this, within the early years field a dominant discourse is created: highly qualified practitioners equals better outcomes for children, therefore meaning quality. This is a proposition also advocated by Professor Cathy Nutbrown, who in her review recognises the need and importance of a highly skilled workforce by stating "Quality is the key to that positive impact, and staff with the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding are a crucial element of that quality" (Nutbrown, 2012). With this theorem in mind Nutbrown made recommendations in order to ensure that this level of quality reaches all children. She recommended that from September 2015, 70 per cent of staff in group settings will need to possess at least a Level 3 qualification, and ultimately requested increased financial investment into the early years sector, in order to produce a highly skilled workforce, better outcomes for children and thus quality practice (Nutbrown, 2012).

The government responded with the 'More Better Childcare' document (DfE, 2013a) by acknowledging the need for highly skilled staff and improving the status of the workforce. However, upon reflection of this response, Professor Nutbrown in her review, 'Shaking the Foundations of Quality' (Nutbrown, 2013), detected that a number of her recommendations were merely labelled by the government as 'accepted in principle' or in some cases 'No action for government' which seem to coincide with the recommendations to alter the qualification systems and status' of early years practitioners. The government disregarded the prospect of early years professionals having the opportunity to obtain a QTS and have the same status and pay as a teacher teaching over 5. It is inevitable, therefore, that there is a dissonance between those with QTS and early years professionals, with the latter expressing feelings of being devalued, as commented upon in Professor Nutbrown's 'Shaking the Foundations of Quality' paper (Nutbrown, 2013). This matter also highlights a contradiction in the aims of the government: despite acknowledging the need to increase the morale of early years

professionals hence increasing quality and advocating that the early years is the most crucial time for children's development, this is only 'accepted in principle' (Nutbrown, 2013).

Thus far it has been identified that in order to ensure a degree of quality in an early years setting, a sufficiently qualified and highly skilled workforce is required. It is now pertinent to consider which attributes staff that are sufficiently qualified possess and how this concurs with effective practice in the early years. Effective practice in the eyes of the EYFS, highlighted in their Themes and Commitments (DfE, 2014), consists of opportunities for development of the unique child and developing positive relationships, importance of having a 'rich and varied' environment and opportunities for active learning (DfE, 2014). It is also important to determine how staff in effective settings teach and facilitate the themes and commitments of the EYFS. Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002) sought further research into the findings of the EPPE. In terms of pedagogy, the REPEY research paper (2002) identified two pedagogical influences or interactions within the learning environment; Cognitive and Social. The cognitive interactions consist of a more formal approach which involves direct teaching, monitoring and "sustained shared thinking". In contrast, social interactions take more of a holistic/ progressive approach where encouragement, social talk and behaviour management are utilized.

The REPEY research examined these pedagogical interactions within settings and established that settings labelled 'outstanding' or 'excellent' provide and utilize both interactions simultaneously, creating opportunities for challenge with encouragement and support in place for the child (Siraj-Blatchford, 2002), the practitioner in this case facilitating the learning by scaffolding (Pound, 2008). Evident here are links to the EYFS, more specifically the learning and development aspect: 4.2 Active Learning and 4.3 Creativity and Critical Thinking, which are principles that encourage children to develop the ability to "discover connections" with the support of the adult increasing their "ability to think critically" (DfE, 2014). This could

suggest that opportunities for challenge and scaffolding in early years settings is crucial and could potentially define ‘effective practice’ in the early years.

It is a given that all of the findings and attempts at defining concepts raised in this essay are a result of evidence from research, therefore it is necessary to examine closely the methods of obtaining this evidence in research, more specifically looking at its measures. Quality, as previously discussed, is difficult to define and perhaps harder to measure because of this. When measuring quality in an early years setting, process and structural measures are considered (Duffy and Pugh, 2014). Process quality measures refer to measuring children’s actual experiences in a setting such as activities, interactions with staff. Structural quality measures consider the foundations of the settings such as group sizes, ratios and also the qualifications level that staff members have attained. It is argued, however, that these measures do not function independently, but rather to create a strong prediction of child outcomes, it is important to note that both the measures in settings complement each other. For example, process quality, which is possibly the strongest predictor of the two for child outcomes (Howes and Brown, 2000), can be influenced by structural measures such as adult ratios or qualifications of staff, therefore indicating that structural measures can add to the process quality and thus improve outcomes for children (NICHD, 2002).

In depth observations are obligatory in measuring process and structural quality and this is done via Environmental Rating Scales which consider the quality based on physical, pedagogical, social and emotional viewpoints (Duffy and Pugh, 2014). The observers rate specific aspects of practice or ‘indicators’ of quality on a seven point scale. This is a similar approach used by Walsh and Gardner (2005) who created a Quality Learning Instrument (QLI) which, by means of extensive observational visits, sought to examine and assess the quality of the learning environment through children’s experience, referring to nine key themes which according to Walsh and Gardner (2005) were integral to any high

quality setting, such as, motivation and independence and ultimately evaluating the nine key themes in relation to the 'Interactional Triangle' which consists of the children, adults and their physical environment (internal). This can be defined as a bottom up perspective considering how a child would feel in the setting.

This is also done externally on a larger scale by the leading inspectorate Ofsted. With a tag-line explicitly stating 'Raising Standards Improving Lives' one can immediately see the aim and rationale of what they set out to do, but how do they achieve this statement? Also, what evidence suggests that this is what they are achieving with their methods? Ofsted assess the 'quality' or 'standard' of a setting based on its adherence to the themes and commitments of the EYFS which formulates three key judgements that become their focus point for inspection: How well the early years provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it is provided; the contribution of the early years provision to the well-being of children and the effectiveness of the leadership and management (Ofsted, 2014:12). Each judgement is graded against a four-point grading scale between 'outstanding' and 'inadequate'. Ofsted's method of monitoring can be described as a top-down approach and increasingly produce mainly quantitative data (Katz, 1993). This can be seen in the language of documents generated by Ofsted or even the government.

This is particularly demonstrated when viewing the changes in the documents that Ofsted consider in their inspections. Focus has been transferred from the Development Matters (DfE, 2012) document, which heavily implies that learning is not linear and considers it as holistic, stating what children or practitioners 'could do' in order to develop, to considering the Early Years Outcomes (DfE, 2013b) which in contrast lists 'typical behaviour' at each stage of their development, implying that if a child cannot do 'x' at a certain point then they are seen as atypical or not achieving the norm. This adds to the increasingly popular concept of 'school readiness' with the priority leaning towards ensuring that all children have a 'good level of attainment' at the end of reception in

accordance to the Early Years outcomes (DFE, 2014). This instantly puts pressure not only on the children to 'perform' but also on the practitioners in their care (Duffy and Pugh, 2014).

To conclude, it is evident that the definition of quality and what constitutes a high quality effective provision for children is an on-going and complex debate. This essay has explored this and through research and recognition of different stakeholders perspectives have found there to be a common or dominant discourse for defining quality: a highly qualified workforce equals improved outcomes for children and the suggested pedagogical methods informed by research that this qualified workforce utilise, a combination of formal and social interactions, seemingly constitutes effective practice. The reliability of the methods of measuring quality in these contexts have been questioned due to the high risk of subjectivity (Burns, 2014). Accumulative research and government legislation suggests the future of education is increasingly becoming outcome based, highlighted by the language in the early years outcomes and related documents. The pressure that is experienced by the workforce to help the children achieve the title of 'school ready' is made apparent in many of the research papers and reviews discussed. It is, therefore, important to contemplate that, as a result of the workforce working under this pressure, the overall quality and effectiveness of practice and teaching potentially may be hindered.

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An examination of changes to university fees

This paper is focused on examining the coalition policy wherein the university fees for students to pay were raised. The aims of the policy and the subsequent impact of political ideology upon these aims will be examined, in the hope of gaining a greater understanding of how political ideology is impacting the creation of policy. Following this there will be an examination of research methodology and how it may be used to further assess the impact of the policy.

Funding for higher education within the UK has adapted over a long course in time, the most recent changes to the system occurred within 2012, wherein a policy was introduced, called ‘Making the higher education system more efficient and diverse’ (Gov.uk, 2012). The Browne Review (Browne, 2010) promoted a system where university fees no longer have a cap placed upon them, and that it is the decision of the university on what fees will be charged to prospective students. When this review was considered by parliament it was developed into the ‘Students at the Heart of the System’ white paper, whereupon it was outlined that the maximum charge for higher education fees would be placed at £9,000 per year, going against the proposal placed within the Browne Review. However the recommendations placed by the Browne Review upon student loan systems were taken into account, wherein fees would not have be repaid unless the individual is earning over £21,000 per annum, upon which they are expected to pay a rate of nine per cent of earnings (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2011). Hillman (2013) indicates that the implementation of a loans based university system is a natural development, as the usage of loans throughout multiple sectors has been increased and that while it may impact upon the student to an extent, previous form impacted upon the tax payer as well.

A further goal within the policy is the development of a higher education system that offers students an improved university experience, over what was being previously offered. An example of this goal is the idea that if a student is more responsible for the funding of their higher education experience then they will desire a greater service, placing an onus upon a university to make the course more appealing to prospective students (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2011). Dunnett et al. (2012) indicate that course value and university reputation are vital aspects in the decision of whether to pursue higher education, they also go on to further indicate that aspects such as previous university experience within the family may have more impact than an increase in tuition fees.

The policy was met with public criticism, an example of this being the student protest through central London, which took place on 9th of November 2011, wherein a high number of protestors voiced their opinion through marching action (BBC news, 2011). A further issue raised is that such changes to university fee structures may have an impact upon how many students choose to apply to study at a university; the London School of Economics has already indicated a drop of enrolment rate of 7.5% for men and 5% for women (Vasagar, 2011). However later research refuted this worry, with enrolment from disadvantaged areas increasing, this is not applicable to all groups as for example it was discovered that applications from mature students saw a drop of 14% in 2013 compared to 2010 (Adams, 2013). Hillman (2013) in opposition to some of the criticism that has been voices to the policies changes, develops the idea of the UK university system being one that may influence future developments within other countries, indicating that the focus should not be upon the survival of the reforms, but in how they may be best adapted.

In order to best examine the development of this paper, and the subsequent policy changes, one needs to examine the political ideology. While there are a varied amount of ideologies that may be followed, there has been development of a spectrum, where these ideas can be placed, varying from right wing, wherein ideologies such as socialism are placed

as left wing while conservatism is seen as right wing (Heywood, 2003). However, Heywood further goes on to indicate that a linear spectrum does not provide a full view of the impact that ideologies can have, and the varying forms it can take, such as social policy and economic policy. It is worth noting that typically the conservative party, who constitute a large part of the current coalition government, are typically seen as a right wing party, however with increasing relevance towards left wing views, leading to a largely centre right party (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2012).

Within right wing ideology, the central concepts can include those of personal responsibility, the role of business and freedom from interference from government. Therefore, the more extreme elements of right wing ideology represent ideas such as business centric goals and the rejection of concepts such as welfare (Heywood, 2003). Strong elements of this can be seen within the fee changes system, whereupon the focus is placed upon the personal responsibility of the student. This change means that they are paying a larger portion of the fees for their higher education, rather than it being largely government funded and therefore tax centred. Furthermore it is thought that these alterations will allow for students take more charge over their own experience within the higher education system, allowing for greater freedom and more autonomy (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2011).

However, while it can be seen that right wing ideology does have a large impact within the current system, there are still elements that could be attributed to left wing ideology. An example of this is that fees are supported through a government based loans establishment, which provides prospective students with financial assistance that they otherwise may not have been able to meet without this government intervention. This sides with elements of socialism, wherein a support infrastructure is set in place that allows a person to obtain something that may not have otherwise been possible given their pre-existing means (Heywood, 2003). This also further establishes the findings of Buckler and Dolowitz (2012) who found that recently the conservative party have been abandoning

some aspects of right wing ideology, in order to become a more centre right party.

An important aspect of fully establishing the impact and suitability of a policy is developing further research around it. This report will now examine research methodology within educational settings and further develop how it may be utilised in order to gain a greater understanding of this policy. Through this it may be possible to see where the current system is working and if there are areas in which it is not, therefore it can be ensured that any future adaptations and alterations can be planned for.

According to Machin (2014) an increasingly important aspect of educational research is the development of economic research within this field, this can be seen in the current tuition fee policy, as it is centred upon the concept of cost and responsibility. Due to this it is an important factor to develop a greater understanding of the financial implications of such policies. This can be done in tandem with other researching organisations and therefore may be carried out as secondary research. However Machin (2014) does further develop the concept that such financial based research can lead to consequences, such as the development of economics having too great an impact in the field of education. In order to ensure this does not happen it is vital to ensure that such finance based research only offers an overview, rather than being the central concept, leading to a distraction from the overall view of educational impact.

Another research methodology that may be used in order to further establish aspects upon the effectiveness of this policy is mixed methodology, wherein both quantitative and qualitative data is used, in order to gain a deeper and more comprehensive overview of the research in question. It is indicated by Venkatesh et al., (2013) that the utilisation of mixed method research can have offer advantages over the utilisation of a single method approach, so long as it is suited to the work being done. This could be utilised in order to further develop the previous question, wherein we ensure that an examination is utilised not only on the financial success of the new policies but also on the financial implications of the

student loan system and its impact upon the student. A further question impacting this paper, which may be addressed through mixed methodology research, is if the raise in tuition fee does offer empowerment to the student, creating a system through which they feel that they are given an opportunity to seek more within their university experience. This also includes that adaptations are made by universities, in order to make their provision more appealing according to the costs. A potential way to utilise mixed methodology in order to address these questions would be to first engage and survey students about their university experiences, gaining largely quantitative data, which would allow for the collection of easily comparable and communicable data. However while performing this essays ensure that ample opportunity is offered for the student to further provide their own thoughts and opinion so such data can also be compiled, further qualitative data could be gained through interactions with the students, such as interviews, along with also potentially utilising these methods with other relevant groups, such as universities and student unions, in order to gain further insight.

It may also be of benefit to gain further research, based upon the prior stated findings of Hillman (2013), in how the current higher education within the UK may be utilised within different countries. This may not only allow for the development of a much greater understanding of our own system, alongside the impact that it can have upon us, but also how it may also be balanced within the systems offered by other countries, and if any of their systems could benefit our own. Alfaro (2008) did a study on the benefits of global teaching opportunities to education provision, finding that such experiences and subsequent reflection may be of benefit to developing a further understanding of educational experiences on an international level. Though this is based upon teacher training could it be utilised throughout higher education setting in order to boost provision throughout, for example could examining how establishments in other countries build greater appeal in order to greater engage students, be utilised within the UK. This research could be achieved first through focusing upon achieving a greater understanding of the many differing

systems through secondary research. Following from this it is possible to then liaise with experts from the areas that you have studying, in order to gain qualitative data, which may offer a much greater and more comprehensive method of understanding how different systems may benefit from shared aspects.

In conclusion, the policy of raising university fees in order to create a system, wherein people have more control and responsibility of their own education, has been controversial, with concern surrounding the impact on university applications and impact on later life. It can be seen that while those controversies do have impact in some areas, such as the applications of mature students, it is to date not having as great an impact on the disadvantaged as may have previously been thought. It can also be seen that there are adaptations being made to the structure of the fee system that allow for the policy to meet further political ideologies, however it can still be argued that it is largely right driven. In order to fully establish the impacts, failures and successes of the current system it is vital that more research is further carried out, it is also essential to ensure that the current policy is meeting its goals in areas such as improved service, including greater engagement for the student.

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Reflection on a placement in a special needs school

Within my placement within a special needs school in Northern Ireland I had various core and personal goals to achieve. Reflecting back on my placement I feel that I have developed employability skills which are required for my career aspiration as a teacher. I feel that I significantly developed my communication skills throughout the four weeks as I had to communicate daily with the pupils both verbally and non-verbally through the use of Makaton. I also had to communicate with parents, teachers and other health professionals within the school. I was aware that I had to be confident when providing support and implementing activities with the pupils. Boyle and Scanlon (2010) claimed that 'teachers need effective communication skills to be productive and to develop healthy working relationships with colleagues'. Those communication skills involve understanding both verbal and nonverbal communication as well as effective listening'. Additionally, I also feel that I further developed my team working skills by working as part of a team in collaboration with other professionals in order to provide a child centred approach. I got the opportunity to take part in meetings alongside many different professionals and to observe each one, sharing their knowledge and expertise in order to develop individual education plans and provide a high standard of learning. My placement, I feel, that greatly influenced my career aspirations of becoming a special needs teacher in the future.

Before commencing placement I was unsure if I wanted to become a teacher, however after observing the role of the teacher, taking on my own responsibilities and thoroughly enjoying my placement I feel that I am sure of my chosen career path. In order to achieve my chosen career aspiration I feel that gaining more experience working alongside children with special educational needs and challenging behaviour would further

help me to gain valuable skills which would benefit me to work as a teacher. In relation to qualifications I would also need to complete a PGCE in order to become a qualified teacher. My time within my placement has given me a greater understanding of the professional requirements of a teacher. I have learnt that being punctual, confident, organised and patient are some of the vital requirements in order to become a professional teacher.

Throughout my placement in the special needs school I found myself frequently having to make decisions in appropriate situations. I observed an occupational therapist take a P.E session with the class in order to identify their abilities and further develop their gross and fine motor skills. The occupational therapist set up a sensory circuit which included a series of activities that supports the children's physical development. She used various resources and took each child up individually to complete them. However, reflecting back I remember observing the occupational therapist taking one of the children with Autism around the sensory circuit. The activity was throwing a tennis ball inside a hula hoop, however the child refused to pick up and hold the ball and started to become upset and agitated. As a result of this the occupational therapist moved the child to the next activity which involved hitting a tennis ball with a racket, yet again the child become distressed. From observing the session I figured that perhaps the texture of the ball was discomforting the child due to its wool shell. As in previous physical sessions the child always enjoyed taking part in activities. Hannah (2004) stated that children with autism do not like change and are often sensitive to smells and textures. I approached the child and calmed him down, due to the child having speech and language difficulties I was unable to ask the child if he disliked the texture of the ball so I had to use my own initiative. I then made the decision to change the activity resource from a tennis ball to a bean bag or a soft ball to see if it encouraged the child to participate. I motivated the child by giving him a sense of choice by allowing him to pick between the two new resources of which he wanted to use throughout the session. He chose the bean bag and went back and completed the sensory circuit independently and

thoroughly enjoyed it. From this outcome I learnt that it is important to be aware of an autistic child's tactile sensory stimulation when planning and implementing activities as it can discomfort the child. I reported this incident back to the teacher along with the occupational therapist. The teacher then decided to refer the child to the school's therapist as she explained that the child had other issues with food textures. According to Reynolds and Dombeck (2012), therapists may work with tactile-sensitive children with autism to desensitise them to unavoidable textures and touch sensations. This is accomplished gradually over time by teaching affected children to be able to tolerate ever increasing durations of contact with avoided sensations.

Throughout my placement I frequently had to use my own initiative as the teacher and classroom assistant were often busy so I was unable to always seek advice and guidance. On the first day of placement I was informed of one of the pupils who had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and challenging behaviour. However, I was unaware of the severity of his behaviour and was unaware of how to deal with challenging behaviours. One morning we were about to start our weather and news lesson when the pupil suddenly became frustrated and angry as he did not want to sit at his desk and take part in the session. Both the teacher and I attempted to explain to him that he had some work to do and after he could have choice time. However, the pupil often dislikes doing school work and began to become verbally abusive to the teacher and the classroom assistant. I was aware that the pupil often attention seeks and due to this we ignored him and carried on with the session as he was distracting the class and interrupting the lesson. He then began to become very aggressive, firing things across the classroom, and the teacher then lifted the phone to ring the principal and, due to this, the pupil came charging across the classroom and hit the teacher. I used my own initiative and pulled the emergency cord without being asked which called for extra help. The children in the class were frightened so I quickly opened the emergency exit door and asked the rest of the children to leave the class with me. I took the pupils to another class as I felt that the children were at

risk and I wanted to ensure the children were safe. I explained the situation to the teacher and offered to take the children to the sensory corner as I felt it would provide a calming environment in order for the children to relax. Fowler (2008) stated that sensory rooms are good for children's emotional development as it fosters and atmosphere of relaxation. The calming environment provides a restful and peaceful experience for children. Reflecting back I remember feeling nervous and worried as I was unsure if I had acted correctly, however the teacher gave me positive feedback and praise for using my initiative.

Within my placement I regularly had to make decisions and actions which had positive or negative effects on others. On one occasion within my placement one of the pupils with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) had been banned from using the computer during choice time as a form of discipline due to his negative behaviour. However, the teacher was on her break and allowed the children to have choice time which allows them to choose freely what they want to play with. The pupil approached me and asked if he could play games on the computer and I agreed and said yes, as I was unaware that he was not allowed to. After the teacher returned from her break, she shouted at the pupil for failing to listen to her instructions and for disobeying her rules. The pupil then became distressed and upset and I felt responsible for this as I had made the decision to allow him to use the computer as I was aware that he used it daily. I explained the situation to the teacher and took accountability for my actions. I apologised to the pupil and calmed him down. The teacher negotiated with the pupil in order to prevent him from behaving negatively and allowed him to use the computer at dinner time if he completed his numeracy work. Reflecting back to this situation I learnt that I should have consulted with the classroom assistant to ensure that it was okay for the pupil to use the computer before making my decision. Before commencing placement I set this personal learning goal as previously I have worked alongside children with challenging behaviour and have often felt anxious and unsure of how to deal with it effectively. I also often felt hesitant about the way in which I addressed situations as I was unsure if it was correct.

I have observed and learnt that a lot of children with special educational needs have behaviour problems. I knew before commencing the placement that the school had many pupils with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) within it and I felt it that this would give me a considerable amount of experience. The school had several behaviour policies that outline the procedures of how to deal with negative behaviour, discipline and also positive behaviours and rewards. In order to increase my knowledge and understanding I took the time to fully read these policies so that I was aware of the schools procedures and could act appropriately in likewise situations. In my spare time at home I also took the time to read various books on challenging behaviour to give me more insight of the topic. I also researched and read about the reasons why children with learning difficulties develop behaviour problems.

One of the pupils within the class who has ADHD often displayed negative behaviours by being aggressive and verbally abusive to the pupils and staff within the class. The teacher and the classroom assistant often dealt with the situations effectively and I closely observed how they dealt with the situations. On one occasion during choice time the pupil was playing a game on the computer and become frustrated when he lost. One of the other pupils sitting next to him laughed at this and as a result of this he become aggressive and punched the pupil in the arm. He then fired lifted a book and flung it towards me hitting me on the back.

I referred back to the schools behaviour policy and remembered to follow the schools procedures. I used my initiative and immediately approached the situation by removing the pupil from the situation and took him to one side. I calmly explained to the pupil that this was unacceptable behaviour and reminded him of the school rules. I encouraged him to apologise for this behaviour and removed him from the computer as a form of discipline.

I drew on Galvin (2013) who states discipline, whether it is positive or negative, teaches children rules and boundaries. Providing negative consequences for challenging behaviours will discourage a child from repeating the behaviour again. The teacher within the class had observed

the incident and provided me with positive feedback and stated that that I dealt with the situation professionally. This greatly developed my confidence in dealing with challenging behaviours.

In relation to the same pupil, I was grateful to get the opportunity to be present in a meeting with the pupil's parents, educational psychologist, teacher and principal. The meeting aimed to discuss the pupil's behaviour, his progress and various strategies to deal with his severe challenging behaviour. I felt that this greatly benefited me as it allowed me to observe everyone's individual knowledge and expertise. I feel that after having to frequently deal with challenging behaviour throughout my placement I within the school developed my confidence. Reflecting back on my placement I feel that I have successfully achieved my personal learning goal.

Having observed Makaton being used in a previous placement that I completed I have always found it intriguing ever since. I was aware that the school frequently used Makaton throughout their lessons and taught it to the pupils. I also decided to familiarise myself with the schools policy on communication so that I was aware of the procedures of how to verbally and non-verbally communicate with pupils who have different abilities. Due to my class having many pupils with speech and language difficulties I witnessed that Makaton was used regularly. In order to learn Makaton, I observed all of the staff within the using the signs to communicate with pupils. Makaton is used whilst singing songs and saying prayers in assembly and from this I picked up some of the signs in order to participate. I also noticed that the school communicated to pupils, parents and other visitors through the use of Makaton symbols which were used on displays, doors and within the canteen area which I felt was an excellent idea as it encourages pupils and even parents to learn signs.

I witnessed that there were two pupils within the class who had English as an additional language and I felt that Makaton was an excellent way of communication for them. This, therefore, encouraged me to learn Makaton signs as I felt it would be great if I could communicate with the pupils non

verbally if they had little speech or English. I felt that knowing some signs and using them would encourage the pupils to communicate with me. Jones (2002) supports this by claiming that Makaton greatly benefits pupils with communication difficulties as it clarifies instructions from adult to pupil and can be used to communicate with others.

I expressed my great interest in Makaton to the teacher of the class and she kindly offered to teach me some signs that were frequently used within the class to enable me to communicate effectively with the pupils throughout my placement. The teacher also gave me a Makaton training book which she received from a training course so that I could learn some signs and work towards achieving my personal learning goal. I was surprised and delighted to be informed that the 'Something special' show on CBeebies which features 'Mr Tumble' was recording one of its episodes with the pupils in my placement school. Due to the teacher being pleased with the development of my Makaton learning she offered me the opportunity to take a Makaton session with the class pupils in order to learn them the signs of 'hello', 'goodbye' 'thank you' which they were required to sign in the filming of the show. I was thrilled and enjoyed watching the episode back which the children took part in.

The speech and language therapist worked closely with the class by taking group sessions in order to support children with speech and language difficulties and to encourage positive communication between children, parents and staff. The speech and language therapist played games with the pupils whilst encouraging them to use Makaton and PECS. This was another learning experience for me as I also learnt and observed how communication was used through the use of PECS. Having researched about my placement before beginning I became aware that the school worked alongside many different health professionals. I was keen to learn about the different roles and responsibilities of health professionals and how they worked in a multi-disciplinary way. The school employs speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists to work with pupils who have a statement of special

educational need. In order to achieve this goal I informed my teacher of my personal learning goal and asked if I could have the opportunity to observe a session with each different health professional in order to develop my understanding of their role and how they work with and assess the pupils. She agreed and explained that I would definitely observe this throughout my placement as each therapist worked frequently with her class as it consisted of a mixture of pupils with different learning difficulties.

During the class P.E session I got to observe the occupational therapist set up a sensory circuit consisting of different activities with different resources. The therapist explained to me that the purpose of the activity was to assess and treat each pupil's motor, sensory, perceptual, psychological and social functioning through purposeful activity and play. She explained that many of the pupils within the class have fine motor difficulties and may find threading beads on to string or picking up small objects like buttons so in order to further develop these difficulties she carries out a physical session each week with class, taking each child around the circuit individually. Kurtz (2010) suggests that fine motor skills are important for young children to complete daily activities within the classroom. Fine motor skills such as stringing small beads can help to develop children's fine motor skills and low muscle tone. After the P.E session I asked if I could have a quick chat with the therapist in order to ask some questions about her role. This helped me to gain more insight into how the pupils are referred, how often the therapists work with the pupils and how they asses them. I learnt that the speech and language intervention within the school was delivered as both class based group sessions and individually. I was particularly interested in the role of a speech and language therapist and frequently got to observe the therapist develop the pupil's speech and language. The therapist carried out several activities using picture cards and encouraged communication through the use of Makaton. After the session the therapist explained to me that she writes up a report after viewing each child's progress and sends it home to their parents in order to inform them of any progress or difficulties.

Reflecting back upon my entire placement I feel that it has been a fantastic learning experience for me as I got the opportunity to work two weeks within a primary class and two weeks within a post primary class. This gave me the opportunity to compare and differentiate between the different levels of ability within each class, the different styles of teaching and the various strategies used for challenging behaviour. From studying education with special inclusive needs I feel that I was able to implement what I have learnt in class within my school setting which gave me the opportunity to develop the skill of linking theory with practice. Working with pupils with many diverse learning difficulties and disabilities provided me with experience in many different areas. I enjoyed working with the children and providing individual support in order to develop their learning and skills. From teacher feedback and from my own reflection I can see that I have developed many skills including communication and interpersonal skills. I feel that from my placement I have also gained a deeper knowledge of the role of a special needs teacher as well as other health professionals. Looking back I feel proud that I achieved each of my personal goals I feel that I have further developed many skills which I feel are required for the role of a teacher. I had a wonderful time at my placement school and thoroughly enjoyed it and as a result of this I feel that I certainly want to pursue a career in teaching within the future. I feel pleased and relieved to finally know that I am on the correct career path.

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Reform of GCSEs: a policy review

The policy issue that will be discussed throughout this paper is the reform of GCSEs and A levels, set out in The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010 (DfE, 2010). An analysis of the policy aims and background will be presented with reference to published documents, which discuss the policy initiatives. I then discuss how an evaluation of the reformed GCSEs and A Levels could be researched and what methods I would use.

The current GCSEs and A levels, according to the DfE (2010) are in need of improvement in order to be in-line with the pace of international competitors. The DfE (2010) deem the decision to allow GCSEs to be fully modularised a mistake; GCSEs are too short a qualification to be taken in small amounts across 2 years. Heinrich and Stringer (2012) found that some believe modules provide an easier approach to learning rather than linear assessment and they do not develop lifelong learning skills. In order to address this issue, Ofqual (2013a) advocates that reformed GCSEs will follow a linear structure, with all assessments at the end of the course. This will allow students to demonstrate their breadth of abilities and standards will be fair and consistent. January examinations for A Levels have also been removed so that all exams take place in summer, at the end of the two-year course (Ofqual, 2013b).

The DfE (2010) believe that allowing numerous re-sits undermines the qualifications themselves and does not encourage educational rigour. Evidence to suggest the extent of the number of re-sits can be seen by data collected by QCDA in 2008 which found between two thirds and three quarters of students re-sat at least one unit of their A Levels (DfE, 2010). The removal of January examinations for A Levels by Ofqual means that students will only be able to re-sit exams in the summer period, which

Ofqual (2014) propose will reduce disruption to teaching and learning, and students expectation of always having a second chance.

In the White Paper Report the DfE (2010) suggest that schools are entering pupils into examinations too early, before they are ready. According to Gov.uk (2013a) evidence shows that pupils who are entered early perform worse than those who do not, even after re-sits are counted. It has been decided that from September 2013 a pupil's first entry in a particular subject will count towards the school's performance tables (Gov.uk, 2013). This will impact the school's league table position. Therefore, careful consideration needs to be made to decide whether students are capable of obtaining a high grade, before entering them early.

The coalition government believes that the removal of separate assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar from GCSE mark schemes was a mistake (DfE, 2010). According to Gov.uk (2013b) employers and universities are often dissatisfied with school leavers' literacy and numeracy skills and it has been found that 42% of employers need to arrange additional training for these young people. This evidence could be a reason to suggest that there is a need to test written communication ability within assessment. Hence, included in policy aims is the need to reform GCSEs so they provide a strong foundation for further academic study and employment (Gov.uk, 2013b).

Views concerning reform to GCSEs and A Levels differ, a survey of people's perceptions in 2012, Ofqual (2013c) suggested that confidence in the A level system was high, however confidence in the GCSE system was lower, 55% among teachers and 54% among small employers. This evidence may imply that reform of A Levels is not necessary as most interested parties are confident with the system in place. Concentration could be made on reforming GCSEs, ensuring marking and grading are improved. Although most are confident with the current system in place, it is not to say that it cannot be improved. According to Winter (2013) A level examinations fail to meet the needs of higher education institutions and

students arrive unprepared, therefore university involvement in the development of A level structure and exams will ensure smoother transition. Although the coalition considers university involvement necessary for A Level improvement, Winter (2013) advocates that university departments may not have enough time, workforce skills or financial resources to meet these demands. Higher education institutions are experiencing funding cuts and pressure to recruit students following the recent university fee increases (Gov.uk, 2012). Therefore, they may not have financial resources available to help develop synoptic A Levels at this time.

Following consultations with head teachers, teachers, employers, higher education institutions, general public and awarding organisations about the Coalition's policy initiative to reform GCSEs and A Levels, a number of response documents have been released. These documents provide the government with feedback on whether interested parties believe the policy contains relevant and effective methods to improve education of young people. In an A level consultation response, the Association of Colleges (2012) believes that in order to develop more rigorous A Levels, not only should universities be included in the design and development of new A Levels, employers should also be involved. The purpose of A Levels has evolved and employment and apprenticeships are also common pathways for young people who have completed their A Levels, thus, an insight into what skills students should develop before entering the workplace is essential.

The DfE (2013) 'Reforming Key Stage 4 Qualifications' consultation also sets out responses regarding the policy proposal. All agree that current GCSEs are not giving pupils the best chance to succeed and something needs to change. However, awarding organisations believe that too many objectives have been set, it is too challenging to make examinations more stretching and accessible to as many pupils as possible at the same time, thus it has been recommended to either reduce the number of objectives or prioritise them. If the government wants to improve educational

standards to be in line with international competitors (Winter, 2013) then they need to consult those who will impact this change to examine whether proposals are likely to become successful policies.

In order to evaluate the outcomes of the reformed GCSEs and A Levels policy, a number of questions and research methods could be used. The first research question which could be asked is 'How effective have GCSE and A level reforms been in raising achievement of pupils?' To gather empirical evidence surrounding this question a quasi-experimental strategy could be used. A quasi-experimental strategy is a form of quantitative research that aims to demonstrate the causality between an intervention and an outcome (Harris et al., 2006). This would be a useful strategy to use to evaluate GCSE and A Level results before and after reformation. A method that could be used is a comparison of school league table examination results before and after policy intervention. However, this could be problematic as it is likely that results will fall initially if the governments' proposal to make examinations more difficult is achieved. A more reliable and accurate measure may be to compare PISA results carried out by OECD before and after. PISA is an international study that aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15 year olds (OECD, 2014). This would be useful quantitative data to use as the coalition wish to raise the standards of qualifications to support a world-class education system, one that is competitive internationally (Ofqual, 2013a). According to the Government Social Research Unit (2007), quasi-experimental research provides valid and reliable evidence about the relative success of a policy intervention. The studies would be non-randomised pre-post interventions that will provide a clear, structured analysis of results. Although quasi-experiments provide a sound comparison of before and after a policy has been introduced, some argue that they are more prone to bias and less efficient than randomised experiments (Green, Camilli and Elmore, 2006). Due to this issue of bias, it is important to discuss quasi-experimental strengths and weaknesses when data is being presented (Harris et al., 2006) to ensure all understand the potential reliability limitations this method has.

Another question that could be asked to assist in evaluating reformed GCSEs and A levels may be ‘How satisfied are universities and employers with GCSE and A level reforms?’ A mixed-method research strategy could be used to help answer this question. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008, cited in Terrell, 2012) define mixed-method research as studies that are products of a pragmatist paradigm; they combine quantitative and qualitative approaches within research. Quantitative research can be defined by Bryman (2012) as a research strategy that emphasises quantification in the gathering and examination of data. Large-scale questionnaires could be sent to all UK universities and given to a sample of employers who are representative of the general employment sector to help identify whether they are satisfied with the reformed GCSEs and A Levels. These findings could, according to Bryman (2012), be generalised beyond the confines of the study. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest that quantitative generalised results have higher credibility within government as it is easier to compare numerical data therefore this method would prove popular. However, some believe that quantitative research cannot be generalised to reflect beyond the population tested (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In this instance, employers and universities that have assisted in the development of reformed GCSEs and A levels may be biased, suggesting they are highly satisfied with outcomes of the policy. A generalisation may not reflect all employers and universities, but only the ones involved in the process. Generally, quantitative studies are positivist, where biases are eliminated and researchers remain emotionally detached from the object of study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Qualitative research is also used in a mixed-method study, defined by Bryman (2012) as a research strategy that emphasises words in the collection of data, where individuals interpret their own social world. To help understand how satisfied universities and employers are with the reformed GCSEs and A Levels, in-depth unstructured interviews and focus groups with a range of employers and universities could be held. Researchers should actively listen and focus on the subject at hand in

order to gain relevant and useful data (Woods, 2006). According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) qualitative researchers reject the positivist paradigm, dislike the passive, detached style of writing taken, and prefer a detailed empathetic account. Empathy needs to be shown in the interview process as confidence and trust are needed if respondents are to be truthful. Using qualitative methods in this study may be appropriate as personal perceptions can be collated, gaining a deeper insight into the effect reforming GCSEs and A Levels has on universities and employers and how they may further be improved. This would highly benefit the government in later education policies.

There are a number of ethical issues surrounding qualitative research, the public have a right to know outcomes of research, however participants also have a right to privacy, (Woods, 2006) therefore consent to publicise information has to be given. Woods (2006) suggests that qualitative research can be time-consuming because of consent issues, time needed to develop trust and negotiate access. Although there may be flaws in qualitative and quantitative research, in this mixed-method study strengths will be drawn from both research methods to create the strongest approach to answer the research question. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) mixed-method research can improve the accuracy of data, drawing more precise conclusions surrounding the question, with limited bias. Mixed-method research requires trained individuals in both quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggests that few are trained in both, therefore, employment costs may be high due to the large number of employees needed to carry out the investigation. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) also propose that mixed-method research can be time-consuming; however, the value of this approach outweighs its negatives.

In conclusion, I believe these empirical research methods will provide sufficient data for the Secretary of State to either substantiate the effectiveness of the government education policy or otherwise. If they are

proved to be effective, this will confirm that the reforms are not just ideological, but based on sound educational principles.

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Portrayals of teachers on screen and social equality

This article will examine the portrayal of the English teacher in American cinema looking at the characters of John Keating (Dead poets Society), Lou Anne Johnson (Dangerous Minds) and Mr Morgan (10 things I hate about you). Looking at the idea of the Hero teacher, in regards to both Johnson and Keating, it will explore the films key ideas about social equality within the American education system, analysing the films discussion of the curriculum and the politics governing the school. Consideration will also be given to the teaching methods used in all three films discussing the effectiveness of the teaching displayed. Furthermore the portrayal of race gender and social class of the teachers themselves will also be examined.

The three films this essay will focus on are set within American High Schools and all feature scenes which entirely take place in an English Class setting. They also feature one group of students and the effect the teacher has upon individuals in that specific class. The interaction between the teacher and other classes is not shown, thus rendering it unimportant in terms of the plot. There are however many differences in terms of the schools setting and the time in which these films are set.

Dead Poets Society was written by Tom Schulman and is semi-autobiographical. The film was made in 1989 but set in 1959 this is very influential on the themes covered in the film. During the 1980's there was great focus on the curriculum in America, and opposition of the U.S. government struck an anti-authority chord, and a loss of faith in authority encouraged the need more influence over live choices, which then impacted the interpretation of the curriculum and pedagogy with many suggesting that methods of teaching were outdated (Coman, 2013). This

is said to have had an effect on the unorthodox teaching style of John Keating (McLaren and Leanardo, 1998).

Keating is portrayed as the 'heroic teacher' (Dalton, 2004) and also as the 'inspirational teacher' (Vermeersche, Soetaert and Rutten, 2013). This is due to his questioning of authority and the curriculum. In one of the earlier scenes, he asks the class to rip out the introduction of their poetry books as he finds the mathematical measurement of poetry ineffective and at odds with his teaching philosophy (which is too encourage the students to think for themselves and strive for more than what is already in design for them) (McLaren and Leanardo, 1998). The pupils are at first unsure of him and seem confused by his deviation from the norm of the schools teaching methods. An earlier scene depicts this typical teaching with another teacher shown running lines of Latin in a class which lacks engagement (Weir, 1989). During the introduction of Keating to the school it is stated that he is an ex pupil which intrigues the class as he is viewed as one of them but he challenges the hierarchy of the establishment (Heilman, 1999) and this, therefore, encourages the pupils that they too can challenge the boundaries (Dalton, 2004). The discovery of the Dead Poets Society encourages the pupils' first act of defiance towards the rules of the school they decide to re-establish the society and sneak out after lights out. They are inspired by Keating to discover more poetry and it broadens their outlook on life (Leopard, 2013).

The role of the 'inspirational teacher' is one often found in cinema (Heilman, 2001) and is described by Dalton (2004) as '…the ability to inspire the class to fulfil their potential beyond what is expected of them'. As the pupils in dead poet's society are attending a prep school, they are already expected to become leading members of society such as lawyers, bankers, doctors etc. Keating inspires them to seize the day and discover other aspects of their personalities. It is suggested that he is sympathetic to the expectations placed upon the boys as he himself would have had similar expectations placed on him when he was a student (Leopard, 2013). The feelings of frustration that the pupils feel in terms of the rules

and regulations of the school environment and parental obligations is also something that Keating can relate to and, instead of punishing the society members for breaking the rules, he tells them they must be smarter when protesting. Although portrayed as a rebellious character he understands that challenges to the regime must be done in the correct manner and remain within methods that are socially acceptable. He tells Charlie that getting expelled is not the way to instigate change, showing that he wants to inspire the students to make a difference from the inside, yet still has a high regard for the purpose of the school. He sees education in a different light to the headmaster and other members of the school (Weir, 1989).

Keating's inability to conform is ultimately his downfall as he is made the scapegoat for the death of Peter; however, the film does not show this as a cautionary tale and emphasize the need to conform. The final scene shows the pupils in one final act of defiance, in this case towards the headmaster (Dalton, 2008). The pupils led by - arguably the pupil that was most positively influenced by Keating - Anderson, they stage a protest pledging alliance to their inspirational teacher and thanking him for teaching them to "seize the day", shown through standing on the tables which was used earlier in the film by Keating as an exercise in seeing the world differently (Weir, 1989).

In Dangerous Minds the character of Lou Anne Johnson is also portrayed as the 'heroic teacher' (Dalton, 2008), however this time her battle is with the school board in terms of reaching students from poor economic backgrounds. Unlike Keating, she cannot compare her own education to that of her pupils; instead, she is faced with 'getting their attention' and helping them overcome the negative aspirations placed on them due to social inequality. It is shown that other teachers have tried and failed when trying to engage the class (Smith, 1995). Johnson quickly establishes that usual methods of discipline are not effective and that she must find an alternative solution for class disruption.

Although Johnson is discussed as being an ex-marine in the film, it is not her strength and discipline that is shown to be effective with the students,

but her kindness, mothering nature and reward is what the film suggests is the true reason for her success. She is portrayed as a brave educator hero that refuses to allow the dire circumstances of her class inhibit their success (Benton, 2013). This being said, as a female, she is presented as recklessly getting to close to the pupils and reacting weakly when a decision is made that questions her methods (Beyerbach, 2005). This misguided idealism is shown when she has two members of her class removed by their guardian as they fail to see the relevance of her teachings, suggesting that Johnson does not truly understand the realities of her pupils and bases their education upon her own social reality (Bulman, 2005 cited in Saltmarsh, 2011). Saltmarsh (2011) questions if this is another example of a white teacher trying to save her underprivileged mixed race class which is the Hollywood banner that, in order for other races to be successful, they must be educated in the way of the white hierarchy (Cammarota,2011 and Jeong,2013). This is further reinforced by Johnsons desire to leave when she realises that her input has not rescued her pupils from their socioeconomic background. This causes the pupils great panic as they have been made to believe that Johnson is their salvation (Cammarota, 2011) with "…you're our tambourine man…you're our teacher, you've got the stuff we need" (Smith, 1995).

Cristensen (1995) suggests that the portrayal of characters such as Keating and Johnson as 'inspirational teachers' can have a negative impact on educators in reality, as teachers may be encouraged to embark on the career imagining that they too will inspire pupils, but soon come to realise that this is an unrealistic aspiration which can lead to frustrations with the role (Duncan-Andrade, 2004). Moreover pupils can also have adverse ramifications from the portrayal shown in film. The expectations are far too high and the lack of engagement can lead to dissatisfaction, with educators making the school experience a disappointing one (Beyerbach, 2005).

In regards to Mr Morgan in 10 things I hate about you, the Hollywood ideal of the 'heroic teacher' is just not appropriate (Dalton, 2008). Although Mr Morgan can be seen to be disengaged with the curriculum, through his comment about the lack of books written by black authors (Ten things I hate about you, 1999), he is not using his position to encourage the class to challenge the curriculum. In fact, he openly mocks Kat for her protests, inferring that her social class and race makes it difficult to truly understand the limitations of the high school curriculum, and her acts of protest are nothing more than complaints due to her dissatisfaction with her 'suburban upper middle class' existence (10 things I hate about you, 1999). This however is more of a commentary on Mr Morgan's frustrations which is displayed by his contempt for many of his pupils. When challenged, he removes the offenders from his class and sends them to the guidance counsellor, who again dismisses their problems in order to continue work on her book which is shown to be of more importance to her than her school role. This, again, suggests that the teachers portrayed in the film are not there to provide support and inspiration but purely as examples of adults who are disinterested in the lives of the students.

Mr Morgan's teaching methods, however, are shown to deviate from the norm (Pitman, 2004). During one of the scenes, he raps a Shakespearean sonnet to make it relatable to the class. This is done to show the pupils that, although they may believe the work of the barb to be irrelevant to their lives, the work is timeless and he encourages the students to write their own version (Melnikoff and Munroe, 2007). This tactic is also used by Keating as he asks his class to write their own poem to encourage their understanding of the poets they have been studying (Dead Poets Society, 1989). Again, the method of using a popular musician in order for students to relate to poetry is used by Johnson when she asks the students to study the use of symbolism in a Bob Dylan record and this is used to highlight the use of metaphors and similes in the lyrics and the students begin to relate this too their own feelings (Saltmarsh, 2011).

The use of language within the film 10 things I hate about you also shows the importance of teaching throughout the film, although many of the scenes are not based in the classroom many nods to famous quotes are made. Not surprisingly, as the film is a modern update to Shakespeare's the taming of the shrew, many of the references are famous quotes and misquotes of Shakespeare's work. This is used to reinforce the idea that the work of such authors is still of importance in modern teaching and, if updated, has a place in the lives of youth, as it can be related to their lives. The language used by the adults in comparison to the teenagers is another area that has been focused on by critics. The adults tend to use language that is associated with teenagers with Mr Morgan for example swearing in class on more than one occasion (Melnikoff and Munroe, 2007). Whereas the students are seen using sophisticated quotes and questioning vocabulary, the scenes that take place in the guidance office of Miss Perky usually end with the student providing the word that the teacher is unable to conjure, again suggesting that the pupil's language acquisition is far greater than that of the educator. The metaphorical descriptions of Kat are used to portray her as almost animalistic and unreasonable "mewling rampalian wretch" (10 Things I hate about you, 1999). On the other hand, the language used in connection with Bianca belittles her character in a different way. She is often described as shallow and foolish. It has been argued that the film has a negative portrayal of feminism with both the Characters of Kat and Bianca being rescued from there misguided paths by men (Clement, 2008). Friedman (2004) finds this to be at a juxtaposition to many of the themes of the film as Kat represents herself as a feminist - and even argues that the curriculum itself is misogynistic – however, as the storyline is based on a play written by a male, it could be argued that the comments are made to imply that, although Shakespeare is still relevant, the curriculum needs to be broadened (Clement, 2008).

To conclude the three films analysed for this essay all portray an English teacher in a school setting. The portrayal of both Keating and Johnson as heroic teachers re-emphasises the Hollywood stereotype of 'good' or 'bad'

teachers (Dalton, 2004). This, therefore, reinforces the belief that, in order for educators to be successful and interested in the welfare of the students, they must be at odds with the ridged authority figure. The deviance of these characters in the film encouraged their students to defy the authority figures themselves. This could be seen to have a negative impact upon educational order. In both films the enemy was seen to be the school board or the board of governors and this may lead viewers' to have a negative image of these groups. It is argued that the films portray ideals that are basis towards the white race and therefore have negative connotations for other ethnic groups (Hatt-Echeverria and Jo, 2005). This is especially seen in Dangerous Minds as Lou Anne Johnson is said to teach her class made up of mainly Black and Hispanic students with a syllabus that is not culturally or socially relevant (Cammarota, 2011). These heroic teachers are said to not be realistic interpretation of educators and are at odds with the nature of pedagogy in reality. The portrayal of Mr Morgan, however, is said to be more realistic, although exaggerated for comedic value, and the frustrated teacher is said to be more representative of the true picture of education (Dalton, 2004). Neither 'good ' nor 'bad', this professional encourages and engages the students by making the curriculum as accessible as possible whilst still teaching the required syllabus. Though frustrated by the patriarchy shown in the curriculum, they do not encourage the pupils to denounce the system but merely work within it to see things from another perspective.

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Autism and the early years curriculum

Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions of early years practitioners who work with children with complex learning needs and are consequently classed as ‘non-verbal’; the principal focus being on children with autism. The main research enquiry focuses on the perceptions of early years practitioners with regards to providing ‘enabling environments’ as defined in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with the use of alternative communication methods.

The research study focused on children who have a diagnosis of autism or similar needs. The research involved two scopes; to review a selection of literature to gain an insight into current research and evidence, and to conduct fieldwork research in order to critically analyse the findings in comparison to the current literature. The research was carried out on a small-scale basis, in a selection of early years settings in the Liverpool area.

The field research was undertaken with the objective of gaining an insight into working with children with complex needs under the framework of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Data analysis showed the emergence of some common themes and trends were identified in the most used communication methods and perceived difficulties. The perceptions of providing enabling environments were found to differ notably between settings. Similarities were found across settings in terms of perceived limitations in creating enabling environments. Some inconsistencies were found between the data collected and the reviewed evidence, including suggestions that although forms of ‘signing’ are deemed the

most effective and most popular, they were also identified as the most challenging to learn, teach and maintain.

Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the care and education of young children who have complex learning needs and are therefore classed as 'non-verbal'. The writer's previous experience includes working with children with special needs and using alternative communication methods, in particular with children with autism spectrum disorders. The research investigated how early years practitioners enable children with complex needs to participate socially, emotionally and independently with the use of alternative communication methods, alongside the guidelines of the EYFS. The prime focal point of the study was children with autism.

The EYFS is underpinned by a key theme of identifying and adhering to individual needs in the early years, with an emphasis on inclusive learning and early support. This was taken into account within the research, which had a strong emphasis on alternative communication and its use in relation to the EYFS guidelines. The EYFS is underpinned by four main principles; 'A Unique Child', 'Positive Relationships', 'Enabling Environments' and 'Learning and Development'. The literature review makes reference to these principles throughout, with the main focus on 'Enabling Environments'.

A literature review was carried out, which included an investigation of current research based around autism, alternative communication and the EYFS alongside theoretical underpinnings. The literature review was organised using a 'funnel' approach, beginning with broad overviews of the EYFS and autism, and leading into a focus on 'Enabling Environments', communication strategies and autism.

The study was carried out on a small-scale basis, using qualitative and quantitative data analysis, and was critically analysed in comparison with current literature evidence.

The importance of early years practitioners having an excellent knowledge of Special Educational Needs (SEN) is imperative, as demonstrated in the 2012 Nutbrown Review which is referred to within the literature review. By gaining an insight into the perceptions of early years workers it is felt that underlying issues or challenges can be identified and investigated further with regards to current research and findings.

For ethical reasons, the study has focused on the perceptions of practitioners who work with children with complex needs, rather than focusing on individual children through observation. This is in accordance with ethical guidelines in place for vulnerable children (Flick, 2011; Valentine et al., 2005). It was felt that a wide perspective could be gained through adopting the chosen method. Interviews and questionnaires were carried out, and compared to the reviewed literature to form an evidence based analysis.

The fieldwork study comprised of qualitative and quantitative research, in the form of interviews and questionnaires. Six interviews and twenty questionnaires were carried out with practitioners from a range of early years settings. Interviews were carried out in confidentiality, using semi-structured questions. Questionnaires were distributed alongside a letter detailing the nature of the study and the purpose of the research. The research was carried out within the Liverpool area. For ethical purposes, research was gathered anonymously and individual cases of children's care were not discussed.

Participants in the study primarily work or have worked with children with a diagnosis of autism; others worked with children who have similar needs. All of the participants in the study have used forms of

alternative communication with the children in their care; this includes but is not limited to Makaton, computer technology and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

The results are presented in the form of graphs and direct quotations, and are analysed using comparisons to current literature in order to gain a broad and constructive insight into the issues surrounding the topic.

Literature Review

> *"Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them*"
>
> National Autistic Society (2014)

It is universally expected that early years settings promote early social development through interaction, communication and independence (Thorpe et al., 2012; Dukes and Smith, 2009). The aim of this piece is to review a selection of literature and research around the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and its associated principles. This will be linked where possible to literature regarding Autistic Spectrum Disorder (referred to throughout as ASD or autism) and alternative communication methods, in order to construct an evidence base for the fieldwork research.

It should be noted that this research, whilst focusing on the issues surrounding the education of children with autism, does not intend to focus on the deficit model of disability. The study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a framework deemed appropriate for all children, with regard to the support and intervention for those with a diagnosis of ASD or similar complex needs.

"There is a strong imperative to move away from the deficit model of disability and to promote the successes and potential of learners on the autism spectrum"

Potter and Whittaker (2001)

The EYFS and Autism

"Children develop and learn in different ways. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities"

EYFS Practice Guidelines (2012:2)

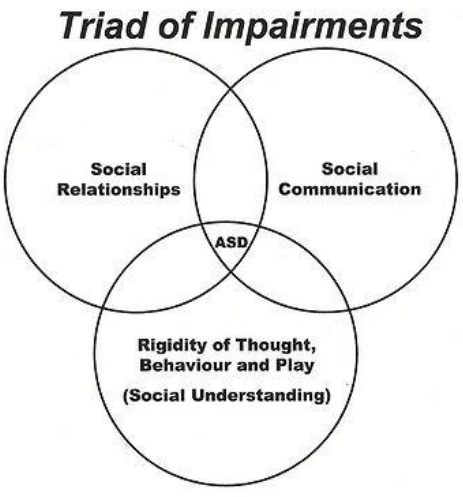
The 2012 'Early Years Foundation Stage' (EYFS) is the statutory framework which all early years practitioners must adhere to when caring for children from birth to age five. The guidance states that, "a child's experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances" (DfE, 2012). The key theme of the EYFS is to recognise and meet the individual needs of all children. The framework is underpinned by four main principles; to recognise every child as unique, to create positive relationships, to provide enabling environments and to understand that children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates (EYFS, 2012). Thorpe et al. (2012) note that children with a special need or disability may have 'reduced access' to peer interaction and social development opportunities due to the need for constant adult supervision or support and this suggests that independence skills may be limited.

Many aspects of the EYFS align with the current research in autism and early provision, including parent-partnership and specialised practice (Guldberg, 2010; Nutbrown, 2012). Dukes and Smith (2009) state that children may require adapted targets to suit their needs and for this reason practitioners should use their knowledge of SEN

to provide suitable activities, and have appropriate expectations for the children in their care.

It is estimated by The National Autistic Society that around 1 in 100 people in the United Kingdom have autism, and care and education settings are required to adapt and regulate their policies and procedures according to current practice (NAS, 2014). This adheres to current regulations set by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) (2001).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has been the topic of lengthy research and debate, and is of personal interest to the writer having worked with young children with ASD in a range of settings. It is known that autism exists as a spectrum of needs, ranging from 'high-functioning', to severe and complex; often alongside further learning or health needs. All individuals with autism will face difficulties in one or more areas of development, the most prevalent being social and communication development (Wall, 2010). Wing and Gould (1979) illustrated the autism 'triad of impairments' which defines the central areas in which all individuals with autism experience difficulty at different severities. It is now suggested that 'sensory sensitivity' should feature within the triad diagram as an 'integral' characteristic of autism (Wall, 2010).



Wing and Gould (1979)

Autism can be characterised by difficulties with social, emotional, communication and language development, with many individuals unable to acquire functional speech or communication, exhibit challenging behaviour and multiple learning difficulties (Kasari, 2002; Wall, 2010). The term ‘non-verbal’ has been contested due to the nature of language development. ‘Non-verbal’ can indicate that a child does not have the ability to speak at all, or that they are unable to use language in a functional or understandable manner, or possibly refusal or unwillingness to talk (Rudy, 2010; Autism Speaks, 2014). Whilst some individuals with autism experience near-typical development with speech and communication, there are some individuals that never develop speech at all, or who may develop a catalogue of words but lack the ability to use them functionally, often continuously repeating words or phrases (Landa, 2007; Cumine et al., 2010). It is known that ‘communication’ does not necessarily relate to spoken language; however the lack of ability to communicate verbally will undoubtedly have consequences for the learning and development of individuals (National Autistic Society, 2014). Due to extensive current research, it is becoming increasingly possible for those with severe or complex difficulties to acquire forms of communication (Potter and Whitaker, 2001). This project will focus on children with complex language difficulties, the implications that this has when working under the EYFS and consequent learning and development.

Guldberg (2010) compiled papers drawn from a range of research evidence, in order to investigate ‘best autism practice’ within the EYFS. This included suggestions that it is adjustments must made to both the physical environment, and the practice of professionals within the setting, in order to meet the specific individual needs of children with autism. It is known that functional language is crucial for both cognitive and social development (Wall, 2010; Guldberg, 2010),

this is specified within the EYFS with regard to its strong association with language, communication and social development.

Communication strategies

Cumine et al. (2010) state that although there has been a dramatic increase in interventions for children with autism in recent years, there is no single 'recommended' approach; due to the complexity and nature of the autism spectrum. Attention is drawn to the 'participation model' of communication in which individuals are enabled to participate socially and emotionally with the support of facilitators, usually adults; suggesting that this model can address barriers to inclusion (Mirenda, 2001; ASHA, 2004).

It has been claimed that Makaton is 'the most popular communication system' used for children with special needs in the United Kingdom (Sheehy and Duffy, 2009; Clarke and Clarke, 2000). Makaton is a form of signing, in which basic words, requests and commands can be made (Sheehy and Duffy, 2009; Van de Meer et al., 2012). Sheehy and Duffy (2009) convey some criticism upon the Makaton approach, suggesting that it can hinder spoken language and sentence structure, and that a lack of staff training and resource barriers can result in inconsistencies.

Children with little or no speech often use physical means of gaining attention or communicating needs. By putting non-verbal communication techniques into place, practitioners can give the child a 'voice' without the requirement of vocalisations; promoting independence and giving opportunities for social involvement (Plimley et al., 2007; Landa, 2007). Tissot and Evans (2010) refer to the benefits of using both auditory and visual prompts for teaching alternative communication strategies to children with autism. Research conducted by Van de Meer et al. (2012) found that visual aids and computer based speech aids were commonly used to

promote development of early communication in children with autism. It is suggested that systems such as PECS, in which symbols are physically exchanged to communicate needs, are often favoured by practitioners as less training is required due to its visual nature; it is regarded as a flexible approach as individuals can use their own symbols or photographs to represent objects or activities (Sheehy and Duffy, 2008; Mirenda, 2001).

Computer technology is becoming ever more prevalent within classrooms and early years settings, with many young children 'fluent' in using technology. Gardner (2000) states that the use of computer technology can engage an entire class of children and introduce a 'new realm' of possibilities in the world of education, suggesting that computer technology can promote inclusive practice. Technology is becoming increasingly accessible for young children with communication difficulties; however research has shown that it is often hindered by financial restraints or a lack of technological knowledge by practitioners (Mirenda, 2001; Gardner, 2000). Despite the varied suggestions that interventions designed to promote communication are deemed effective, Bayliss and Vakirtzi (2013) convey some criticism that communication methods 'built around' the perceived disability can in fact detract from the individual and complex needs of the child.

'Enabling environments'

This section will review current evidence relating to the 'enabling environments' guidance within the EYFS. Sub-headings are used to deconstruct the guidance, in order to make direct reference to autism and communication difficulties.

The 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) states that most children's needs can be met within mainstream settings, with appropriate adjustments made. It is essential that early

years practitioners have a good understanding of autism and be able to provide ‘autism-friendly’ learning environments (Guldberg, 2010; Wall, 2010). Wall (2011) illustrates the notion of ‘enabling environments’ as providing an environment in which children’s thinking, independence and learning development is supported, and play and learning opportunities that are appropriate to the child’s individual needs are presented. McAllister and Maguire (2012) emphasise the importance of the physical environment for children with ASD, stating that sensory, tactile and spatial stimuli need to be considered. In order to provide enabling, or ‘autism-friendly’ settings, the environment should be clearly structured and set out, with a strong focus on social and communication development, including visual or other communication aids (Guldberg, 2010; Solomon et al., 2012; Whitaker, 2007). An example of creating enabling environments for children with autism is the implementation of the TEACCH programme (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children); TEACCH ensures that the physical environment is suitable, and that routines and tasks are structured and presented visually (Cumine et al., 2010). It is suggested by Whitaker (2007) that children requiring extensive assistive intervention are often educated in specialist settings. This reflects approaches associated with the social model of disability, that the environment surrounding the child can create barriers to inclusion and learning (Bayliss and Vakirtzi 2013).

Van de Meer et al (2012) stated that, as many individuals with autism fail to develop functional or intelligible speech throughout adolescence or adulthood. It is imperative that alternative communication methods are implemented as soon as possible in order to allow communication and cognition development; therefore, providing an ‘enabling environment’ where the individual has the opportunity for independence, participation and choice from an early age to avoid becoming ‘institutionalised’ or dependent on others.

‘Inclusive Practice’

‘Inclusive practice’ is a key element of the EYFS, underpinned by its aim to recognise and respond to children’s individual needs. However, inclusion is an elusive concept, subject to varied interpretations (DfE, 2012; Armstrong and Richards, 2011). Inclusion can be broadly defined as addressing the barriers to participation, and using this information to identify the best ways of meeting the needs of the child. It is suggested that ‘true inclusion’ lies within enabling children to gain the skills that will help them to access the curriculum - and to use it to learn and explore - alongside the development of policy and practice to ensure wellbeing and safeguarding, as identified by the Department for Education (Jones, 2002; The Learning Trust, 2003).

‘Working Together’

The 2012 Nutbrown Review comprised of intensive research regarding the qualifications and training of early years professionals, in which it was stated that practitioners must have an excellent understanding of the EYFS and of identifying and acting on the individual needs of children (Nutbrown, 2012). This shows that current policy and practice reflects aspirations to enhance inclusive and ‘enabling’ provision, by providing settings with specially trained staff in order to fully support children with SEN, and ensuring high levels of communication and collaboration between practitioners.

‘The Learning Environment’

The EYFS specifies ‘learning and development’ requirements, the principles of which are based around learning through play, interaction and exploration. Landa (2007) recognises the ‘deficits’ in

play that are often displayed by those with autism. Phillips and Beavan (2012) note the four main developmental aspects linked with play; cognitive, social, language and emotional development. This, when compared with Wing and Gould's triad of impairment, demonstrates why so many children with autism seem to have difficulty with aspects of play. Wolfberg (1999) stated that, in order to fully engage in social play, children should interpret 'subtle social clues'; this links to the Vygotskian theory of the adult as the facilitator (Vygotsky 1978). In order to do this, Solomon et al. (2012) suggest that children with autism can be taught to play through 'functional learning'. This is recognised by Guldberg (2012) as providing the child with opportunities to initiate play and communication with others, therefore enabling progression in social functioning.

'The Learning Journey'

It is stated within the EYFS framework that practitioners must ensure that children are provided with activities that meet their developmental needs, including individual, peer and group learning opportunities to create a 'learning journey'. This is underpinned by the Vygotskian socio-cultural learning theory, including the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where the practitioner 'scaffolds' the learning of the children in their care by providing them with the tools and resources to play and learn 'freely' (Siraj-Blatchford 2009). This links directly to several pedagogical concepts; for example, the notions of both child and adult-initiated activities, and encouraging sustained shared thinking. Wall (2011) states that, particularly in the case of children with additional needs, practitioners must plan and provide appropriate learning opportunities which support children, and allow them to express their feelings and emotions, whilst providing opportunities for independence and interaction. It is recognised by Thorpe et al. (2012) that this notion is often difficult to

achieve for children for whom constant support or supervision is essential.

Inclusion Development Programme

The Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) was introduced in 2009 by the Department for Schools, Children and Families (DSCF) with the specific aim of improving outcomes for children with autism in early years settings, and additionally for children with similar needs who do not necessarily have a diagnosis of autism. The main aims of the programme are listed to help practitioners to develop the skills required to identify additional needs early, and to strengthen the strategic approaches within settings (DSCF, 2009:2). The guidance states that inclusion should not be defined as treating all children the same, but in recognising and providing for children's individual needs, allows them to grow, develop and learn (DSCF, 2009). The IDP states that it is imperative that additional or specific needs be identified early within early years settings, working in line with the EYFS (DfE, 2012:9), a process in which has resulted in a better understanding of autism (Guldberg 2012).

Methodology

The objective of this research was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and classroom assistants when working with children with special needs under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). For the purpose of the study, the focus is on children who are deemed 'non-verbal', and an investigation of the subsequent issues surrounding their early care and education. The aim was to compare the results to evidence highlighted in the literature review, suggested by Creswell (2012) as an effective means of carrying out evidence-based analysis.

The research was carried out on a small-scale basis, with both qualitative and quantitative data gathered; comprising of six interviews and twenty questionnaires. The purpose of this was to lessen the risk of generating biased data, with the knowledge that multi-method research allows the researcher to engage further with the participants (Cresswell, 2012; Torrance, 2012). The concept of triangulation, by gaining data by using differing methods, is viewed as a way of validating findings by drawing on varying sources of information (Creswell, 2012). It is known that the corroboration of evidence often enables the researcher to further understand the data and its meaning, as compared to single method investigation (Anderson and Burns, 1989), and for this reason the participants were chosen as they work across varied settings. Information letters detailing the assignment were given to each setting and participant prior to the study, describing in detail the purpose of the investigation, and the interview process. The consent forms specified clearly that the participants were invited to take part voluntarily, and may withdraw at any time without the need to give a reason. Each interview was recorded with a dictaphone before being transcribed. Participants were aware of this prior to the interview process, and it was explained that the recordings were to be used for transcription purposes only. Hard copies of the questionnaires have been retained for the presentation of the final study.

For ethical purposes, a discussion was held with professionals at Liverpool John Moores University prior to the research being carried out and permission was granted after review through the faculty ethics procedure at the Faculty of Education, Health and Community. It is imperative that ethical consideration is taken in all fieldwork research circumstances, in order to safeguard all involved (Flick, 2009; Torrance, 2012). Due to ethical implications when working with vulnerable young children it was determined that the study would focus on teachers' perceptions. This approach is suggested by Arthur

et al. (2012) and Valentine et al. (2005) as an effective means of gaining data without raising ethical concerns. This includes ethical issues that arise over participants' cognitive ability to make decisions to participate in research studies (Lewis and Porter, 2004).

All participants were informed that this project will be available to view by other participants, or those connected with the university on completion, and this ensured that all those involved were aware of the possible prevalence of the disclosed information. Although all data was collected anonymously and with confidentiality, it is still considered good ethical practice to disclose such information (Torrance, 2012). Participants of the study predominantly worked with children with a diagnosis of autism, or children with similar difficulties. All data gathered relates to children classed as 'non-verbal'. For ethical reasons, the details or education plans of individual children were not discussed, and the names and locations of settings or participants were not recorded as it is noted that research with vulnerable young people is increasingly difficult due to ethical concerns (Valentine et al., 2005).

Twenty questionnaires were distributed across a range of early years settings; the purpose being to identify the most commonly used alternative communication methods, and perceived challenges. Flick (2011) notes that the use of questionnaires allows the formulation of data from a larger number of participants than interviews; taking time restrictions into consideration. The questionnaires consisted partly of Likert-scale style questions, which rated the frequency of use of five methods of communication. This was deemed an effective way of gathering data which could then be signified in graphs. The second part of the questionnaire involved two open-ended questions in which participants were invited to identify both their preferred method of communication, and one which they found challenging. This methodology is reinforced by Munn and Drever (1990), with the notion that questionnaires are an efficient way to gain a larger

amount of data in a small time scale, and across a range of locations. The results are presented in graphs and quotes from the open-ended questions are used to highlight key themes found within the data.

Six interviews were carried out within Early Years settings, including both mainstream and specialised provision. Interviews produce rich and detailed data (Flick, 2011) but it is noted that the interview questions will in some way be motivated by the interviewers' personal and social context (Flick, 2009). The questions within the interviews were relatively broad; therefore, it was ensured that all questions were presented in the same way, in order to maintain consistency. This method does draw some criticism; Wengraf (2001) states that drawing inferences from qualitative data can be problematic due to the nature of semi-structured interview techniques possibly creating 'social unrealism'. The writer remained as neutral as possible throughout the interviews and the writing up process, in order to reduce the risk of this happening.

The interviews consisted of six questions, and were based around two main themes; alternative methods of communication, and the EYFS. This reflects the notion of standardised questioning but non-standardised prompts were likely to differ depending on the personal interpretation of each question by the participant (Anderson and Burns, 1989). Interviews were carried out in a controlled environment, where the privacy and anonymity of each participant was respected. Brief discussion was held with each participant prior to interview, which included an overview of the interview questions and invited the participants to ask any questions that they felt necessary.

Results

The following section is broken down into three parts; findings from the quantitative research (questionnaires), findings from the

qualitative research (interviews) and an amalgamation of the findings to identify key themes. The findings will be linked to evidence gathered within the literature review, in order to provide evidence-based analysis.

Findings from quantitative research

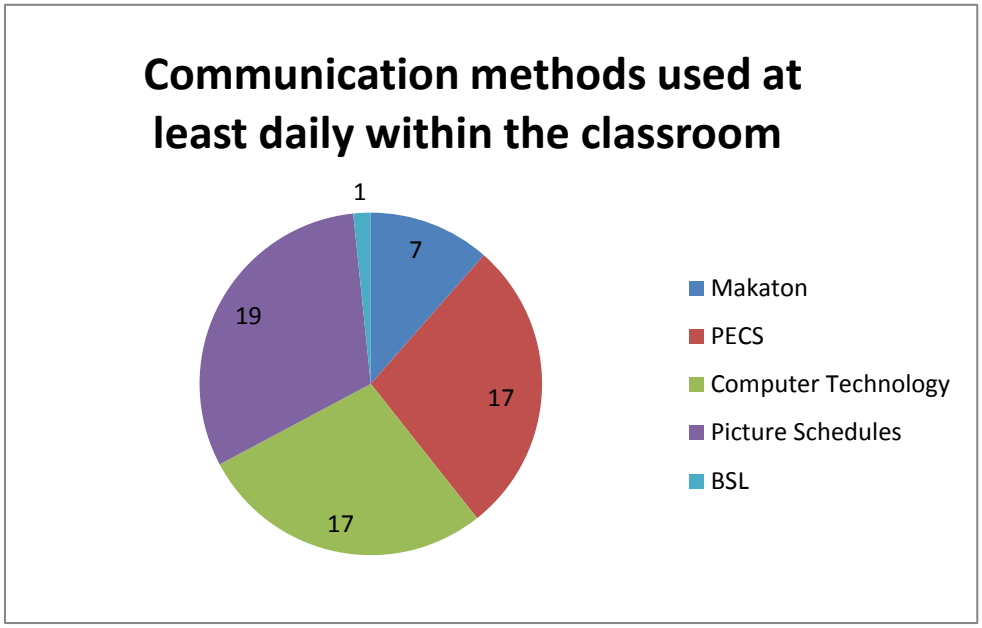


Diagram 1.

The results from the questionnaires were mixed and varied, although some common themes were identified. Of the twenty questionnaires returned, all practitioners used at least one form of alternative communication with a child or children in their care. Seventeen of twenty participants (85%) identified Makaton or British Sign Language (BSL) as challenging methods of communication; despite the suggestion that forms of signing are recommended for young children with autism or similar difficulties (Clarke and Clarke, 2000). Visual strategies were the most frequently used methods, with all respondents claiming to use them. 85% of participants use PECS at least daily, and 95% use picture schedules at least daily (n=20). 85% stated that they use computer technology at least once a day, but it

was not specified in which form or context; this method can cross many variables (Van de Meer, 2012; Gardner, 2000; Mirenda, 2001).

All but one of the completed questionnaires stated that PECS or Picture Cues were used at least daily within the setting, and it was described specifically as a successful communication method by sixteen of the twenty written responses (80%). One written response stated that 'PECS works quite well for making requests and choices' and others stated 'picture cues' and 'visuals'. This links to the findings of Sheehy and Duffy (2009) who suggested that visual strategies are deemed easier to implement, and usually require little or no formal training, and the suggestion of Mirenda (2001) that PECS is often deemed the most effective strategy for very young children with SEN; specifically autism. Despite this, there were some discrepancies raised regarding the use of PECS. The following are a selection of written responses:

> "*PECS doesn't encourage speech but is good for functional communication. Need to keep up to date with picture cards for new things, hard to find a picture that applies to all eg. Drinks look different"*
>
> *"Makaton and PECs can be difficult for those children who have fine or gross motor difficulties"*
>
> *"PECS systems rely on the child to be able to access the PECS book, and at times PECS symbols may not have been introduced"*
>
> *"PECS can be difficult as the pupils may not immediately relate a symbol to its meaning in reality"*
>
> (Written responses from questionnaires)

This suggests that, whilst all practitioners referred to visual strategies, they can come with significant problems in terms of

understanding and use. Although it was identified previously that ‘communication’ does not necessarily entail spoken language (National Autistic Society, 2014) some of the responses draw attention to the difficulties in not ‘encouraging’ speech, and the issue that with PECS being a visual and physical aid (usually in the form of a PECS book or chart) it may not always be available or appropriate.

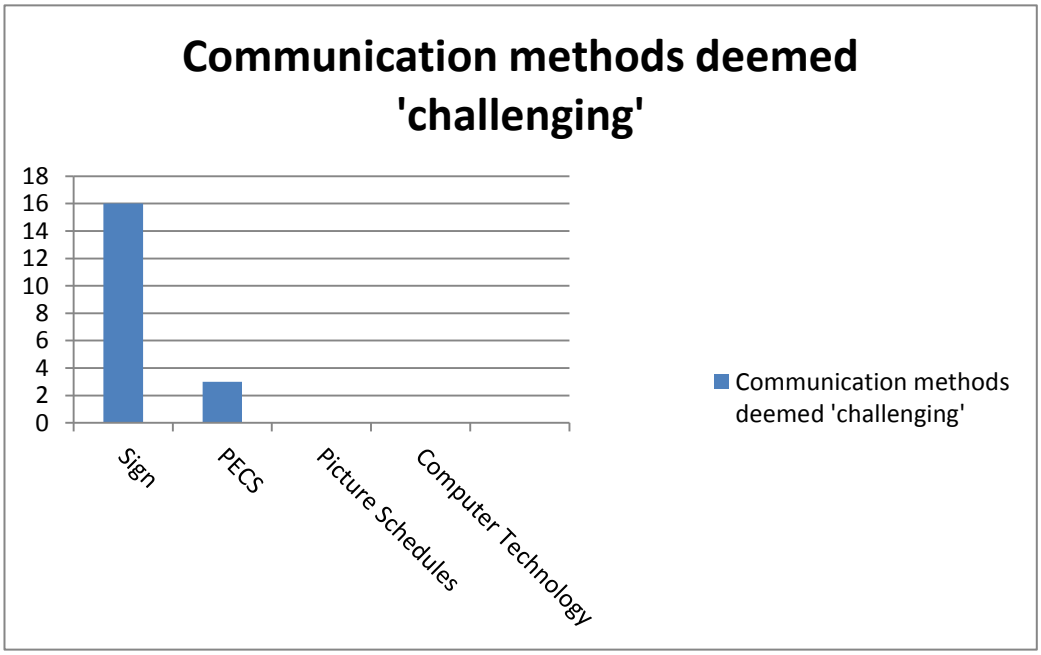


Diagram 2.

For the purpose of the above graph (Diagram 2), answers incorporating Makaton or BSL were combined in a single category of ‘sign’; the reason for this being some answers stated ‘Makaton’ some stated ‘BSL’ and others stated ‘sign’ or ‘all types of sign language’. It was felt necessary to combine these into a single category in order to avoid confusion or replicated data; as the subjects can be considered homogenous, that is, they each refer to a form of sign language. This approach is referred to by Agresti (2002) as a means of categorising results to allow interpretation, although it is accepted that this can in

some cases lead to assumption. It is viewed as appropriate for the nature and purpose of this research.

A selection of written responses compiled from the completed questionnaires are presented below. They indicate a common theme in the use of Makaton or BSL:

> *"Makaton can sometimes be challenging as training is often required + lots to remember"*
>
> *"Both sets of sign-language (Makaton/ British sign-language) due to lack of experience"*
>
> *"Makaton and British sign language as I have never used these methods before"*
>
> *"Makaton also relies on other understanding the sign the child is communicating. Verbal approximations also provide difficulty for adults to understand if the child's clarity of speech is poor"*

These answers indicate that a common issue is training and knowledge of signing systems; despite evidence which suggested that these are the most common communication methods used (Van de Meer et al., 2012; Tissot and Evans, 2010). Makaton scored highly in both frequency of use, and perceived difficulty (See diagrams). This suggests that whilst Makaton is viewed as a highly effective means of communication within early years settings, it is in fact perceived by staff to be a challenging method of communication; with the suggestion that whilst Makaton is perceived as highly successful and inclusive, barriers such as lack of resources and staff training can hinder its effectiveness (Sheehy and Duffy, 2009).

A key theme that emerged was a lack of knowledge of communication methods. When asked to describe a communication method that they find challenging, written responses included:

"Makaton and British Sign Language as I have never used these before"

"BSL – lack of knowledge"

"Do not find any challenging, however it can be challenging if new to the method"

Clearly methods of sign language are viewed as challenging or difficult to implement; this data represents findings by Sheehy and Duffy (2009), as discussed previously. However it should be taken into account that the question related to strategies that the practitioners themselves found challenging and does not necessarily represent the preferred methods of the children.

One written response claimed that a challenging element of alternative communication is when, 'A child with speech/language problems cannot tell us what is wrong'; the same participant stated that visual systems are the favoured communication method. Further responses claimed that;

"Makaton can be challenging if a child gets frustrated as they can't communicate the specific sign they want to use"

"Makaton and PECs can be difficult for those children who have fine or gross motor difficulties"

"May cause confusion if a pupil also has learning difficulties"

"[lack of understanding] can lead to challenging behaviour"

The above responses suggest that communication methods can be deemed challenging or 'ineffective' for a variety of reasons. If a child lacks the understanding of how to use it, or the comprehension of language or communication, many forms of communication may be inappropriate. This suggests that whilst alternative communication is undoubtedly essential for those who adapt to it, it does not always

overcome the barriers of understanding, as identified previously by Landa (2007) and Cumine et al (2010). This links to the suggestions that although visual strategies such as PECS are depicted as easily-implemented, they can cause difficulty in terms of language development as they do not necessarily encourage speech or using full sentences. This overall would suggest that creating 'enabling environments' for children with complex needs is ever-changing and not necessarily achievable by adopting common communication techniques.

In terms of identifying preferred methods of communication; the evidence gathered showed clear themes and similarities. Diagram 3 (below) illustrates the findings:

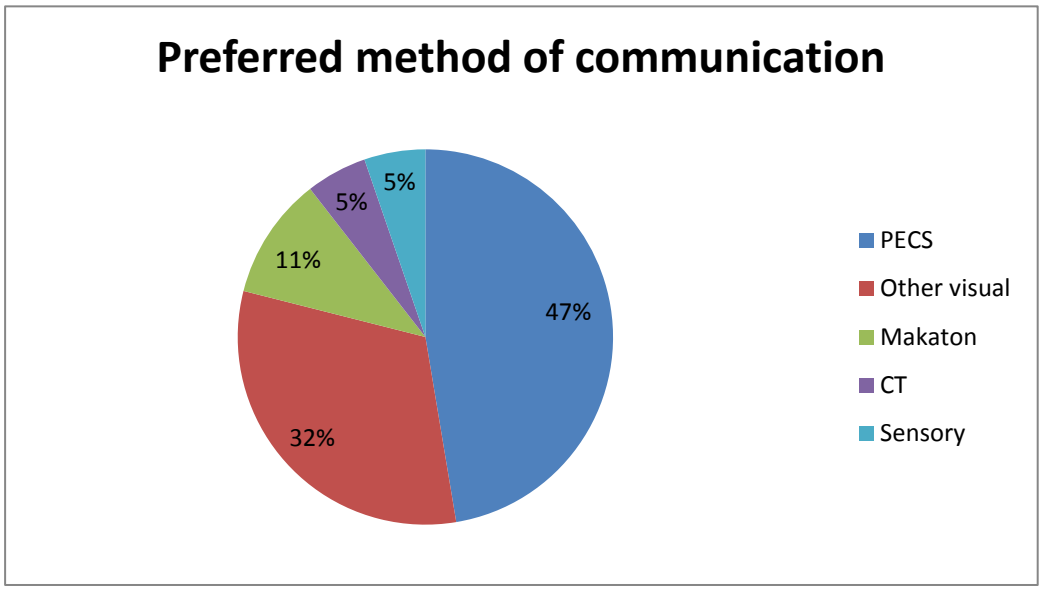


Diagram 3.

Other methods deemed effective were daily visual timetables (answered by three), TEACCH strips (answered by three), computer technology (answered by one), and 'sensory objects to engage in learning' (answered by one).

The responses combined within the 'Other Visual' category are broken down below:

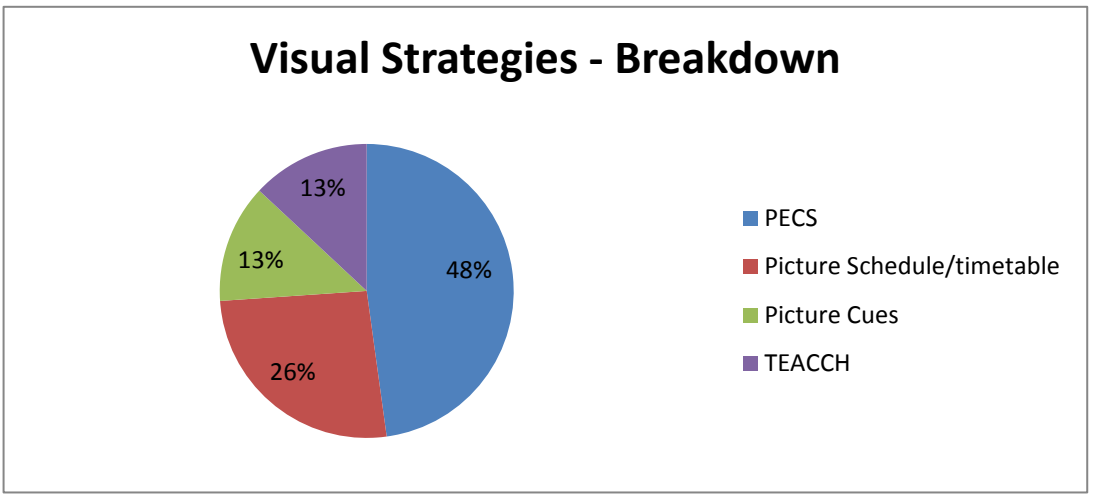


Diagram 4.

This highlights the findings by Cumine et al. (2010) which recognised that there is no 'one preferred' method, and often practitioners are required to master various communication strategies. It is clear that communication strategies are suited to children dependent on their individual needs and abilities, however visual strategies were deemed effective by all participants. Written responses illustrating the effectiveness of visual strategies are identified below:

> *"The child can see the routine of the day and know what is the next activity"*
>
> *"PECS works well for making choices"*
>
> *"Encouraging the children to learn to request independently"*

Overall it is acknowledged that the findings in general link to evidence previously gathered. However, there were some differences, including the perceived difficulty in using forms of sign language, with consideration to its popularity. As previously suggested, it is widely believed that sign language is the most

effective way of encouraging speech or vocalisations (Sheehy and Duffy, 2009; Van de Meer, 2012) however this can be contested. The prevalence of visual strategies was, as expected, clearly identified within the quantitative findings, indicating that they remain an integral form of communication in the daily lives of both children with communication difficulties, and the practitioners who work with them.

Findings from qualitative research

The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions, with the aim of gaining the personal perspective of the participants. Similarities were discovered across settings and individual practice; in terms of the favoured communication methods, and the prevalence of multi-sensory resources. The interview process aimed to draw together the use of communication techniques, and their relation to promoting enabling environments.

As the literature demonstrates, the EYFS defines 'enabling environments' to include the physical and emotional atmosphere within a setting; this includes the accessibility of resources, continuous provision in terms of play and learning opportunities, and the option to participate independently. The responses below indicate that this is clearly acknowledged:

> *"Sensory…sand, water play, sensory room, soft play room"*
>
> *"We have desks that are specifically assigned for some children that will have everything they need – their own work station"*
>
> *"We use PECS, TEACCH strips; we have a lot of PECS around the classroom"*
>
> *"The children have got their own PECS books which are portable"*

"Differentiated learning…resources suited to different needs"

The findings suggest that all participating settings have interpreted the provision of enabling environments in similar ways, as outlined within the EYFS principles. The settings show evidence of the use and importance of "stimulating resources, relevant to all the children's cultures and communities" (DfE, 2012:2); ensuring that resources are accessible and providing continuity, participation and inclusivity. This also reflects the findings of Guldberg (2010) who stated that the physical environment should be adapted to meet children's needs.

The following was an answer to the question 'how do you promote the personal, social and emotional development of children who are non-verbal?' This also indicates strong links between the classroom environment, inclusive practice, and the wellbeing of the child.

> *"It's difficult sometimes…on the playground you want them to be interacting with each other…obviously sometimes the kids that are non-verbal take up a lot of the time, compared to the kids that are verbal…we make sure that they're included as well because it's not fair to take them out of the setting"*
>
> (Classroom Assistant: Early Years Setting)

This immediately refers to inclusion, and can be linked to the suggestions that independence can be limited for children with complex needs (Guldberg, 2010; Jones, 2002). This reinforces findings from the reviewed literature, suggesting that it is not necessarily the acquisition of language that poses the greatest difficulty in communication; it is the matter of developing the ability to interact with the world around them (Landa, 2007; Cumine et al., 2010). It is increasingly difficult to specify a fixed definition of 'inclusion' as discussed by Armstrong and Richards (2011), and the findings suggest that difficulty arises due to the nature of the

difficulties associated with autism and the opportunities that the environment presents. This can be in terms of the classroom, the children's peer group, as identified below:

> *"We also carry our own things on our badges that they can access as well if they need to communicate anything"*

> *"There's things in place in the classroom, like visuals, and work stations, for particular children who need things like that"*

> *"I think sometimes it's difficult to be inclusive, to a certain extent, especially when you've got a high number of children in your room… especially children who need one to one support, supervision, help with most of the daily routine…"*

The 'Parents as partners' idea is a key element of the EYFS principles. As discussed in the reviewed literature, Guldberg (2010) deemed parent and teacher collaboration as an 'essential foundational element' of the education of children with autism. It is also highlighted within the framework that communication, maintenance and consistency of practice between practitioners are of paramount importance. This is clearly evidenced below, with reference to the importance of collaboration with parents and other practitioners. These responses give an example, albeit brief, of the importance of partnership and unison. It is well established that routine and consistency is key; this demonstrates a key strategy in maintaining consistency.

> *"Some parents request they want exactly the same symbols [that] we use here, so we'll print them off and send PECS symbols home to them"*

> *"The two children that are non-verbal, we've sent PEC books home with them"*

"We just have discussions all the time really to make sure we're on the same page and we know exactly what we're all doing"

"Home-school diaries are really important, to make sure that we know what a child's like when they're coming in, what kind of a morning or a night they've had"

The following also demonstrates understandings of the importance of collaboration between practitioners and other employees within the setting;

"We have a list that goes round to each classroom, and it's got any behavioural needs…so if there's any children out on the playground, people know how to get involved".

(Class Teacher)

As highlighted earlier, this links directly to findings from the Nutbrown Review (2012) with the proposal that all practitioners should have the training and ability to work collaboratively in order to provide the best outcomes for children in the setting.

The EYFS Practice Guidance states that practitioners can enhance the learning of children with additional needs by adapting the following visual strategies:

- Use pictures or consistent gestures to show children with SEN the expected behaviours.
- To support children with SEN, use a sequence of photographs to show the routines in the setting.
- Provide pictures or objects representing options to support children in making and expressing choices.
- Carefully prepare children with SEN, such as those with autistic spectrum disorder, for any changes to their routine. (DfE, 2012)

All of the interviewed participants referred to visual communication strategies such as PECS or TEACCH strips. Picture Schedules allow children with very limited cognitive or communicative functioning to visualise a range of situations, from using the toilet or crossing the road, to an entire day or even weekly timetable; therefore promoting self-management and independence (Mirenda, 2001); this is clearly highlighted in the data, with the prevalence of visual timetables being made clear.

Referring to children's sensory awareness and creating opportunities for learning, the EYFS states the following;

- Support children with sensory impairment by providing supplementary experience and information to enhance their learning about the world around them.
- Using senses to explore the world around them.
- Explores and experiments with a range of media through sensory exploration, and using whole body.
  (DfE, 2012:40)

These factors were represented within the research data, with the theme of sensory-based learning evident throughout. This links to current evidence, and also to the suggestion of incorporating 'sensory sensitivity' into the 'triad of impairment' due to its undoubtedly direct impact upon the learning of the individual (Wall, 2010).

> *"Sensory, lots of sensory stuff is really good for our non-verbal children"*

> *"It's quite broad the EYFS, and you can do a lot of multi-sensory things through the curriculum"*

"The lessons are incorporated with their needs included, so every single child's needs should be met within [those] lessons"

"If they're sensory we make sure that they've got a sensory programme that they follow, so it's basically making sure that their individual needs are met"

The literature reviewed for the purpose of this study had evidence underpinning the difficulties that many children face due to the nature of Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

"I think sometimes it's difficult to be inclusive, to a certain extent, especially when you've got a high number of children in your room. Sticking to ratios it's difficult…"

"…especially children who need one to one support, supervision, help with the daily routine and things"

(Class Teacher)

This response exemplifies the suggestions of Thorpe et al. (2012) who recognised that children with SEN often require continuous supervision, which can encroach upon the possibility of experiencing peer interaction, and could also suggest that practitioners find it difficult to allocate extra time to spend on learning strategies to aid learning or communication, due to class ratios and time constraints.

Summary of findings

In summary, the basis of the findings linked to current research and evidence surrounding autism, communication and the EYFS. The underpinning theme of both sets of results appeared to be the prevalence of visual aids or strategies. This is evidenced within the responses for both qualitative and quantitative sets of data. All

participants referred to visual schedules or timetables in some way, with twelve questionnaire responses stating that they used visual schedules continuously and five stating that they use them daily. All of the interviewed participants referred to visual communication systems. Seventeen respondents claimed to use computer technology daily; however this was not elaborated on within any of the responses. This could suggest a misunderstanding of the question, or that participants deemed 'visual' strategies to include the use of computers or other technology.

It could be argued that inconsistencies were found in terms of the prevalence of Makaton, in comparison to its perceived challenges identified by the research participants. However, it would be suggested that further in-depth study of Makaton could be carried out in the future, to enable a deeper insight into its use and challenges.

Key themes found in the qualitative and quantitative are combined and summarised as follows:

- Visual strategies were the most commonly used approach in all participating settings
- PECS were used at least daily by all of the participants
- Strategies requiring the use of signing were deemed the most challenging
- 'Lack of knowledge' was the most frequently stated reason for experiencing difficulty
- Visual strategies are deemed the most effective approach by 85% of participants (n=20)

Conclusion

In conclusion, a combination of reviewed literature and data analysis has recognised that the EYFS is based around the early identification of special or additional needs, and providing the correct support for

those who require it. Due to this, the study has found that the EYFS in itself is deemed largely inclusive of children with complex needs.

The literature review examined evidence regarding the EYFS, autism and communication strategies. Evidence was gathered highlighting the difficulties that individuals with autism face with regard to communication, language and social development; this was linked to a key underpinning theme of the EYFS; play and socialisation. The notion of 'inclusive practice' was critically analysed in order to do this. Reference was made to the 2009 Inclusion Development Programme, which was specifically implemented to benefit children with autism within early years settings.

It was found that visual strategies were the most effective means of communication with non-verbal children; with seventeen of twenty participants stating that they found visual strategies the most effective. Ninety-five percent of the twenty respondents used a visual strategy to communicate with the children in their care. This reflects findings in the literature, with significant emphasis on the assumption that visual strategies are less complicated to implement that, for example, strategies such as Makaton or TEACCH.

The interview responses also highlighted similarities; for example one hundred percent of respondents stating that they used PECS on a daily basis, and referring to visual systems throughout. Notions of inclusive practice were also highlighted, with the difficulties in social development and independence featuring as key aspects.

Some areas of difficulty were identified in terms of alternative communication methods. A common theme identified in the research data is conveyed by a lack of training or knowledge. For example, it was suggested that formal training should be undertaken in order to build a knowledgeable repertoire of Makaton, but that time and financial restrictions often prevent this. This highlights possible inconsistencies; Makaton is recognised as 'the most popular' form of

communication for young children who have not acquired speech; however this does not necessarily identify that it is the favoured method. It was also highlighted that methods such as PECS are only effective if the child using it understands the concepts, and has access to all of the symbols that they require. It was suggested that PECS does not encourage the use of speech, and could therefore discourage spoken language.

Comparisons were drawn to current evidence through reviewed literature, and analysis of the data gathered through fieldwork evidence. It is felt that the amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative research data has provided a broader insight into the study.

Recommendations for future research

This research has given a viewpoint to the perceptions of early years practitioners who work with children with complex SEN. However, the research was undertaken on a small-scale basis, with a limited number of interviews and questionnaires. Recommendations for future research would include a larger scale study, with participants from a wider sample area. Further research could be undertaken to investigate the communication strategies used by older children, adolescents and adults to determine which approaches are the most suitable for transition into adulthood or later life.

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Targets, testing and league tables: the changing nature of primary teachers and leaders' work, identity and professionalism

"Is there any hope for teacher professionalism within the current socio-political environment?" (Gray, 2006: 63). Historically teacher professionalism emphasised the importance of individualism, personal resources and autonomy. Achieving high professional status was seen as priority (Nias, 1989). The idea of professionalism is disputed, with differing definitions (Hoyle and John, 1995). Social constructionists believe that professionalism has different limitations depending on place, time and political environment; this could link to teacher professionalism which changes over time due to political influences (Locke et al., 2005; Days et al., 2006). In recent years teaching has been seen as a mix of league tables, performance and testing which has led to a performative culture (Bryan, 2012). Teacher professionalism today has been moulded to fit professional teaching standards, introduced by New Labour in 2007; however the White Paper 2010 outlined plans to remould teacher professionalism (Evans, 2011). Primary teachers are currently suffering from a negative relationship with the government as they believe their work is becoming too politically motivated (Cunningham, 2002).

Towards the end of the 20th century the pace of change in legislation and administration in education was great (Gardner, 2002). The Plowden report (1967) was the first official report on primary education since 1931 and took a child centred approach to education (Suttle, 2011). It began to look at education in the wider social context. Themes shown throughout the report are curriculum flexibility, children's play, the use of the classroom environment, and

evaluating children's learning. It should not be accepted that the only valuable things in education are measurable (Blackstone, 1967 and Gillard, 1995). The authors of the 'Black Papers' criticised primary schools, and blamed the Plowden Report. The papers were written by right wing educationalists; however, the Plowden report was published when labour was in power therefore the authors of the black papers are going to be critical of any changes to education while a left wing party was in power. All papers condemned comprehensive education and teaching methods. They criticised the lack of discipline in schools and blamed comprehensive education for academic students not being able to obtain their potential (Cox and Boyson, 1977).

Before 1988 teachers' identity was about being child centred, freedom from government control was taken for granted (Nias, 1989; Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). The Education Reform Act (1988) generated competition between schools to raise standards within education. The belief was poor schools should be allowed to fail, good schools able to develop and new providers allowed to enter the market (Dearden and Vignoles, 2011). This would lead to teachers having incentive to adhere to market pressures. Today, having the education system as a market place has led to lots of head teachers following a chief executive model of leadership, they are visible in school however push teachers for results to compete in the market (Hughes, 1976). The act also introduced the national curriculum, which led to great change within education. Primary teacher's professional identity since 1988 has been overpowered with accountability leading to reduction in job satisfaction. Richards (2001) and Alexander (2009) believe that today's education is in the age of domination. Some teachers argue that the introduction of the national curriculum has meant their profession has been deskilled and lost individuality. Teachers 'deliver' the national curriculum as it is a statutory requirement but 'delivering' suggests little personality

(Garratt and Forrester, 2012). Nevertheless some believe that teaching styles still vary depending on the school and teacher (Cunningham, 2002). The curriculum was perceived as beneficial, giving parents and pupils a clear guide about what they would be learning throughout school, whilst providing a framework for teachers. In the 2014 curriculum, Literacy, Numeracy and Science are highlighted as core subjects, mirroring previous reforms (Shaw, 2014). Targets, testing and league tables are pushed throughout the new curriculum (Moon, 2010).

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has been the cause of illness, stress, anxiety and overall fear for lots of teachers. Ofsted was introduced in 1992 after a long period of criticism surrounding the education system, the first primary inspection was in 1994 (Holmes, 2000; Ward, 2013). The aim was to ensure that the curriculum was delivered properly, arguably Ofsted are a form of control and surveillance ensuring compliance with government's education agenda (Garratt and Forrester, 2012). Accountability surrounding the 1988 Education Act led to visibility for primary schools so the general public could see what was happening, this was seen as pressurising for teachers and perceived to weaken their professional integrity, today inspections are available for everyone to view online (Cunningham, 2002; Bryan, 2012).

The National Union of teachers (NUT) conducted a study using 16,000 teachers, 62% stated preparation for Ofsted inspections was the central reason for the excessive work load felt by teachers (Exley, 2014), this is supported by Teachline First (2000) who stated inspections are the main cause of stress for teachers (Holmes, 2000). The NUT study did not state what teachers they questioned. The NUT will try to highlight negatives within the system, as their aim is to improve working standards for teachers, nevertheless it does show that a majority of teachers are unhappy with inspections. Ofsted has its advantages, as it allows knowledge and skills to be

recognised. However, teaching is not necessarily poor even if Ofsted suggest it is, as their main focus, especially since 2012 has been Literacy and Numeracy, whether a school is delivering a balanced curriculum has been forgotten (Shepherd, 2012; The Guardian, 2014). Teachers are encouraged to learn from Ofsted inspections as a form of development (Beere, 2012), however what happens in the snapshot of a lesson is published for all to see. Since the coalition government came into the power the idea of performance has been pushed further, teachers feel that parts of the curriculum have been marginalised in order to pass an inspection (Paton, 2014). During 2012, tension rose between teachers and Ofsted, as the chief inspector stated that teachers did not understand what stress was, although he was previously a teacher (Shepherd, 2012). Recently Ofsted have been completing more observations, intensifying anxieties surrounding an inspection. As well as the inspector, a senior member of staff is likely to be present, leading to internal and external pressures (Forrester, 2005; Beere, 2012). It has been suggested that good teachers will use observations as a formative assessment, therefore will not feel stressed (Beere, 2012; Bartalo, 2012).

For a school market to happen a choice and accountability system was required to publicise the data about schools academic achievements. League tables were introduced into primary schools in 1996. Schools examination results are published, observing how teachers are performing and helping to inform parental choice (Leckie and Goldstein, 2009). Key stage 2 results are published; the focus on test results has undoubtedly put pressure on teachers that is then sometimes passed onto children, the pressure felt can lead to all involved feeling demotivated (Webb, 2006; Bartalo, 2012; Garratt and Forester, 2012). The pressure of results being published has led to one dimension teaching, surrounding academic achievement (Dearden and Vignoles, 2011). League tables have had a negative

impact on professionalism as teachers feel untrusted. There is a lot of pressure on teachers for short term measurable results, without taking into consideration teachers' professional self-esteem (Hargreaves, 2008). The idea of league tables was to allow for parental choice as a way of empowering parents, however it is disempowering teachers. Teachers have intense workloads and league tables can challenge their professional identity (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). Using league tables as a guide to how a school is performing can be highly misleading as they do not discuss socio economic background, yet many parents still use them (Leckie and Goldstein, 2008).

Testing in education is always under scrutiny by the public and politicians, it has been suggested that England has one of the most complex and reformed qualification systems; Children within the English education system are the most assessed in the world (Eccelstone, 2012). Gunter and Rayner (2007) argue that developments within education means that failure is always perceived to be the schools and teachers fault. Examination is defined as "detailed scrutiny of an object usually involving a microscope" (Inglis and Aers, 2008:80). Within targets, testing and league tables the object under scrutiny is the teachers and the 'microscope' could be seen as the inspectors, head teachers and government. Testing is used to assess how effectively the curriculum is being taught. At Key Stage 2, under the coalition government, schools are seen to be underperforming if less than 60% of pupils are reaching a level 4; this does not take into account the percentage of special educational needs in the school or the socio economic area (Bryan, 2012).

The National Strategies for Numeracy and Literacy were put in place to enforce uniformity in teaching; this is again deskilling teachers and undermining them as professionals. The strategies led to further testing and observation. Evidence suggests that primary teachers

and head teachers are enthusiastic about national strategies, implementing teaching approaches they have learnt through the strategies. It has been suggested that National Strategies solved the problem surrounding how to teach Literacy and Numeracy, however some argue it was removing authority from teachers and giving more authority to the state, which was initially seen as having a negative impact on teacher autonomy (Cunningham, 2002; Kellet, 2004).

Using standardised testing has raised performance but arguably came at a cost as teachers are no longer seen as autonomous professionals; the narrowness of the curriculum is seen as being disadvantageous to pupils as well as it is taking away flexibility for teachers (Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter, 2010). The autonomy felt in teaching pre 1988 is being lost as teachers are being assessed against external criteria's. Michael Gove was appointed education secretary in 2010, his approach towards teachers was to dictate to them that they would be to blame if they did not ensure their pupils behaved well and succeeded (Boffey, 2012). The new education secretary, appointed in 2014, Nicky Morgan stated she would do everything possible to ensure teachers spend more time teaching and reduce their work load. It could be argued she is trying to please teachers as this speech given at a conservative conference although sounded positive, did not have any clear policy announcements (TES, 2014). The coalition government is currently trying to raise standards to develop the idea of Great Britain having a 'world class' education system (Paton, 2014).

The drive to meet what are seen as 'important' targets is so high, that it means other targets are being missed (Inglis and Aers, 2008).The Cambridge Review of primary education (2009) was funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation , it was part of the largest independent investigation in 40 years for education. The foundation funds work of organisations to achieve positive change; this could affect the outcomes of the review to have a slant towards the foundations

ethos. The reviews main argument is that change is needed in education (Garratt and Forrester, 2012; Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 2014). It argues that arts and humanities have been pushed out and suggests that learning in primary schools is heavily slanted towards formally tested subjects which results are then published in league tables. The Excellence and Enjoyment initiative (2003) claimed to try and promote creativity and enjoyment through the wider curriculum (Department for Education and Skills, 2003), however the coalition government still emphasises Literacy , Numeracy and Science as core subjects and places pressure on performance levels in these areas, so therefore are arguably ignoring the Cambridge review and Excellence and Enjoyment . However, with these being brought in by labour government, this is possibly not surprising (Shaw, 2014). Head teachers that are more likely to take notice of the Excellence and Enjoyment initiative would follow the leading professional model of leadership, these head teachers will decide on policy making but are more flexible, they like to consult with staff and outside agencies, they try to be child centred (Hughes, 1976).

Inspections, the national curriculum and standardised testing are the most intensely conflicting developments in the education system since World War Two (Holmes, 2000). Primary education is nationally important, however conflicting thoughts surrounding teacher professionalism and the amount of control the state should have will mean that primary education will remain having a high level of visibility for years to come (Cunningham, 2002). The accountability surrounding primary education leads to questions about the purpose of primary education. Is it to develop individual personalities and talents or is it to improve standards for testing? At the moment possibly improving standards is the ‘purpose’ as the government drive their ambition of a ‘world class’ education system (Johnston, 2002; Paton, 2014). The pressure of targets, testing and league tables is still great and arguably getting worse as the coalition

continues to add pressure onto todays teachers. This is having a negative impact on teachers work, identity and professionalism, however a positive effect on standards. The evidence surrounding targets, testing and league tables would conclude that the statement 'targets, testing and league tables have gone too far' is true for teachers identity, leadership work and professionalism.

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Pedagogy and primary teaching

It is widely assumed that today there is no single style of teaching endorsed by everyone. How a teacher delivers their lesson is dependent on factors such as age, background and ability (Dunne and Wragg, 1994). With ever increasing pressures on teachers from the government and Ofsted, teachers now have to be more than just advocates of education. The introduction of league tables and constant assessment means primary teachers have to be effective in their pedagogical approaches to teaching children and how they deliver the governments' ever changing focus on different aspects of the curriculum within this. The term 'effective' however can be scrutinised and apparent in many different forms. Alexander (1995 cited in Gipps, MaCallum and Hargreaves 2000:5) suggests an effective teacher has a range of "organisational strategies and teaching techniques… [and] selects from this pedagogical repertoire according to the unique practical needs and circumstances of his or her professional situation…" Alexander puts forward the view that teachers should have a wide range of teaching strategies and should be able to adapt their teaching style in any given situation. However, how much autonomy teachers actually have inside their own classroom whilst trying to deliver a constrained curriculum can have a massive impact upon this. It can also bring into question how effective the teacher is actually being, are they merely just ticking boxes to meet current government policies or are they creatively using effective pedagogical approaches to teaching to inspire young children and promote learning? McNess et al. (cited in Hewitt, 2008) suggest that there is an over emphasis on the term effective and it could in fact damage the quality of learning long term (Hewitt, 2008).

This piece will examine how effective pedagogy can be more than just delivering a curriculum put forward by the government. It will also look at the expectations of the government and the wider effects Ofsted can have upon a classroom environment and the impact of their grading.

Firstly pedagogy is a contentious term. Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) define it as techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place. It can also include more than just the learning environment (and actions of the family and community), but the interactive process between the practitioner and learner. Alexander (2004, cited in Eaude, 201:13) defines pedagogy as, "…what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted." With both views of pedagogy it can be summarised by Gage (1985 cited in Blatchford et al, 2011) who believed pedagogy to be "the science of the art of teaching." However, in 2010 the government published The White Paper depicting the 'Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) and explaining the overarching political ideology that drives practice. This document does not mention the term pedagogy once throughout, so it would seem their current view would critique Gage and put forward there is no art or science behind being an effective teacher. The coalition's focus was switched to prescribing a more rigorous and tighter curriculum, rather than that of the previous government which they deemed to contain too much that was not essential and little to stretch children to achieve standards (DfE, 2010). It should be noted that a newly elected government focus on reforms and try to distance themselves with what the previous Government has implicated themselves. Then Secretary for Education Michael Gove puts forward in the document that there is a need for "…profound structural change and rigorous attention to standards" (DfE, 2010:7). This could show an early indication that the coalition's view on

effective teaching is addressing standards with precision and teaching pedagogy should adopt a more didactic and rote form.

It is important to note that children's learning takes place in many different forms. Effective teaching is about tailoring the learning taking place to meet the needs of all children. This is supported by Piaget's theory around assimilation and accommodation. He believed that "…the ability to assimilate varies from child to child and that educational material must be tailored to each child's cognitive structure" (Hergenhahn, 1976:353). Piaget put forward that in order for learning to take place, children need to have partly known (assimilated) and partly unknown (what will be accommodated) material provided. By making available mildly challenging experiences for the child, this dual process can equate to intellectual growth. This theory puts a much greater emphasis on the role of the teacher as a facilitator but could question if it is actually effective teaching. A second theory of learning is Vygotsky's social constructivist theory. This differs to that of Piaget's theory as he believes that it is not only the child's pre-requisite knowledge that learning depends on, but also the capacity to learn with help (Croll and Hastings, 1996). This model supports the argument for a more knowledgeable other, so in theory the practitioner could facilitate learning in a way in which their peers learn from one another. This can be evident in current classroom practice when children are split up into smaller groups and posed a question in which they have to collaborate for one specific answer. It could be suggested that Vygotsky's theory is a view of creative learning and this is how the previous Labour Government depicted effective teaching, whereas Piaget's theory, a more didactic and rote form of learning, is how the current coalition see effective teaching practice.

Jones and Wyse (2013) argue that the most positive aspect of the coalition government's ideology is the commitment to allow schools to have more freedom in curriculum development. However, the

rhetoric of more control is contradicted by parallel initiatives such as the phonics test. This would then seem that the government is in fact narrowing the curriculum, as a result of inspection pressures by OFSTED and comparisons of teacher and school scores (Jones and Wyse, 2013). Since the national curriculum was formed from the Education Act of 1988, it has been a subject of much reform and controversy. In principle the national curriculum is widely agreed to be a necessity for teachers in order for them to teach effectively, the main issues seem to surround the content. Robin Alexander wrote in the Cambridge Primary Review that the government should "…work towards a pedagogy of repertoire rather than recipe, and of principle rather than prescription" (CPR, 2009:8). Alexander agrees that there should be a curriculum for teachers to follow but argues the government should establish new aims and values to drive 21st century teaching. The curriculum should not just be tailored to the core subjects of Mathematics, Science and English, but develop the whole child instead whilst incorporating creative perspectives. This would take up to 70% of the teaching requirement while the other 30% to focus on the 'core' modules (CPR, 2009:23). It should be noted that Alexander is critiquing the previous Labour Government and not the coalition who were pre 2010. Beetlestone (1998) agrees that teaching creatively can improve the quality of education, make learning more meaningful and open more exciting ways of approaching the curriculum. This could mean giving teachers more autonomy and freedom to teach children which would then allow a broader pedagogical approach. However, this could mean teachers use the curriculum as a narrow guideline and teach the subjects in which they feel most confident at. This could then deem the teaching as not being effective and not delivering government expectations. Pavlov's model of classical conditioning could then be applied, for example if a teacher has a certain dislike for maths and delivers this in a rigid and authoritarian atmosphere that this could create a negative attitude towards the subject (Hergenhahn, 1976). In

consideration on an international perspective, the Education Department for Hong Kong states that "…schools should also encourage students to inquire beyond the confines of 'curriculum prescriptions' and textbooks, and to process information and make their own judgements in order to enhance their knowledge-building capacity. (Hong Kong Education Department, 2002:78, cited in Watkins et al., 2007). Hong Kong uses the curriculum as guidelines, and promotes wider learning so teaching is not constrained. It remains to be seen however if this could be deemed as effective teaching because children may never consistently learn the same curriculum as the previous year group.

In order for schools to prove their teaching practice is effective and they are indeed delivering the curriculum, they have to be independently inspected. Ofsted's purpose is to ensure a minimum acceptable standard that schools must adhere to, with the rationale behind regular Ofsted inspections in order to raise standards (Williams, 1997). Ofsted do have a fundamental role and Dunne and Wragg (1994) believe that a feature of effective teaching is that the skill concerned is acknowledged to be a skill by those competent to judge, this might include teachers, inspectors and learners themselves. Ofsted raises expectations by setting the standards of performance and effectiveness expected of schools. In doing this they have the impetus to act where improvement is needed (OFSTED, 2014). However, some believe that Ofsted themselves and the grading system awarded is a flawed process. The specific marking criteria schools are judged on is constantly reviewed and reformed as each government's opinion on what is 'outstanding' differs. Dunn (2011) puts forward Ofsted's criteria for outstanding is just a bit more than good. There is no specific framework to achieve an outstanding grade, but the focus should be on ensuring outstanding learning inside the classroom first and foremost. This can also be echoed from Alexander (CPR, 2009) as he feels the

focus should be on the classroom and not on the documentation. The arising problem is that the school systems are now run like a business. Whilst Ofsted assess achievement, teaching quality, behaviour and leadership, they also look at culture and how the school works with the surrounding community. A recent story from the Telegraph has seen a school not achieve the outstanding grade from Ofsted because it was deemed 'too white' (Paton, 2014). The contradiction is that you can have effective teaching whilst delivering the curriculum because Ofsted have awarded this outstanding, however the overall school mark does not achieve the grade because it does not promote community involvement or engage with different multi-cultural beliefs. Aniscow et al. (1995) however believes this to be of key importance because culture actually influences effective teaching with the values and beliefs of the school. Stoll (1998) also supports Aniscow by suggesting schools must improve from within and by this it is not just changing personal or the curriculum. It requires a respect and understanding of the different meanings and interpretations people bring into education and a shared value of norms.

Lastly, in order to be an effective primary teacher and achieve an outstanding grade, practitioners must engage with behaviour management within the classroom. To have an effective pedagogical repertoire, teachers must be able to tailor the different needs of children. This is evident in the Teaching Standards document where practitioners must "manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils' needs in order to involve and motivate them" (OFSTED, 2014:12). An Ofsted report on achieving good behaviour in schools also deemed that "good behaviour is a necessary condition for effective teaching and learning, and an important outcome of education" (OFSTED, 1993:1). Establishing a framework for discipline is key, so that children understand boundaries and in order to minimise classroom disruption. Croll and

Hastings (1996) add that teaching strategies that are effective in promoting learning are also effective in minimising disruption and distraction. If children are engaged with the curriculum and it is being taught creatively then less disruption will occur so effective teaching can take place. A recent YouGov survey has shown that pupils are potentially losing up to an hour of learning each day due to this kind of disruption (OFSTED, 2014).

To summarise this discussion, effective primary teaching, to an extent, is about delivering the curriculum and being graded outstanding. Although Ofsted's methods to judge schools can be contentious it is a necessity. Primary schools need guidelines and a curriculum to follow, whether government intervention is necessary to depict the content is a different issue altogether. However, the current government do leave some room for innovation and creativity inside the confines of the curriculum. The government's White Paper (2010) indicates there should be a new approach to the national curriculum. There should also be more autonomy inside the classroom and more innovation to teaching pedagogy. This will then become a benchmark and schools will be judged on this instead of the prescriptive straightjacket that it once was previously. This view coincides with Robert Alexander and his views that teachers should have more autonomy in the classroom and with the curriculum. This is also apparent in the Teaching Standards document that all teachers must adhere to, by which they must "…contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s)" (DfE, 2011: p11). To an extent effective teaching is then more than just delivering the curriculum and being graded outstanding. The freedom and enjoyment of learning must be promoted first and foremost, as well as what teaching goes on inside the classroom. You could have effective teaching methods and outstanding learning, but not receive the appropriate grade from a government perspective. What one would see as outstanding,

another may see as merely good or acceptable. Effective pedagogical strategies embedded in an outstanding and creative lesson structure fits somewhere between the two contrasting views. The answer is in a rather grey area, as both arguments seem to want the same outcomes, however it is just the process of how to achieve them within the overhanging government ideologies and that is still the ongoing debate.

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