



MEd Adult and Community Education

Assignment Cover Sheet

Student Name Connell John

(Please ensure that full name is entered and that it is the same name given at Registration)

Student Number 63146517

Student Email john.a.connell.222@mumail.ie

Module Code AD 610

Assignment Title **Thesis Submission**

Date 25th June 2023

Painting by Numbers: How Provision of Education for People with Intellectual Disabilities Leads to Exclusion from Further Education

John Connell

Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the MEd in Adult and Community Education

Department of Adult and Community Education Maynooth University

2023

Supervisor: Dr Margaret Anne Nugent

Acknowledgements

I would like to first thank the participants who gave their time freely and were fully open to the discussions had during the interview process. I am deeply indebted to you all for your valued contribution. To my classmates and colleagues in the adult education department at Maynooth university, I say thank you also. The rich dialogue that took place during our weekly sessions was fundamental in shaping the manner in which my research came about. Deep philosophical debate was often challenging and created an environment where we grew as individuals. To the faculty at the university, I will miss each and every one of you. The care and patience shown by every one of you was a shining example to all educators. A deep sense of teamwork was felt throughout my time in the department. Even though my time there has come to an end I feel that I am now a part of the department of adult education, a badge I will wear with pride. To Dr Margaret Nugent, most of the credit for this thesis should lie at your door. Your gentle encouragement yet critical eye helped guide and shape concepts in the field of special education. I felt insanely lucky to have such a lovely lady all to myself for the duration of the course. To everyone who gave their time and advice over the course of the last number of years through my journey of becoming an adult educator, I thank you all. My long-suffering wife most of all. I love you and hope I offer you half the support you have given me during our precious time together.

Abstract

People with Disabilities, be they physical, mental, or intellectual, have always been on the margins of modern western society. And as a marginalised group, find themselves subject to a disproportionate influence of power. This power comes in many forms, within their daily relationships and the power handed down through administrative processes. Post-Structuralist philosopher, Michel Foucault, believed that power influences how every member of society acts and thinks. Using Foucauldian principles, I demonstrate how power structures negatively affect the education of people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Not only in the exorcizing of power over students, but how power acts within society to establish social norms, shaping the thoughts and opinions of educators, practitioners, and parents. Through discussions with practitioners within special education I have highlighted societal structures, through which power is manifested within this particular epoc of the Irish education system and made suggestions as to how provision can change to ensure SEN learners have greater access to educational opportunities, in whatever form that entails, for future generations.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | I |
| ABSTRACT | II |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | III |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW | 2 |
| INTRODUCTION | 2 |
| REMOVAL FROM SOCIETY..... | 3 |
| THE CLINICAL MODEL | 3 |
| CATEGORISING INDIVIDUALS ACCORDING TO DISABILITY | 6 |
| HISTORY OF SPECIAL ED IN IRELAND | 7 |
| THE EPSEN ACT..... | 8 |
| REFORMS WITHIN THE EPSEN ACT | 9 |
| THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM..... | 10 |
| CLASSIFICATION OF DISABILITY | 12 |
| FORMS OF RESISTANCE | 14 |
| NORMALISATION..... | 15 |
| CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY | 17 |
| ONTOLOGY | 17 |
| EPISTEMOLOGY | 20 |
| METHODS..... | 23 |
| <i>Recruiting Participants</i> | 24 |
| <i>Data collection and analysis</i> | 28 |
| <i>Ethical Considerations</i> | 30 |
| <i>Limitations</i> | 31 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS | 32 |
| THE INFLUENCE OF POWER ON LEARNERS | 32 |
| HIERARCHICAL OBSERVATION: ONGOING SURVEILLANCE OF THE SEN LEARNER..... | 32 |
| <i>The microsystem</i> | 32 |
| <i>The mesosystem</i> | 34 |
| <i>The exosystem</i> | 36 |
| NORMALIZING JUDGEMENT: FUNDING MODELS AND LEARNER CENTRED PRACTICE | 37 |
| <i>Funding young adults to access training</i> | 37 |
| <i>More people accessing Special Ed</i> | 41 |
| <i>Types of training available and Options for progression</i> | 42 |
| THE EXAMINATION: ABLEISM AND EXCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN EDUCATION | 43 |
| <i>Post Primary Education</i> | 43 |
| <i>Further Education</i> | 44 |
| <i>Higher Education</i> | 46 |
| <i>Day Services</i> | 47 |
| <i>Reflective Practice</i> | 48 |
| <i>Staff Agency</i> | 49 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS | 52 |
| CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION | 55 |
| INTRODUCTION | 55 |
| AREAS OF FURTHER STUDY..... | 56 |
| POSITIVE PRACTICES | 56 |
| A LONG WAY TO GO..... | 57 |

FINAL CONCLUSION 58

BIBLIOGRAPHY 59

APPENDICES - 1 -

APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL - 2 -

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM - 6 -

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - 10 -

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

People with disabilities (be they physical, mental, or intellectual) have always been on the margins of modern western society. And as a marginalised group, find themselves subject to a disproportionate influence of power within their daily relationships and the power handed down from administrative processes. Post-Structuralist philosopher, Michel Foucault believed that power influences how every member of our society acts and thinks. In the literature review I apply Foucauldian principles, to demonstrate how power structures negatively affect the education of people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Not only in the exorcizing of power over students, but how power acts within society to establish social norms, shaping the thoughts and opinions of educators, practitioners, and parents. Institutions dedicated to the Human Sciences (Foucault M. , *The Order of Things*, 1966(2002), pp. 380-389), have specialised in the provision of care to people with intellectual disabilities for hundreds of years and only recently, have been charged with the provision of education for people with SEN (Shevlin, 2016). This advent has been a blessing and a curse for these marginalised people. On one hand, people who would otherwise have not had an opportunity to experience education are now able to access such. On the other, schools and institutions were given a mechanism to remove disruptive forces from the classroom. My epistemological belief is that current policy has created an opportunities for private entities in the form of public service providers, sanctioned by the Irish government to commodify SEN learners.

Are SEN learners excluded from the mainstream post-primary and further education in Ireland and subject to commodification by private service providers with support from the Irish education and health Boards? This research question was based on the assumption that SEN learners are being denied opportunities to progress on to Further and Higher education through a series of gatekeeping mechanisms deeply ingrained in Irish culture. Through interviews with practitioners I have established evidence to suggest that socially constructed practices are preventing SEN learners from accessing further and higher education due to gaps in education provision and resistance from educators, and have identified how SEN learners are being diverted away from mainstream settings into Health Service Executive (HSE) funded programmes and subsequently into adult day services.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Foucault used groups situated on the peripheries of society as a study in how these societies function. In *Madness and Civilisation* (1961(2006)) Foucault writes as to the formation of the institution and how it functions to remove disruptive and unproductive elements of the workforce. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault M. , 1973) and *the Order of Things* (Foucault M. , 1966(2002)) he describes the ways in which positivist approaches came into being, particularly through medical practice, how the ideal member of a productive society is generated and how those not meeting this ideal become subject to the linguistic power of the medical professional.

These epistemological studies by Foucault generated new ways of viewing how power is constructed in our modern society. Authors such as Shevlin (*Historical Overview of Developments in Special Education in Ireland*, 2016) use similar techniques to apply critical theory to the study of disability and how current inclusive educational policy in Ireland (Van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019) (DES, 2004) has come about, and Howe and Griffen (Howe & Griffen, 2020) ask questions as to whether this policy is meeting its planned objectives. The Department of Education and Skills(DES) and the Health Service Executive(HSE) work in tandem to deliver inclusive education to SEN learners. By looking at current practice and studying accepted theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (*The Ecology of Human Development : Experiments by Nature and Design*, 1981) and Colgan (*Inclusion in Education: Towards Equality for Students with Disabilities*, 2013) I have revealed how ableist narratives, presented by Oliver (*The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach*, 1990) (*The Integration: Segregation Debate: Some Sociological Considerations*, 1985) have served to remove SEN learners from the Irish education system. In order to do this it has been necessary to study the culture of various institutions involved in the training and education of SEN learners. Spassini and Friedman's research on *Stigma* (2014) studies how this stigma prevents activism within intellectual disability culture as a result of the effects of internalised ableism. This creates opportunities for institutions to assert their dominance in the Irish market. Creating opportunities for medical professionals to maintain their dominance in a market subject to pressures exerted through agreed international agreements (UNESCO, 1994) (United Nations, 1948). Within these structures of power the learners become subjects, commodities to be traded and controlled. Feely (*Sexual surveillance and control in a community-based intellectual disability service* , 2016) looks at how SEN learners are

controlled in Irish institutions through a Foucauldian lens and McIntosh (An Archi-texture of Learning Disability Services: The use of Michel Foucault, 2002) looks at the hegemony of clinical culture and the normalisation of this power in society.

Removal from Society

According to Foucault in his book “Madness and Civilisation” (1961(2006)) people with disabilities were removed from society through social policies enacted across Europe from the end of the middle ages up until the industrial revolution. At the beginning of the renaissance Foucault presents an episteme of a society within Europe of “taxonomy and that of signification” (Maclean, 1998), scientific reasoning and the development of various philosophies around the relations of phenomena within nature start to come to the fore through nosography and the clinical gaze (Foucault M. , 1973) and we begin to see the subjectification of individuals. At the same time the invention of the printing press and the democratisation of knowledge saw the beginnings of large scale production and merchant practices.

This move towards a productive society and “the division of Labour” (Durkheim, 1933) saw the objectification of the body. The body could be changed and molded in order fulfill particular functions. Foucault references how this transformation could be studied and used for military purposes in Discipline and Punishment (1975(1991)). This realisation led to the classification of individuals having value assigned according to their usefulness. At the same time efforts to study and control the spread of disease in France led to La Société de Médecine (Foucault M. , 1973), epitomising the healthy body as being one which could engage in certain activities. Therefore, inability to engage in these activities, would mark the individual as unhealthy and subject to the esoteric power of the clinic.

The Clinical Model

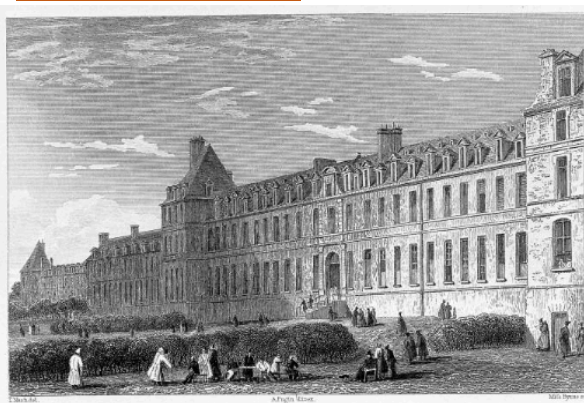


Figure 1 Hospice De Bicetre, Engraving by Letitia Byrne, 1829,

17th century France saw laws passed to encarcerate the “poor scholars and indigent” (Foucault M. , 1961(2006), p. 43) within L’Hoptal General. A workhouse were unproductive, deviant classes were housed and put to work in the local industries and thus, the institution is born. These institutions

commodified care through standardising practices and developing language to study clinical disorders. It did this by:

1. Being somewhere between open to all and open to specialized individuals. To make manifest a complete structure of disorders through classification
2. Interested in the disease not the patient. Trying to understand disorder and seeking out new disorders.
3. The clinic does not have an identity, per se, rather, it alters according to the particular individuals housed within it. “it is not the gaze itself that has the power of analysis and synthesis, but the synthetic truth of the language, which is added from the outside.....in this clinical method.....it is a question not of an examination but, of a deciphering” (Foucault M. , 1973, p. 60)
4. It documents it's findings
5. It had not yet developed a scientific language and until the end of the 18th century. It was open to the whole of medical experience (Foucault M. , 1973, pp. 54-62)

As we moved from a feudal to capitalist society we see the establishment of hierarchies, where the study of these “indigent” (Foucault M. , 1961(2006), p. 227) would inform the care of wealthy individuals within society, which required a doctor due to their complexity, whereas the simpler folk who tended to suffer from simpler diseases were placed under the care of officers of health. And as Foucault puts it in the Birth of the Clinic,

“from the slow illumination of obscurities, the ever-present reading of the essential, the calculation of times and risks, to the mastery and the majestic confiscation of paternal authority, are just so many forms in which the sovereignty of the gaze gradually establishes itself – the eye that knows and decides, the eye that governs.”
(Foucault M. , 1973, p. 89)

The “paternal authority” establishing itself within the clinical discipline, gradually, over time, gave us the health service we have today. Where doctors through particular linguistic uses govern from the top of the hierarchy by “reading of the essential” and health care workers carry out the tasks of making observations and documenting findings of the subject. This model is still recognisable in multiple disciplines across western society today.

By the time we get to the twentieth century, the move away from unskilled to skilled labor led to the need for the welfare state (Oliver M. , 1985) as a means of provision for those unable or unwilling to engage in skilled labor. Institutions and special schools are identified by Marxists as a “repressive mechanism of social control”. So dependent were people on these institutions they “were rushing to defend the welfare state against ‘the cuts’ and other attacks on it” (Gough, 1979, p. 11). The Marxist’s defence of the welfare state led to the



Figure 2 Coffee with Foucault; courtesy of Wombo AI ART generator

provision of supports for those who find themselves incapacitated, mindful that we all experience some level of disability If we live long enough (Oliver M. , 1985). McIntosh (2002) describes this dependence on welfare as an extension of the involvement of clinical care beyond the walls of the institution and one of the gatekeeping mechanisms preventing those with intellectual disability from fully participating in valued social contracts. Within special education these gatekeeping mechanisms serve to remove deviant elements from mainstream classrooms through Foucauldian ideas of Surveillance, Normalisation and Examination (Foucault M. , 1975(1991)). Mechanisms of care, instil normative cultural expectations upon this group through institutional power structure in modern clinical practice, developed over centuries. One result of these practices is

as from their communities and their

classification according to their inability to conform to social norms (Foucault M. , 1961(2006)).

Social Reforms in the 1950’s and 60’s led to the development of the welfare state and an inadvertently ableist approach towards the integration of people with disabilities into society.

“Ableism can be understood as a preference for certain abilities and an often-negative sentiment towards the lack thereof” (Van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019). This occurs through the lifelong monitoring and scrutiny of people with intellectual disabilities. Within the welfare state, mechanisms such as social work, housing and education were considered by Marxists to be mechanisms of adapting and/or controlling non-conforming groups in society to the needs of capitalism. Special education, viewed by Marxists, as yet another mechanism of this system according to Oliver (Oliver M. , 1985, pp. 81-82)

These practices within institutions can often lead to stigma around intellectual disability severely affecting the cultural identity of people with intellectual disabilities. “This stigma causes internalised ableism and leads to people with intellectual disability’s disassociating with others with intellectual disability in an attempt to cope with the stigma” (Spassiani & Friedman, 2014, p. 331).

Categorising individuals according to disability

However, not all disabilities are equal. Spassiani and Friedman (2014) highlight the lack of cohesion in disability culture stating that people with intellectual disabilities can find themselves classified as “non-human” (Spassiani & Friedman, 2014, p. 330) and devoid of culture, often living in congregated settings where vocational skills were

“The obligation to work assumes it’s meaning as both ethical exercise and moral guarantee. It will serve as askesis, as punishment, as symptom of a certain disposition of the heart. The prisoner who could and would work would be released, not so much because he was again useful to society, but because he had again subscribed to the great ethical pact of human existence” (Foucault M. , 1961(2006), pp. 54-55).

Throughout modern history people with disabilities are segregated, culturally, socially, and physically, according to their disability. By viewing the positivist provision of services for the idle and indigent through a punitive lens, Foucault believed society was conditioned to view deviants as being separate from normative culture.

“Binary division between one set of people and another” made way for the “intensification and ramification of power” (Foucault M. , 1975(1991), p. 198).

Enshrined positivist approaches in western society ensured organised class structures and subsequent stratification leading to class reproduction within education (Lynch, 2001, p. 135). This had detrimental consequences for those in state care.

History of Special Ed in Ireland

Traditionally in Ireland young people with intellectual disabilities have been educated through the health boards. In 1947, Saint Vincent's home for mentally defective children, the first special school recognized by the state, was opened (Shevlin, 2016, p. 185). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 26 recognized the right of the individual to access free education and technical and professional education (United Nations, 1948). Throughout the 1960s there was a move away from institutionalized care for people with intellectual disabilities, reflected in Ireland through the new primary curriculum providing remedial teachers, ensuring pupils received support in relation to literacy and numeracy difficulties (Shevlin, 2016, pp. 186-187). In 1980 the government of Ireland issued the white paper on educational development. This document stated for the first time that integrated education for people with learning disabilities should be the first consideration before any other option (Shevlin, 2016, pp. 188-189). In 1989 the UN Convention of rights of the child brought about a major turning point for children with special education needs in Ireland. Several court cases were brought against the state in the early 1990s in which the state argued some children with SEN were ineducable. The High Court found in favor of the plaintiffs, forcing the state to provide education to these young people (Shevlin, 2016, pp. 189-194). In 1991 the Department of Education established a Special Education Review Committee (SERC) to examine the existing system of education and make recommendations to develop special education provision for the future and internationally, the Salamanca agreement (UNESCO, 1994) laid out the framework by which countries could promote inclusivity within schools. In 1995 the government white paper on education resolved to promote equality of access participation and benefit for all as per their needs and abilities (Shevlin, 2016, pp. 189-194).



Figure 3 Foucault and the panopticon; Courtesy of Wombo AI ART generator

Oversight of organisations offering care and education to learners with intellectual disabilities remained the remit of the health boards until the last decade of the 20th century. O'Brien (1990) highlights three problems with the progression of organisational purposes when providing services for people with disabilities:

1. People with disabilities have been medicalised throughout the last number of centuries, professionals find it hard to add value to peoples lives without framing supports within a care model.
2. Prejudice to disability is ingrained in society. Access to workplaces, classrooms, homes and many other barriers exist that non-disabled people, attempt to make reparations for, rather than responding to disability.
3. Funding is not provided to add funding for peoples lives, instead funding is provided for therapies, workplacements, residential placement and so on. The survival of organisations providing services is dependent on the service meeting specific requirements set out in service level agreements. (O'Brien, 1990)

These problems, in tandem with market led practices, encouraged a cost effective approach being adopted by service providers (Lynch, 2012, p. p12). With the focus on quality control diverted away from the practice of what the individual service user values and towards the value of service provided to meet the individuals needs, objectifying SEN learners as a commodity, used to facilitate service funding criteria.

The EPSEN Act

The passing of the Equality Act in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2004) saw a legislative change aimed at ensuring equity for disadvantaged groups and we began to see a change towards “the social model” (OECD, 2020, p. 10). In 2004 the Education of Person with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) marked a significant milestone in education for children with disabilities’ inclusion in school and society with a rights and equality approach at the core of the legislation, driving change in educational practice. However, a diagnosis of disability was needed for children to be able to avail of special education resources, meaning it was in the interests of parents to have children diagnosed to access supports. This requirement for children to receive a diagnosis before the allocation of resources by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) meant many SEN children who did not meet specific criteria were unable to access resources. McConkey et al (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2015) state that during the period from 2008 to 2013 there was a marked growth

in the number of children presenting with intellectual disabilities in Ireland. The growth rate was nearly twice that of the overall child population. This measure served to lock some children out of the special education provision and prevent early intervention as not all children in need of learning supports were diagnoseable and served to promote” micro-exclusion” within the classroom (Cologon, 2013) with learners being labelled with the stigma of SEN.

In 2013 the General Allocation Model (GAM) (Howe & Griffin, 2020), meant that a child no longer required a diagnosis from a health team or psychiatrist. This model would separate teaching resources into either:

- learning support for peoples with high incidence of SEN or
- resource teaching for people with low incidence SEN

This general allocation model was generally thought of as being a positive step forward and a good transition tool for inclusive education, McConkey et al (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2015) report a sharp increase in attendance in inclusive mainstream classes in primary education and a decline in attendance in special classes mainly due to the general allocation model and the provision of support teachers.

Reforms Within the EPSEN Act

In 2017 the Department of Education and Skills issued circular 0013/ 2017 piloting a new model of special education provision within primary and post-primary schools in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). This circular brought about a major change in the way special education was perceived within the class. Where formerly the means for people with special needs to access education was done through an integrated ableist model¹ (Howe & Griffin, 2020). The circular recommended a move away from the use of differentiation, “a process where curriculum objectives, teaching methods, resources and learning activities are planned to cater for the needs of individual pupils” (Bearne, 1996), has been criticized internationally as watering down curriculum and lowering teaching

¹ “Ableism constructs and reinforces a social construction of ‘normative’ and, through this, enforces a divide between abled and disabled identities (Campbell, 2009). Ableist narratives generate uncritical beliefs about the superiority of ablebodiedness, whilst also positioning people with disabilities as tragic and shameful” (Alfrey & Jeanes, 2023)

expectations (Howe & Griffin, 2020). A favored approach currently is that of post-modernists in the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), recognizing the environment in which learning takes place as a disabling factor for learners and planning curriculum, making it more accessible through:

- Multiple means of representation
- multiple means of engagement
- Multiple means of expression

This approach recognizes humans as complex beings affected by biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors (Howe & Griffin, 2020). This Ecological Theory allows multiple stakeholders interact in specific ways to ensure positive outcomes for learners (Bronfenbrenner, 1981) (Scanlon & Doyle, Transition stories, 2021).

The Need for Systemic Reform

SEN learners immersed in special schools and classes are less likely to achieve employment and/or move on to Further education (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2015). Learners with special needs can get caught upon the continuum of provision...a range of SEN provision from full enrolment in mainstream schools to full time enrolment in special schools, with options such as dual-placement and special classes in between (Howe & Griffin, 2020), this mechanism ironically designed to ease inclusion could very well be the cause for some educators to have diminished expectations of learners. A report issued by the NCSE in 2013 found the reasons for learners being stuck along this continuum to be many, including:

- “concerns about the physical segregation between “two tracks” of special and mainstream, and about the separation of pupils from their peers within mainstream settings as a result of additional support.....
- Many teachers were not prepared for working and planning with other adult staff within their class and needed a better understanding of the roles of the special educational needs officers (SENOs), special needs assistants (SNAs) and health staff.
- parents often feel under pressure and at a disadvantage in their relationship with schools; this perception related to professional and administrative attitudes as well as access to settings and resources. “ (NCSE, 2013, pp. 3-4)

Currently the education system does not measure outcomes for learners with SEN at all (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2015). Section 15(1) of the Epsen Act (NCSE, 2004) states

“In preparing or reviewing an education plan, the principal of the relevant school or relevant special educational needs organiser shall, from the child's attaining such age as the principal or organiser considers appropriate, have regard to the provision which will need to be made to assist the child to continue his or her education or training on becoming an adult.”

Scanlon & Doyle (Scanlon & Doyle, *Transition stories*, 2021) found a lack of focus on learner progression has resulted in many learners transitioning directly into HSE funded services on completion of their post-primary education. A recent report commissioned by the National Disability Authority (NDA) with support from the NCSE found that

“ Staff in Further and Higher Education settings believed that young people required specific supports to enable them to engage with the different challenges in a radically altered teaching and learning environment. Staff also were in agreement that there was a need for focussed career guidance to be provided in school. Young people with disabilities, who attended Further or Higher Education institutions, agreed that they required more specific one to one career guidance at an early stage of their school career, which they had not received.” (RSM, 2017, p. 13)

“Generally, staff in post school environments believed that young people with disabilities were not adequately prepared for life in their post school environments. To a certain extent, this belief was shared by some young people with disabilities and some parents of young people with disabilities. School staff, not surprisingly, did not concur with this view.” (RSM, 2017, p. 10)

Educator’s diminished expectations of learners combined with the lack of pathways and preparation for further education has led to a loss of the necessary skills and competencies within the education system to support learners to access further education (Scanlon & Doyle, *Transition stories*, 2021). This requires capacity building to actively engage with agreed international practice (UNESCO, 2021). Teacher training now includes specific elements of inclusive practices in the classroom, yet there is no mandated requirements for teachers to engage in any specific standards or competencies in inclusive education (Kenny, McCoy, & Mihut, 2020). A recent study conducted by the NCSE on initial teacher training found

“Evidence of praxis and ‘reality shock’, most forcefully shown by the significant drop in perceived attitude, knowledge and skills for inclusive teaching in the survey data. The NQT(Newly Qualified Teacher) and Principal interview data suggest that this may be due to factors including:

- Greater understanding of the complexity of the relationship between theory and practice in the NQT year, which may make beginning teachers more aware of the complexity of the task of achieving effective inclusion

- For some students, the ‘reality shock’ of the challenges of achieving effective inclusion may decrease their overall motivation to be inclusive teachers, particularly for post- primary teachers
- The challenge of behaviour management
- The challenge of establishing their role or identity as a teacher in their class or school” (NCSE, 2019, p. 135)

Classification of Disability

McIntosh (2002, p. 66) cites Lewis (Lewis, 1933) as classifying “mental retardation” according to two factors:

1. Specific organic processes directly responsible for or closely associated with mental defect.
2. An interaction of genetic and environmental factors

In the positivist era people that today would be classed as having intellectual disabilities, were left in the care of clinical professionals, and historically behind the walls of institutions. McIntosh (2002) goes on to discuss, in detail, the development of community care models, moving these individuals out of institutions. And through the assistance of economic interventions, in the form of disability benefits awarded with evidence of impairment has secured the authority of the clinic within the community, extending it’s influence, establishing itself as the invisible guardian of people with intellectual disabilities leading to children with intellectual disabilities being seen as subjects of care. McIntosh (2002) cites Wolfensberger (1994), describing people with intellectual disabilities as being socially dead “because of their perceived deficits in both intellectual and aesthetic value” (McIntosh, 2002, pp. 68-69) and many social care models emulate Wolfensberger’s ideas of normalisation.

“normalisation requires that, to the highest degree and in as many areas of life as feasible, a (devalued) person or group have the opportunity to be personally integrated into the valued life of a society. This means that as much as possible, (devalued) people would be enabled to: live in normative housing within the valued community, and with (not just near to) valued people; be educated with their non-devalued peers; work in the same facilities as ordinary people; and be involved in a positive fashion in worship, recreation, shopping, and all the other activities in which members of society engage.” (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983, p. 27)

This model of care seems very forward thinking and inclusive in its initial reading. But the use of the phrases “as much as possible” would seem to suggest that these “devalued” are allowed (“have the opportunity”) a certain level of autonomy. The use of particular language within the field of SEN is evidence of the power of the clinic within that discourse.

McIntosh moves on from this point to discuss the work of John O’Brien (1990), who notes, the need of clinicians to “clarify and negotiate organisational purposes” (McIntosh, 2002, p.

69) and cites three reasons for people with intellectual disabilities failing to integrate into society.

1. Clinicians and institutions find it difficult to offer support to people without framing that support through a clinical narrative.
2. Prejudice within society is deeply ingrained and people with intellectual disabilities find it extremely difficult to negotiate public forums and buildings with these prejudices in place.
3. And finally, funding is provided for resources and the effectiveness of these resources is measured on how they are deployed and not on the outcomes for the individual such as their happiness or their ability to lead a better life.

Indeed, in McIntosh's piece, Barnes et al (2010) pick apart Wolfensberger's theory of normalisation by stating that it doesn't challenge the legitimacy of the role of the professional in the life of people with intellectual disability. A relevant example of an ableist portrayal of people with intellectual disabilities still existing in state publications is given by Van Aswegen and Shevlin (2019). When analysing the current Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (Government of Ireland, 2015).

“(The) disablist portrayal of people with disabilities is systematically reinforced throughout the narrative by a rhetoric of recovery (the term appearing 17 times within the policy document) and a lexicon of deficit-based interventions aimed at ‘fix it and get better solutions’..... A glance at the bibliography (Government of Ireland, 2015: 63) reveals a babble of legitimating voices (Ball, 1994), speaking authoritatively of ‘perfect partnership-workplace solutions’ and knowing ‘what works, for whom and when’ as extract 3 testifies. From here, the evidence base and its corrective solutions, become part of a process of legitimising a disablist rationality logic and rhetorical strategy, impregnated by a professional, medicalised, discourse” (Van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019)

This presents education as a means of supplying the market with labour through the focus on “recovery” and the use of medicalised discourse is seen to be used to legitimise rational decision making processes in relation to employment for SEN learners.

Within society the authority of the clinic is seldom questioned and more often than not, in the case of people with intellectual disabilities, it is actively sought out. Interestingly, Barnes et al (2010) use the definition provided by Lewis (Lewis, 1933) to redefine the way society views disability, drawing on the social model of disability (Oliver M. , 1990) and focusing on Lewis' interaction of genetic and environmental factors which individuals with impairments are required to negotiate in order to integrate into modern society. When we shift focus away from the individual with impairments to the environment they are having difficulty negotiating, we start to look at disability in a new way. And if we take this one step further,

recognizing the different sociologies within disability culture (Spassiani & Friedman, 2014) (particularly between physical and intellectual impairment), as educators, we can start to consider the factors which allow us to negotiate the world around us. These Multiple Intelligences are described in Howard Gardener's "Frames of Mind" (Gardener, 1984) and are regarded as the cornerstone to the UDL framework.

Forms of resistance

How do learners resist power in institutions developed to marginalise? Foucault believed that there was a gulf between reason and unreason, across which, no communication could take place, and that acts of transgression through anti-social behaviours could be seen as an excess of action that crosses "the limit".

Critics of Foucault believe he goes too far in his assertions. That he draws no limit on the measure of resistance required to counteract power. Power is "ubiquitous and all-encompassing" (Pickett, 1996, p. 445) and without reason for resistance to be preferable to submission, Foucault paints a picture of a futile struggle against power mechanisms (ibid). Fraser (1981) and Habermas (1987) were among some who believed there should be acceptable limits to resistance. But according to Foucault by putting limits to resistance you remain trapped within power structures (Pickett, 1996). Foucault believed that acts of transgression have the potential to enrich society by giving voice to all its participants. He believed rules and limits, through reason, served to highlight deviant behavior and marginalized those exercising it. Transgression does not serve to create new rules, rather, it is a tool used to challenge the status quo. Attempts at transgression of SEN learners has led to them being deemed disruptive elements within mainstream classrooms and are subject to mechanisms of social control (Oliver M. , 1985, p. 80). The mechanism for such control has been sanctioned through the allocation of the "continuum of provision" (Howe & Griffin, 2020).

Spassiani and Friedman (2014) discuss how people with physical disabilities started political movements, self-advocating for better access to public infra-structure, and how these movements have in turn brought about, albeit indirectly, the movement of People First in the UK. In special education in Ireland there have been many documented cases of power structures being challenged (Shevlin, 2016, pp. 189-194). These acts of transgression, through instruments of power (Pickett, 1996, p. 451), saw the formation of the Special

Education Review Committee (SERC) bringing about legislative reforms to our education system to include children with disabilities in mainstream settings.

But these reforms have been met with resistance from other quarters. Oliver (1985) describes how the lack of teacher training and opposition by teacher representatives has led to a backlash to Special Ed provision. Teacher representative bodies in Ireland have resisted mandating specific standards in inclusive education (Kenny, McCoy, & Mihut, 2020). This may lead one to the assumption that these stakeholders are subject themselves, to pressures by gatekeeping mechanisms (Gaventa, 1980) on the Bio-psychosocial, macro-system level (Howe & Griffin, 2020). Conflicts such as this one allow other stakeholders to advance their own interests before those of learners.

Normalisation

“The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the “social worker”-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements” (Foucault M. , 1975(1991), p. 304)

Ongoing differentiation and classification through education has a profound psychological effect on SEN learners, leading to many capitulating to the “soft power of the disability service” to normalize themselves and accept their pathology (Feely, 2016, p. 23). Within institutions Rogers’ person-centered approach (1992) take the individual’s voice, making them a subject of care (Pickett, 1996) through a clinical model. Ongoing surveillance is perpetuated by the culture which surrounds these services. It is commonplace for decisions surrounding the care of an individual to take place without them present and often without their knowledge (Feely, 2016), with surveillance going beyond the individual service users, to reports of strict monitoring of staff (Feely, 2016, p. 15). Rogers himself highlighted the need to exercise caution when using scientific approaches to therapy...

“Science will never depersonalize, or manipulate, or control individuals. It is only persons who can and will, do that. That is surely a most obvious and trite observation, yet a deep realization of it has had much meaning for me. It means that the use which will be made of scientific findings in the field of personality is and will be a matter of subjective personal choice.” (Rogers C. , 1967, p. 221)

Ableist approaches often result in the internalization of ableism by the individual, with many reports of disabled people becoming quiescent through three-dimensional power structures

(Gaventa, 1980) and their *agreed* goals being quantified and met through a particular set of medicalized standards.

People with intellectual disabilities are often linked to the “burdens of pauperism” (Oliver M. , 1985, p. p77) and deemed as having little value towards the promotion of the “wider interests of society” (ibid). The development of ideologies in special education legitimized ableist approaches (Tomlinson, 1982, p. 107). To this day learners often experience exclusion in the form of:

- Macro-exclusion through the provision of special classes in mainstream schools and
- micro-exclusion through differentiated learning programs within mainstream classes (Cologon, 2013)

Through resistance from mainstream education and a willingness for traditional service providers to maintain influence, power structures enable “certain groups or classes to advance their interests at the expense of others” (Oliver M. , 1985, p. 79). This has occurred in state sanctioned bodies such as institutions dedicated to the care of people with disabilities and schools through the language of the clinic. Through this language, reason wins out. This “Mental Framework” (Van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019, p. 638) of ableism permeates Irish society through “rhetorical devices including language, imagery, and systems of representation(ibid).

With spending on learning supports increasing dramatically (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2015) since the introduction of the EPSEN Act in 2004 (NCSE, 2004), the budget for special education now accounts for over ¼ of the entire education budget for Ireland in 2023 (Government of Ireland, 2022) providing inclusive education for 16% of learners within the schoolsystem (DES, 2017, p. 10).

With much of the further education options available to SEN learners provided by “separate dedicated provision” (Solas, 2020, p. 47) in the form of private providers (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021) the and a lack of implementation of Section 15 of the EPSEN act (2004) for school leavers means that many SEN learners are expected to progress into HSE funded programmes when they leave school (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021)

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Ontology

Growing up in a village in Dublin, Ireland throughout the 1980s I was always out of the house. Innocent times before the Internet and mobile phones, myself my friends used to wander the streets, we knew every back lane, Every unlocked garage, and every orchard ripe for the picking. We knew all the local characters, knew who to avoid and which shopkeepers were good for free handouts. We knew all the stories and lore of our own little patch. But one place we knew nothing about was the center for mentally retarded, a huge installation in our small Dublin village. This institution was a place of mystery, with large grey walls it was full of houses and a big old building. We never got to see who lived there and we used to jest among ourselves that if you got caught inside the ‘mentallers’ would get you. As I grew older these stories disappeared into history. I moved on to post primary education and, following a less than adequate leaving certificate (state exam) I took a course in horticulture which led me to seek employment in my local area, and straight to the doors of the institution. That was 22 years ago. During that time, I met my now wife, who was working as a job advocate for the same organization. My wife and people like her introduced me to people with intellectual disabilities and their families living out in the community. All ordinary people, many of whom living in impoverishment, during a period in Ireland’s history when the economy had never been doing better. Many of these people had massive potential but I was aware of how structures within society were creating environments in which these people were not able to achieve the normal economic advancement that the rest of society enjoyed. In 2007 I completed qualification in training and education in supported employment for people with special needs. This training gave me the grounding I needed, starting to form my practice going forward. A degree in human services management achieved since then helped me understand how institutions are governed. In 2012 my wife and I were blessed with a daughter with Down syndrome. Having a child with a disability made both my wife and I consider the options for our daughter’s future. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, incidents which had happened over the period of lockdown made me look for a change in my life and it was this search that led me to the doors of Maynooth university and the department of adult education.

Engaging with critical pedagogy during my time on the Higher Diploma in adult education, I was made aware of the possibility to examine sociological structures that exert influence on all our lives and was deeply affected by the lack of agency marginalized groups like people

with intellectual disabilities have over their own lives. I was asked the question, what is the purpose of education? The essentially contested concept has multiple answers, from the growth of the individual to the provision of skilled labor for the market. But I wanted to find out what the purpose of *Special Education* is.

Using critical theory as defined by Paradis et al

“critical scholars reject singular truths in favour of more nuanced portraits of concepts and events, mobilize inductive approaches over deductive ones, and use critical theory to develop their projects and analyse their data.” (Paradis, Nimmon, Wondimagegn, & Whitehead, 2020, p. 842)

I believe market led practices are resulting in many SEN learners being excluded from further, meaningful education, possibly due to an inherent culture of ableism among practitioners and policy makers in the Irish state today.

Michel Foucault described his writings as a study of how human culture has turned human beings into subjects through three different modes (Foucault M. , Power, 1994, pp. 326-327). Firstly, through the use of linguistics. Through developing ways of describing phenomena and “the objectivising of the productive subject, the subject who labours, the analysis of wealth and economics”. Secondly is through dividing practices and how the subject is divided from others. The examples he gives are “the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the ‘good boys’”. And finally, in his later work he looked at how the human being turns him- or herself into a subject. He cites his own studies of individuals identifying as subjects of sexuality in this case (Foucault M. , 1981).

He goes on to say that although he believed his work was not directly related to power, but through his studies he has subsequently become involved in the question of power. That “while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations that are very complex” (Foucault M. , Power, 1994, p. 327).

I believe that through these modes and the subsequent relations of power, SEN learners are subject to power in many mainstream institutions through positivist practices developed over time. Multiple sets of complex practices, “Born under the star of Darwin” (Giroux, 2011, p. 31), prevent the implementation of person centred policy, watering it down and negating its effectiveness. Supports for learners with intellectual disabilities provided at post primary level education by the Department of Education and Skills through the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) are not continued into Further and Higher education. Schemes such as the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) offer places in third level Higher Education to students from marginalised communities and those with disabilities based on a diagnosis of disability

and the student having completed the Leaving Certificate, a points based set of examinations at the end of the senior cycle (final two years) in Irish post primary education. Within this paper I examine how SEN learners are being denied the opportunity to partake in Further and Higher education through well-established practices ingrained in the education system. The UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 27(d) stipulates “...persons with disabilities to have effective access to the general technical and vocational guidance programs, placement services and vocational and continuing training” (United Nations, 2022). The number of Special schools is currently increasing throughout the country and many providers are increasing their services (Madigan, 2022). According to Scanlon and Doyle (2021), learners in geographic areas with special schools have lower outcomes than those who do not attend segregated settings. These lower outcomes seem to be a feature of large urban areas where special education is more easily accessible (McConkey, Kelly, Craig, & Shevlin, 2015)

As a father and tutor of people with intellectual disabilities I look at these realities through the lens of a critical realist (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 27-35), invoking “a real and knowable world which sits ‘behind’ the subjective and socially-located knowledge”, making the case that marginalised groups, such as SEN learners, are excluded from education due to well-meaning and long established practices within the system. When starting out this research I was advised by a Phd student conducting research with people with intellectual disabilities, not to use marginalised people in my study as it will create ethical issues and slow up the whole process. This was a theme that was evident throughout the interview process and can account for the absence of the learner voice within the paper.

Epistemology

It is my belief that a convergence of regulative practices, social perceptions and neo-liberal ideologies has perpetuated existing stigmas towards SEN learners and seen the expansion of private enterprise into the disability sector. I believe that changes since the inception of the EPSEN Act have seen the commodification of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and perpetuates state sanctioned, private education institutions, thus removing

“disruptive and potentially disturbing children from ordinary schools regardless of whether their disruption is based upon handicap, impairment, behaviour or performance” (Oliver, 1985. pp83).

In the intervening years since Oliver wrote his piece many reforms have taken place within the field of special education. But given the ever present move toward market led economics and employment strategy within Ireland, many see the SEN learners as the deserving poor (Van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019). This has it's problems for policy makers.

“the category of ‘all’ becomes yet another prized and out of reach circle of inclusion. For many disabled people, confinement to the ‘Other’ of this style of society is a reality, not due to impairment but due to the rules and rituals designed by neoliberalism without human diversity in mind. It is contended that neoliberal forms of government maintain exclusion in society, as:

outside the communities of inclusion, outside the control of society, exists an array of micro-sectors, comprised of those who are unable or unwilling to enterprise their lives or manage their own risk, incapable of exercising responsible self-government, attached either to no moral community or to a community of anti-morality. (Rose Citation1996, 347)

Indeed, while the 2014 SENCoP and wider policy documents are very clear in their expectations and desires of what constitutes a successful adulthood, they are less open in sharing what happens to those who get left behind.” (Burch, 2018)

The use of private sector service providers in SEN provision satisfies policy objectives and leaves state bodies to the task of workforce provision.

But what is inclusion? Inclusion means different thing in different situations. I interpret inclusion for SEN learners as meaning the full and equitable involvement of a person in the curriculum, with allowances and supports put in place to ensure they receive the same opportunities as learners who are not classed as having special educational needs in the same setting. But it is my belief that the language surrounding policy and practice means that inclusion, as a concept, is used to exclude SEN learners from the normal classroom practices that mainstream learners have no need to consider.

“What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away (VP 117/SP 104). A “meaning” or a “mission” is a way to contain and compact things, like a nutshell, gathering them into a unity, whereas deconstruction bends all its efforts to stretch beyond these boundaries, to transgress these confines, to interrupt and disjoin all such gathering” (Derrida, 1997)

Taking a Post structuralist position (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 7) I study special education provision in Ireland today and the narratives and knowledge that created that system, challenging the positivist narratives that exist in the discourses within. I engaged practitioners in the field of SEN through semi-structured interviews, gaining a shared understanding of the topics contained within the research question (Appendix C). In engaging practitioners in this way I was “free to pursue lines of thinking introduced by the interviewee” and “obtain rich, nuanced, descriptive material that reflected the interviewees understanding of her/his life-world” (Walsh & Ryan, 2015, p. 124) in order to highlight the “real and knowable world which sits ‘behind’ the subjective and socially-located knowledge” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.p 27), highlighting systemic flaws which serve to marginalise SEN learners in Irish society. Using a top-down approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178) to thematic analysis I explore the “particular theoretical ideas” of how social reproduction is perpetuated through existing positivist approaches to the education of these individuals, contradicting existing policy, both from an Irish point of view and internationally. However, it must be acknowledged that as the parent of a child with SEN of school going age and due to my extensive involvement in the sector over an extended period of time, I have certain biases that I myself am not fully aware of.

Throughout this research I have endeavoured to engage in reflexive practice. Stephen Brookfield’s four lens theory (Brookfield, 1995) has always stood out for me as a well-considered framework on which to build this practice. Autobiographically I have engaged in journal keeping and mind mapping. Throughout the course of my experiences in education as a practitioner I have endeavoured to discover new theories, formerly unknown to me. Whether this was through recognising my own education through progressive methods in the scouts or in a trade school run by the Salesian order, to learning about transformative and critical pedagogical philosophies like those of Mesirow and Freire.

I have relied upon the feedback from my peers and supervisors throughout the masters programme. In safe spaces provided by the Adult Education department in Maynooth university in which I could engage freely in meaning making in the issues that I felt, through

my decades working in the field of disability, I needed to address. And I have tried to create safe spaces to engage with the research participants themselves, changing my approach from interview to interview in accordance with the participants wishes and trying to improve on previous interviews.

The irony of my position has not been lost on me. My role as an adult educator in a health service funded, private provider would place me in the position of what Freire (in the context of my research) would refer to as an oppressor. And as such, Freire would argue that I cannot gift power to the oppressed and am “unable to lead the struggle” (Freire, 1970, pp. 21-22). Instead I take the position of a practitioner and a father who wishes to understand and inform my own practice and the practice of those around me by engaging in this critical qualitative research, collecting data through semi- structured interviews to establish paradigms within the field of special education and analysing that data according to its context and meaning set against the theory of Foucault (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 4)

Having started from a position that SEN learners were subject to forces, in what Simplican et al (2015) describe as being on the socio-political level, I was made aware of the possibility that learners could be influenced by forces on an interpersonal level and how these forces are themselves subject to power mechanisms outside their influence, heavily influenced by existing narratives within the education system. Many people working in the field of care and education come from employment sectors that are heavily regulated and unionised. And in many cases are relatively low paid. Mike Oliver (1985) talks of how teachers unions have, in the past, created barriers in relation to the provision of education to SEN learners, and McIntosh refers to the methods of fixing, dividing and recording by healthcare professional for the purpose of being accountable to regulators as contributing to the “politicisation of the human condition of learning disabilities” (McIntosh, 2002, p. 74). This seemed to be evident in the majority of interviews with few exceptions. As do the findings expressed by Feely (2016) when he talks of surveillance and regulation being constant factors in the lives of people with SEN and the people working with them. My own experience would very much , tally with these theses. In such a world the voice of the individual learner is often lost. Spassiani and Friedman (2014) discuss how disability culture often excludes people with intellectual disabilities and this, along with the prevalence of internalised ableism - I believe - leaves people with intellectual disabilities without representation in their community, other than those within their own families. This is due mainly to the institutions of care becoming “hardened into a dominating bureaucracy” (Freire, 1970, p. 31), through multiple

mechanisms of power. These are knowledges that form the basis of my epistemological approach.

Methods

Are SEN learners excluded from the mainstream post-primary and further education in Ireland through them being subject to commodification by private service providers sanctioned by the Irish education and health Boards?

My research question was based on the assumption that SEN learners are being denied opportunities to progress on to Further and Higher education through a series of gatekeeping mechanisms deeply ingrained in Irish culture. I am not, however making an assumption that SEN learners would be capable of negotiating the world of third level education. I simply wanted to know if these learners were being denied an opportunity afforded nearly all other groups in Ireland. In order to ascertain whether or not my assumptions were correct I had to explore different narratives within the of field Special Education. To do this I sought clarity on a number of different topics:

1. What are the qualifications and backgrounds of practitioners?

I wanted to know what qualifications the interviewee had, what motivated them to carry out their roles and what continuous professional development they had engaged in to enhance their skills and what could they recommend for other practitioners.

2. What supports are in place in for SEN learners?

The reason for this question was to try and gauge the level of impairment each of the interviewees were working with. The learners socio-economic backgrounds and resources available in each of their respective settings.

3. What are the Expectations of practitioners for learners?

I was keen to find out if the practitioner felt if the learners, they were working with could progress on to further education and certification. This was ultimately a question relating to the practitioner's pedagogical philosophy.

4. What power dynamics exist within the practitioners' sectors?

In asking this question I was interested in finding out what gatekeeping mechanisms were in place that prevented learners from progressing into adult education or employment. This subsequently became a question in relation to practitioner agency and the influence of third parties outside the learning environment.

5. What Guidance and support can learners' avail of?

I felt it necessary to ascertain what mechanisms are in place to assist learners in making life decisions. The cognitive and emotional challenges that are involved during the learner's

formative years present practitioners with challenges beyond those posed by the syllabus and I wanted to get a feel for the scaffolding required to achieve successful transition.

Recruiting Participants

It was envisaged that the research would attempt to achieve a “shared understanding” (Walsh & Ryan, 2015, p.p 124) with peers regarding their field, drawing out information and exploring alternative perspectives through dialogue.

I believe the power dynamics during each interview was well balanced, with clarity often being sought by both participants and myself. I, coming from a different background to many of my participants, often had to seek clarity in relation to technical terms and procedures that are required from participants in their respective work environments.

Although I felt it important to allow the participants to speak freely during the interviews, there were times when I commented on my own assumptions as to how SEN learners are denied access to mainstream resources or how managerial structures often dictate outcomes for learners. This was done deliberately to stimulate an emotional response from the participant. These assumptions were frequently challenged by all participants and this led to rich dialogue and revealed some surprising information that was crucial to my findings.

The proposed methodology involved the collection of data from 8 participants during seven, semi-structured interviews between late January and mid-March 2023.

Out of the 8 Participants 6 had formal teaching qualifications, one had a nursing qualification and the other had an instructors qualification in a specialised area. 3 worked in day services for adults with intellectual disabilities, 2 worked in Post Primary Education, 2 worked in further education and 1 worked in a residential setting for people with intellectual disabilities. 5 of the participants were female and 3 were male. Two of the participants were a married heterosexual couple with a child with a disability.

In order to give each of the participants an identity that readers could relate to I chose to use the identities of mythological figures from Irish folklore. Stories of these characters are known to the majority of the Irish population. Some of the figures have been portrayed as villains by popular culture, but within Irish mythological stories all the characters chosen have great power and influence. In matching each character to the participant I sought out what I deemed to be a positive attribute shared by both. Medb was powerful and to be feared, Finnegas was wise and considered etc. Each participant had no knowledge that I would be assigning such pseudonyms when we met.

Medb

Medb is a young married mother of one who has spent the last 20 years engaged in social care work of one form or another. Whether that was as a Home care worker, care support in a training centre for SEN or as an instructor in outdoor pursuits for adults with special needs. I met Medb through a colleague. I asked her if she would like to be interviewed for the thesis and she agreed, this happened on 13th Dec 2022. The interview with Medb took place on 24th Jan 2023 in her home with her young son present for the interview.

Niamh & Oisin

Niamh and Oisin were approached by me during a Christmas party held for a local support group that we are all members of on 11th Dec 2022. I knew Oisin was involved in Special Education and thought he would be a valuable addition to my research. He graciously accepted and when I contacted him to arrange an interview he suggested interviewing his wife as well. Oisin has a Master's degree in special education and Niamh has a Master's degree in Intellectual disability nursing. They are parents to Plor, a 23year old lady with Down syndrome. The interview with Niamh and Oisin took place in their family home on 30th Jan 2023.

Grainne

Grainne works in adult day services for people with disabilities. She has worked in this area for over twenty years, having a primary degree in teaching and having completed a masters in the last ten years she has a wealth of knowledge that I thought would be beneficial to the research. I approached Grainne on 7th Dec 2022 and conducted the interview with her on 16th Feb 2023. It was held on the Maynooth college campus in a private conference room.

Airmid

Airmid is a teacher working in the FET(Further Education and Training) sector. She normally teaches business and Information technology programmes at QQI level 5 and 6 but she also engages in literacy and numeracy outreach programmes in several different organisations involved in SEN. Airmid has worked in FET in paid

employment for approximately 15 years. In that time she has engaged in multiple continuous professional development courses including UDL and Digi Cap. I approached Airmid on the 14th Dec 2022, I was somewhat acquainted with her and was interested to get her take on my thesis. The interview with Airmid took place on 16th Feb 2023, the same evening as that of Grainne in a conference room on Maynooth campus. I spaced both interviews 90mins apart to avoid participants meeting each other.

Brigid

Brigid has been working for a private provider in FET for SEN learners for less than ten years. She has a BA in English and Philosophy as her primary degree and returned to Maynooth some years later to complete a Post graduate degree in Further Ed. She embarked on completing her master's degree some years ago but could not complete the program due to family commitments. Brigid describes herself as being committed to the RT(Rehabilitative Training) side of the house. Brigid's participation was suggested to me through a teaching colleague. I initially reached out to Brigid on 7th Dec 2022 and the interview took place in a hotel bar close to her home on 17th Feb 2023.

Finnegas

Having read a paper discussing transition of SEN Learners from post-primary on to FET and employment, I was made aware of a programme that does just that in the Dublin area. I conducted a brief search on the internet concerning the programme and one name came up, Finnegas. I emailed Finnegas straight away and asked if he would be available to interview. Finnegas identified himself as a day service manager, but during the course of the interview it became apparent that he had qualified as a teacher from Maynooth many years before. Finnegas' programme is being trialled across multiple special schools around the country as part of a pilot programme with the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) backing. Finnegas was the first person to agree to an interview with me in November 2022 and he was the second to last interview I conducted on 1st March 2023 in his Dublin office.

Fionn

The interview with Fionn was suggested by Niamh and Oisín when I first approached them. I contacted him by SMS message and he agreed to meet me. Fionn had qualified as a teacher in the late 1980's before moving to the USA. He had taught there to some extent but generally he was involved in the building trade. He has worked as a teacher in a special school for the last 25 years, since his return from the United States. For the last number of years Fionn has taught Junior Certificate programme (QQI Level 1,2 & 3). I contacted Fionn on 19th December 2022 and his was the last interview, held in a hotel lobby close to his home on a snowy night of 9th March 2023

Table 1 Participant Interview Details

| Pseudonym | Setting | Date of interview | Location of Interview | Agreed to Study | Initial Contact Date | Consent Received | Qualification |
|-----------|---------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Medb | DS | 24/01/2023 | Own Home | Y | 13/12/2023 | y | Instructor, Care worker |
| Niamh | Parent | 30/01/2023 | Own Home | Y | 26/01/2023 | Y | ID Nurse |
| Oisín | PP | 30/01/2023 | Own Home | Y | 11/12/2022 | Y | Teacher, Principal (Sp. School) |
| Grainne | DS | 16/02/2023 | College campus | Y | 07/12/2022 | y | Teacher, Social Care Worker |
| Airmid | FE | 16/02/2023 | College campus | Y | 14/12/2022 | y | Business degree |
| Brigid | FE | 17/02/2023 | Hotel Bar, Mullingar | Y | 07/12/2022 | y | Teacher |
| Finnegas | DS | 01/03/2023 | Place of work | Y | 01/11/2022 | y | Teacher, Service Manager |
| Fionn | PP | 09/03/2023 | Hotel Lobby, Mullingar | Y | 19/12/2022 | y | Teacher |

Data collection and analysis

The interviews took place during evenings, when participants were free to engage. A choice of settings was given to each participant. Three of the participants chose to be interviewed in their own home, two were interviewed on the university campus in a space provided by the researcher, two took place in a hotel lobby and one was conducted in the participants place of work. All interviews were audio recorded with the participants consent given both aurally and documented.

Each interview was then transcribed and analysed using a poststructuralist discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 177) to examine “ways in which discourses constitute objects and make available particular subject positions”. I chose this method as it was conducive with Foucauldian principles and allowed a focus on the effects of power on SEN learners. And compliments participatory approaches to qualitative research in reasonably small datasets.

Having conducted the interviews, initial coding of meaning making in the discourse’s paradigms, sorted data into meaning repertoires, establishing the context in which statements are made and their associate values and attitudes, talk and practice, theorizing about concepts and drawing general inferences (Walsh & Ryan, 2015, p. 180).

Preliminary analysis revealed codes, some were apparent from the interviews themselves and others were drawn on from my research questions (Walsh & Ryan, 2015, p. 178).

- Funding Models
- Agency of staff
- Options for progression
- Reflective practice
- Medicalization of the individual

Further analysis revealed additional codes :

- Exclusionary practice
- Learner/Person Centeredness
- Public Awareness/Infrastructure
- Types of training /Jobs

Once I had arranged all the codes within each transcript, I had to organize them into themes. Initially I looked at themes that I thought could marry well with one another:

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding Models • Learner/Person Centeredness | <p>In grouping these codes together, I wished to evaluate the relationship between funding and the choice of the learner. I was concerned that the requirements to meet criteria for funding and resources could be affecting the quality of service being presented to learners.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicalization of the individual, • Exclusionary practice • Public Awareness/Infrastructure | <p>It was evident from the interviews that there was a correlation between exclusionary practice and public perceptions and a lack of infrastructure that is preventing people with disabilities from accessing a lot of services. By placing the medicalization of the individual into this bracket I had hoped to highlight how existing discourses have led to a normalization of exclusionary practice in society.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options for progression • Types of training /Jobs | <p>Options for progression included the involvement of professionals trained in preparing learners for life beyond education. And the tracking the types of training and jobs available was a natural outcome on completion of training.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency of staff • Reflective practice | <p>I was interested to see how the level of control by various managerial structures affects the performance of practitioners and whether these individuals felt empowered to make positive changes in student's outcomes.</p> |

I then took those same themes and applied them to a theoretical framework (Maxwell, 2013, p. 108). In discipline and punish Foucault (1975(1991), pp. 170-194) discusses three mechanisms used in institutions as the “means of correct training” and wanted to ascertain

whether these means of training were different to those employed in traditional school systems. The three means of correct training described by Foucault are:

- a. Hierarchical Observation (Surveillance)
- b. Normalizing judgement and (Normalization)
- c. The examination (Examination)

Ethical Considerations

For the participants to give freely to the process I had to employ core ethical requirements (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 62-65). These included the principles of respect:

- The need to maintain privacy,
- to obtain informed consent,
- the right to withdrawal,
- doing no harm and
- informing participants of issues in relation to potential disclosure of traumatic or criminal information.

As I have mentioned previously, my approach was dictated by the need to consider ethical issues in relation to the vulnerability of SEN learners as research participants. Having negated this issue by altering my approach to not include SEN learners I still had a responsibility to the participants that did take part in the study.

Prior to each interview all participants were sent a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) and a copy of the research questions (Appendix C). Contained within the consent form was a list of the principle mentioned above. This coupled with the considerable lead in time for each interview allowed participants to consider their positions before agreeing to be interviewed. The shortest period between participants agreeing to an interview and partaking in the process was five days. This occurred in the interview with Niamh and Oisín. However, Niamh was present when I first approached her husband Oisín, 6 weeks prior, was aware of the research and had made suggestions towards my approach at the time.

Limitations

It has to be noted that this research took place in a relatively short period of time. I have conducted all the research myself along with the interviews and this has all occurred in a 6 month timeframe from conception to thesis submission. The exclusion of SEN learners themselves was a glaring omission from the research. Had I included the voice of learners I doubt I would have found the same results.

I, as the primary gatekeeping mechanism for the research, have chosen convenience and snowballing methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 57), meaning that I have allowed my own personal biases to dictate the research participants that chose to take part. In order to allow for this I chose participants who were well established in their own fields and who, I felt, would challenge my own personal assumptions. I feel that this worked, as all the interviews contained rich dialogue with very worthwhile and revealing information.

The use of thematic analysis has limited interpretive power if not used within an existing theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 181).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The Influence of Power on Learners

Throughout my research there were certain recurring themes. It seems that the disabling environment which we chose to create as a society leaves many people with intellectual and physical impairments susceptible to forces running through the “Ecology of Human Development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1981) more so than those considered to be the ideal of what Foucault (Paden, 1987, p. 123) described as ‘Man’. All participants alluded to mechanisms, relationships, and environments that SEN learners had to negotiate to access education suitable to their needs that typical learners do not.

The findings were viewed through a theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 180) into three categories which Foucault wrote as “The means of correct training” (1975(1991), pp. 170-195). By focusing on the three areas of (i) hierarchical observation (ii) normalizing judgement and (iii) examination, I demonstrate how learners with SEN are subject to the power within education.

Hierarchical Observation: Ongoing surveillance of the SEN learner

To demonstrate how SEN learners are subject to “disciplinary institutions.... functioning like a microscope of conduct” (Foucault M. , 1975(1991), p. 173). I use Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1981), separating my findings into the micro-, meso- and exo-systems for ease of explanation.

The microsystem

Bronfenbrenner defined the microsystem as

“a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 22).

All the participants spoke of the influence parents have over the wishes of their children advocating on their behalf and influencing centers’ planned approaches to the training and education of learners. This was true for participants from post-primary to further education and day services. Airmid talked of one learner who was discouraged from attending educational outings by their parents and subsequently wasn’t present in the shared experience

among classmates leading to further exclusion within one of her courses missing opportunities to form social bonds with classmates.

John 32:07

“And then with regardssituations where you've come up against parents, is that to get them (the learners) out of the house for a couple of hours?”

Airmid 32:22

“I've seen where parents have such an influence that they might have stopped individuals participating in programs or outside programs, as well. So say for example, days out or a weekend away, the parents, maybe they're getting older, their outlook wouldn't be the same and they would be trying to protect the person with intellectual disabilities, but they (the learners) could be in their 40s or 50s.“you can't go on that” and of course, they're going to listen to their mom or dad and they're not gonna have that opportunity. So there could be a lot of missed opportunities there. The parents think they are doing the right thing, but mightn't necessarily be the right thing or limit the amount of interaction with their peers.

I think that's sad. Because when the parents do pass, or go and then they have to go into residential or something like that, then all of a sudden, they're submersed into this world..... That has to be a big transition. And yeah, I would have seen one individual in particular that I would have recalled and actually, when he'd go into the residential, he completely changed. Even his dress sense changed, and he looked cool and hip, he dressed for his age. He was in his 40s, he had a cool shirt on him when I met him in Tesco's. And he came up and said hello, he'd come from this quiet shy, really closed off individual, kind of sad looking at times, to this, the best thing that happened to him. So, he'd gone from the family home into residential and it had a positive impact on him.”

This in turn led me to consider relationships with peers. These were seldom discussed during the interview process. Fionn talked of a group in the special school in which he was teaching, for past pupils. This was a group run by teachers within the school as a form of outreach for pupils who may be isolated. The practitioners running the group, did so outside of their allocated teaching hours. Natural supports were not a common feature within the interview transcripts. However, Brigid did talk of encouraging learners to arrange leisure activities for themselves and to involve others who may be interested. This sounds like it was quite a natural process that she encouraged and helped facilitate in her center. But this was the exception within the findings.

Social outings and interactions for learners described by most participants seemed to be somewhat contrived, in many cases to satisfy policy (Health Service Executive, 2015), and in some cases used by staff to satisfy their own agendas. Medb talked of learners becoming disengaged and complacent because staff had brought service users to the cinema because they (the staff) could get in for free as carers. Niamh and Oisín talked of their daughter not really having friends in mainstream school:

Niamh 36:15

“I think it's very hard to expect youngsters that haven't got an intellectual disability to socialize with our people.Because even though it is social, we found that when Plor was in mainstream school and she was asked along to partiesthey always had somebody to mind her, you know, but she didn't have any friends really?”

The mesosystem

“A meso system comprises of the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work and social life).” (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 25)

Many of the participants discussed stakeholders known to learners having discussions around options for learners without their involvement. Again, parents were involved in many of the discussions. Medb talked of how parents, many of whom are growing older, have had to fight for services all through their child's lives and are 'neurotic'. Brigid talked of parents looking for 'a little job' for their son or daughter when they first enter her training program and Fionn talked of how work experience is decided for each student in the special school without consulting learners.

John 1:03:25

“who influences learners decisions most..... would it be staff, teachers, managers, clinicians?”

Fionn 1:03:38

“Parents, teachers, and school put in place options, I suppose. We'd try and pair up their skills with work experience. It used to be a huge part of the program in schools. Where People go on work experience.

But that work experience.... they did come in for an hour or half an hour, they wouldn't necessarily be working that long. I felt they were too minded, in the sense that they go for an hour in a day. And there's so much (scaffolding) around them, bringing them to work and bringing them home. Whereas those kids sometimes....you have to let them go”

The involvement of the occupational guidance officer as a liaison between services was also another recurring theme amongst participants. It seems that these HSE employees are very much involved in conversations with parents, educators, and services from learner's entry into special education. Very few of the participants questioned their involvement. Many actually looked on these professionals as a vital support in finding suitable placements for

learners and had built up strong relationships with the Occupational Guidance Officers in their areas.

Finnegas 11:28

“I don't go to any HSE meetings. We do the Schools Project.....We do what's called supportive transition. You will know yourself. There are no career guidance teachers in special schools in Ireland. Yeah, you know why?”

John 11:41

“Because they're fed into the....”

Finnegas 11:44

“No, because they're primary schools. Special schools are under primary curriculum in Ireland. So why would you have a career guidance teacher in a primary school? That's the ridiculous thought process that goes on. Even though they are of school leaving age. Post primary age students in special schools are treated like primary school students. So you don't have career guidance teachers. So nobody's asking them what are you going to work at when you leave here? What do you want to be? What does your life look like? you were funnelled into the day services because the HSE do the profiling in the special schools and they don't do further and higher education or employment options. They offer you this service or that service - the ones they fund. And they're called occupation and guidance staff.

The Department of Education fund the schools, as primary schools so they don't give you a career guidance teacher. And the first time you meet somebody you're gonna talk to you about when you leave school, is that HSE occupation guidance person? And they're only talking about services. So who's telling you about college? Who's telling you about jobs who's asking you what you want?”

The exosystem

Bronfenbrenner defined an exosystem as

“one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person”. (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 25)

Finnegas referred to universities as the training grounds for future policy makers and how the lack of visibility of people with SEN in those settings has led to a disconnect between policy and those which it affects. He also talked of how transport links were not in areas where much of the potential employment options for people with SEN are located and how a conversation needs to be had between the policy makers and transport links.

With regards policy, Many of the participants talked of how enacted policy has been very creative in its formation. But either through policy not being fully implemented, as Oisín discussed with the EPSEN Act (DES, 2004), or having no one to champion it and lead by example as Finnegas mentioned in relation to the New Directions (Health Service Executive, 2015) policy for the HSE, it seems that policy is ineffectual because of a lack of leadership.

Finnegas 37:29

“The approach of this has to change, you won't get New Directions unless the HSE actually stops doing what it's doing. But you can't just stop and throw everything out. You've got to bring everybody on the journey. So where's the guy who's leading all of this? Who wrote new directions.

John

“I know one,”

Finnegas

“So they're the leaders. So who's driving new directions?”

John 37:56

“Nobody. Everybody's just kind of sitting back and waiting to be told what to do next.”

Finnegas 38:01

“**Yeah, painting by numbers.** Now, we're going to do that in the schools as well in terms of transitions and all of that. That's all taking off now at the minute. The department of education have a pilot project going on in 10 schools in Dublin, 10 in Galway and ours with 10 schools, two different models, but these are being evaluated now and I just did a transition piece from school to where?

So I was talking to the coordinator of that (school) this morning and their model is giving the schools an extra 12 teaching hours a week but they have to come up with

the programs. They have no idea of further education or services right, because the HSE are coming into the school. So part of it is his job one of the things he wants to do is community mapping, which means taking a look at what's out there”

There seems to be a disconnect between special schools and further education. Brigid spoke of how her service was a place where learners could potentially move on to further education if they succeeded at the level she was providing training. Finnegas talked of how services, like the one Brigid works for, are private companies that fill a gap in the market for a profit. He discussed how he had coached a parent of a learner who qualified for, and wished to access a QQI level 5 program in an ETB, went to one of these private companies to enquire about doing a possible QQI level 4 program for one year, to gain some experience in further education. The service that was approached recommended putting the woman’s daughter on a QQI level 3 program for three years before recommending the level 4 program. This, for a learner who has qualified for a QQI level 5 program?

Normalizing judgement: Funding Models and Learner Centred practice

Specific means of accessing funding and entitlements for SEN learners has led to what McIntosh (2002, p. 69) described as one of the key gate-keeping mechanisms for inclusion of these individuals and a means by which clinicians can extend their influence into the realm of community care through the “soft power of the disability service” (Feely, 2016, p. 23).

Funding young adults to access training

Many of the participants interviewed, highlighted a the need to satisfy funding requirements. Funding, made available to education and care providers ensures that marginalised populations in Irish society are now able to access education in mainstream settings and children and adults with SEN are no different. Medb made reference to the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) (Government of Ireland, 2015) which provides funding from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to early childhood education providers to upskill their staff and improve their facilities to allow children with particular needs access to childcare and early education for up to 2 years, without having to provide a diagnosis of any impairment.

In Further Education many of the young adults accessing training, seem to be doing so through funding provided from the Department of Social Protection in the form of a

rehabilitative training bonus which was set to discontinue on 1st September 2019. After that date new applications were not accepted. At the same time many large private actors, who would have traditionally provided services for people with disabilities began to introduce new programmes and courses for young adults with SEN, funded by the Health Service Executive (HSE), the same body that provides funding for all state run hospitals and services for people with disabilities, including Day centres and congregated living settings. This expansion of services was commented on by the majority of participants. Some participants working within those services saw this new approach as being generally a positive move away from the old model and moving towards one of community inclusion. One participant, Finnegas, questioned the involvement of private “for profit” businesses and noted that although their business model is very much person centred, that they are a “for profit” business, taking the responsibility of providing training away from the ETB’s, quoting the figure of €47m available to that provider annually.

John40:05

“So would you advocate for a transition and then, the NCSE will provide supports up to post-primary but not further Ed?”

Finnegas 40:21

“What sort of supports are they providing?”

John 40:25

“Well, the SNAs and resources”

Finnegas 40:28

“Well that’s in the school. So the funding or the thought process of all that comes to the NCSE, but once you leave school..... Solas have a remit in all of this and they're trying to work through but they're missing the point though, that if they insist on starting a QQI level 5 in the colleges of further education, we’re screwed. Yeah. They think community education is the place to go there, or **The Private Provider**?”

John 40:52

“Yeah, and **The Private Provider** are private”

Finnegas 40:55

“Private and congregated, yeah, for profit. I have no issue in somebody making profit. Now as long as there is an interest in the young people themselves and where they need to go. I mean, deliver your programs, but there has to be outcomes,”

John 41:10

“I think, they have a good setup, they're well-structured and it is put together well. And I think an awful lot of people there seem to be very learner centered. A lot of them would be qualified teachers, the majority would be.”

Finnegas 41:24

“To what end though? where do the young people progress to when they leave?”

John 41:33

“So services are changing themselves as well from HSE. So.....”

Finnegas 41:36

“In what way?”

John 41:40

“A lot of people who can access further education will, and now with the likes of community hubs, with the likes of New Directions coming on board, even other school leavers coming through now can't go on into congregated settings.”

Finnegas 41:57

“Three examples of that actually working?”

John 42:01

“I know where **The Private Provider** are taking on a different approach, setting up new programs which are now HSE funded.”

Finnegas 42:15

“So new programs with old content.”

John 42:21

“Yeah,”

Finnegas 42:22

“I'd be very careful with that. Does it do what it says on the tin? The only way that you'll know is you have to open the tin. So I would be very cautious when somebody were telling me that something is new and something is different, something's better and it's still being done by the people who were doing it wrong and differently in the first place.”

This was supported through my meeting with Airmid who noted that they would have very few people with intellectual disabilities attending the ETB (the Education Training Board) and has no knowledge of funding towards a resource teacher within their particular centre.

Three year funding from the department of social protection was discussed by several of the participants during the interview process. Niamh and Oisín discussed how a HSE employee told them that if they used the funding to source education initiatives outside their local

administrative area or Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) that their daughter would go to the bottom of the waiting list for services when she completes her course.

Oisín 3:19

“.....there was one course that we were very taken with. And that was a course that Plor applied for it was with a group called the Blue teapot Theatre Company”

John 4:44

“In Galway? And they were connected to NUIG?”

Oisín 4:48

“They were connected to NUIG.”

Niamh 4:52

“Yeah, but they're really only ever FETAC level five.”

Oisín 4:57

“It's just the courses available is what you were considering more than anything else. And Plor went down and had an interview for that. We went to the interview as well. And she received a place in the course. And we were absolutely over the moon about getting the place..... But we were told that if Plor took the place on that course she would have to go to the bottom of the list in relation to services in county Westmeath.”

Niamh 5:32

“In other words if we left Mullingar to access the course. a three year courseand we came back to Mullingar, we are not guaranteed any services when we came back, and that was what happened in those days. But I believe since then, that has changed, that funding will follow her.”

Brigid talked at length of how funding and financial security is a major consideration for families and how this is linked with continued access to services.

Brigid 25:43

“the one big thing I would say and I think this is the biggest eye opener for me. So it's the amount of people (learners) who come to us who, for a variety of reasons, don't have control over their own money. Or maybe access to their own money. And yet, money management is something that comes up all the time as a skill that people want to learn.”

John 27:29

“That that's a recurring feature?”

Brigid 27:32

“Can be yes. And it can be for a whole host of reasons. There simply isn't money there in houses, or the DA(Disability Allowance) has been absorbed into the running of the household and it doesn't occur to anybody to change that. Maybe students aren't even aware the DA is theirs.

I mean, because that's not something that features in their day to day, like they don't think about it, some people don't apply. Some families don't apply for their own reasons.”

John 28:15

“And then in relation to that, you've got, say, parents with a child with a disability. And they've got fears on anxiety against that child growing up and what's going to happen - any parent would. And then you mentioned three years funding. Is there a lot of anxiety amongst parents and families or can you see that being fed through into the centre?”

Brigid 28:48

“Definitely saw that last year, because last year, the majority of the students we had then were finished three years of funding. And a lot of families were quite anxious. What happens now? Where do they go next?”

John 29:05

“Where do they go?”

Brigid 29:07

“The hub came out of that. So a new service basically came out of that, for people who were not going to require a day service or residential care, maybe we're not currently ready to move on to VT (Vocational Training) and that's the other thing, if you move on to VT you could lose your HSE funding. And that's a big thing to give up. That's a big thing for families to give up.”

More people accessing Special Ed

In Primary and secondary education the budget for the provision of Special Education increased significantly by 38% between 2011 and 2017 with the number of Special Needs assistants nearly doubling in the period 2014 to 2018 (Kenny, et al., 2020), however, the levels of students with “some” disability attending Higher Education only increasing by 12% between 2015 to 2017 (O'Donovan, 2021, p70). The increase in Special Ed funding has been increasing according to the Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion by 450% in the last 11 years with further increases planned (Madigan, 2022). A move away from inclusive SEN education was evident from my interview with Fionn.

John 40:48

“Have numbers gone up or down in general over the years, do you get more people attending *The Special School* or less?”

Fionn 41:14

“Say for example this drive to inclusion to some extent. Say All primary schools now have an autistic unit. Well, not nearly the majority of schools have an autistic unit attached to them. Majority of primary schools are going to care for children with mild learning difficulties, right? But if you put in major behavioral problems and moderate

and general learning difficulties, there's more likelihood that they're going to come to a special School.”

John 41:47

“Would you have noticed a change in the dynamic?”

Fionn 41:51

“Oh, definitely Oh, yeah. Years ago I used to be able to read novels. Roald Dahl books,. And you could do a novel with kids. And then you see, there used to always be a kind of a cut off at third class, (in mainstream schools) when parents and school realized ‘Mary's Not going to be able to climb up the ranks through primary system’ I could never understand this. When I tried to get the second class and you can't read the school books.....But if you can't read them what was the point?”

Types of training available and Options for progression

The focus of all participants was very much on providing positive outcomes for the learners involved. Many discussed the need for learners to acquire life skills such as attending a swimming lesson and developing the skills to research and organise this themselves. Most talked of the need to develop social skills in their learners and highlighted this need.

Learners that are placed in the Special education system, as previously mentioned, do not have access to a guidance counsellor and the majority of people coming out of Special schools are moving on to HSE funded services or services run by private actors who have been providing medical models of service provision for many decades.

However, some of these services provided by private actors tend to be learner focussed and try to give learners exposure to the workplace, employing qualified teaching personnel to provide courses. The individual’s level of disability didn’t seem to be a factor for people in further Ed. However. Within day service and in post primary education the expectations of learners seemed to be linked to their degree of disability.

Grainne

“I worked in an area where they were divided into two rooms called stream one and stream two.

That was that was a long time ago, and was based on level of disability.

I would think that there is more of an emphasis - not necessarily on level of disability, but their social skills.

And whether they have behaviours of concern in terms of going out into the world and getting places and doing things I don't necessarily know if level of disability will be the primary thing we'd be concerned or, not concerned about, but the barrier, the barrier Yeah, I think if somebody had behaviours of concern, whether they were going to be a danger to themselves or others would be much more of an issue.”

All participants, with the exception of Finnegas talked of the need for socialisation and Life Skills training. The range of courses offered through the three year funded programmes seemed to be very much focussed on developing social and life skills of people with intellectual disabilities with little variation in training available between centres.

The Examination: Ableism and exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in education

Evidence of exclusionary practices due to people's disability was found in all settings by interview participants whether this was in formation of policy, the existence of infrastructure to allow people participate in their communities or through the attitudes of staff working in these settings.

Post Primary Education

Within post primary education SEN learners are either linked to segregated units separate from mainstream classes (participants talked of the prevalence of autism units in mainstream schools) or how many learners, that the participants were teaching were coming from dedicated special education.

Oisín 26:48

“On an aside, I was in a secondary school in county (Removed) today. I was visiting a teacher who was doing the special education course in (Removed). And that teacher was teaching in a segregated section of a secondary school. So she was teaching children with special needs, who were supposed to be included in mainstream and they had a totally separate wing to the rest of the children in the school. Yeah, so inclusion? there was one of the young men he was doing busy at Maths, he's 15. Busy at maths is a 3rd and 4th class program, and he was doing a program sourced from Twinkle and Twinkle is a primary school program resource.....So go figure. If that's inclusion, then it's working very well.”

Schools distanced themselves from SE for a number of reasons.

Oisín

“A lot of the local schools didn't invite **The Special School** into their school.,.....It just didn't happen as easily as I'd like. I think there were a couple of reasons. Reason number one, a lot of the staff were not trained in working with children with additional needs, and they would automatically say “we don't do special ed” and they will pull away from it. And a lot of staff would say that the department didn't provide an awful lot of training either”

Oisín 25:53

“In fairness, I think inclusion does work”

John 25:59

“well integration is a different thing”

Oisin 26:03

“integration and inclusion. Yeah. And I would say that from a geographic point of view, people are included. They include them in the building, they include them on the grounds. From an academic point of view. I do not think the system is has been oiled enough to be able to include people properly”.

Fionn gave evidence of how he informed his own practice by focussing on a learner centred approach as most of the information on file was focussed on the individual’s impairments.

Fionn 2:01

“You know, the way in school, their files are filled up with psychological assessments and all that right. But there's actually very little emphasis placed on talking to the person to so my argument was, when you open up their file on John Doe, it should read.... Hello, my name is John Doe. I am 14 years of age. I mean, some peopleif you've coached them long enough, they'd be able tell you a little bit about themselves, rather than looking for, you know, all these tests they do. It put a personal touch to the file that wouldn't normally happen.”

Further Education

Section 15 of the EPSEN Act (DES, 2004) makes provision for Further Education and yet, there are limited pathways for SEN learners to progress to the FE sector. Teachers and tutors working for private organisations serving the needs of people with intellectual disabilities exclusively, felt that other FE centres aren't set up to cater for the needs of SEN learners

Brigid

“But they're all on our course because a mainstream vocational training setting, with their current level of needs wouldn't work for them just yet.”

Two participants discussed Solas’ only providing training from QQI level 5 upwards, directing SEN learners into other programs. The need for an overlap in qualifications offered by the ETBs was stressed by these participants. Airmid discussed how easy it would be for the ETBs to accommodate SEN learners, that they have the expertise and access to assistive technology and all it would take is a little creative thought.

John 40:05

And that's pretty much everything. So is there anything else that you think might be a value or that you can think of?

Airmid 40:28

“Like you just said, if you're talking about the ETB's, what about some training programs, like apprenticeship programs, why can't they participate in some of them? Like Catering. If they have good ability, why not?”

And there is training going on in those days services, so there is possibilities, you just need to find a suitable apprenticeship or program. And that'd be a better way of gaining wilful employment, if that's the case, If that's what they want.”

John 41:14

“And they'll be fairly widespread to be easy enough to access.”

Airmid 41:17

“Yeah. And it's such a big promotion now on apprenticeships as well.”

Brigid talked of learner’s being identified by the HSE early on in their education and are earmarked for particular services through the Occupational Guidance Officers

John

“Overall? So, they all have intellectual disabilities, right?”

Brigid

“Not all of them some of them would have autism that wouldn't be deemed to have an ID or autism would be the primary diagnosis. There might not be a whole lot of ID because that's what we would say “Autism and or....” Because I wouldn't take it for granted that everybody has an intellectual disability. If that makes sense? I know it probably doesn't, but that's how we phrase it.”

Brigid

“Because they go through a very in-depth screening process with the occupational guidance officer who works for the HSE.”

John

“OK. And then how, at what stage does she engage with the learners?”

Brigid

“Chances are the majority of them, if they've been in ***The Special School***... She'd have always been aware of what's up because she'll know them from when they had been in ***The Special School***, but not all of our students come from ***The Special School***. So definitely from when they're in secondary, whether that's in mainstream school support or if that's in an autism unit in the secondary school. That's when she will be made aware and then she would start to engage with the school, whether it's through the principle or ...guidance counsellors or whoever the teacher is looking after. So, she identifies students that will probably go on into our sector for example. And then she will do what's called,... a profiling meeting with them and their families, and she'll do an assessment of needs. And that will be from an educational perspective, from a personal care perspective.....”

Higher Education

SEN learners were felt, by many, to be excluded from HE through the range of courses offered and complexity of subject matter. It was mentioned by several participants that the universities are not truly universal, particularly when it comes to offering placements for people with disabilities. Oisín and Niamh talked of how the universities were offering a good variety of different courses throughout the country but that their daughter wouldn't be able to integrate into that environment and therefore they didn't find it suitable.

Finnegas alluded to a Path 4 funding model (HEA, 2022) which is due to be rolled out in all universities across Ireland to enable people with intellectual disabilities access university campus' and gave an explanation for his reply.

Finnegas 52:57

"I don't get segregation AND CONGREGATION I don't agree with..... I remember when I was doing my hDip in Maynooth, and there was a guy there Professor Pairic Hogan, he's retired a few years ago. He was good. His lectures were good, there was always a bit of an aul debate. You know, But there was one day he talked about mixed ability class or streaming, which was best and it kind of went on for a while and Jesus I was back and forth. I didn't know which. My wife is a math teacher. A secondary school maths teacher. I met her on the course that time.... we ended up getting married and all that. but she would be all for streaming."

John 54:00

"Where would you stand?"

Finnegas 54:02

"Oh, I'm all for mixed ability. Some teachers don't know how to teach. They call it differentiation.

I mean, people who get 600 points in the Leaving Cert will still get 600 points in the Leaving. The reason why I like the idea of the Path4 for the higher education places, because a lot of our leaders, public servants, politicians all come out of universities, don't they? So if they've never been in a class with a young person with Down syndrome, how will they bloody well write policy? They think it's a good idea to put a high vis jacket on them (The SEN learners). Do you understand? So it's time we got that out of our heads and we had all of these people visible in our society, not at home, not in special centres, not on special bloody buses. So if we're the decision makers, in policy, in government, if you don't know them (SEN learners) well then, how can you make the right decisions? The only people in government that actually sit down and have a conversation with you are the ones who have a child with a disability and even they can't figure out how the system works."

Day Services

Three of the participants who work in HSE funded settings seem to indicate that there is a lack of resources available. In some instances there are reports of poorly paid staff which are monitored constantly by managerial practices. Ongoing risk assessments for individual activities and high levels of managerial scrutiny before each activity.

This practice seems to have direct consequences for learners. Several participants discussed how the voice of the SEN learner is seldom heard due to gatekeeping mechanisms by institutions citing the interests of the individual as the core of their decision making.

Although all participants were very aware of the need to allow the SEN learners have a voice, their opinion or choices were very often overridden or disregarded by those in positions of power. Grainne spoke of service users asking for a change of service for many years before it is granted.

Grainne

I know those policies and I'm sure there's a form to fill out if you want somebody to move on, but it's very hard to do. I wouldn't say that it's an easy thing to happen within our organization.

Like I can think of one guy who did move.... It took him years of asking, and asking, and asking before he got a transfer.

Medb told a story of three female service users in their thirties, who are all in wheelchairs appear to be very astute, having never experienced a girls day out and being described as 'lifers' by the staff. This moniker was applied because the service users were tired of staff deciding how they spent their day (usually a trip on a minibus). the service users becoming complacent and disengaging from the service and being given a label. This could be described as the effect of internalised ableism.

Medb 17:21

“ There were three young woman in their early 30s with a mild intellectual disability that had never got their nails done. They had never had an Indian Head Massage. They never had a back, neck and shoulder massage. You know what I mean? Three young women from Dublin, they could use a bus themselves. You know, they had good skills..... but they're not compliant with staff so they get left, or they just don't go out. It was a time of, you know, when we did a million risk assessments before you could do anything. So I took the thing(outing request) down and said I'm taking these women out. She(the manager) said 'I'll eat my shirt. They don't go out.' That's a poor attitude. You know, so the girls didn't think they were worth it, getting out, know what I mean? Just because they had a disability they weren't entitled to have a girls morning

Reflective Practice

Brigid, coming from an FE background, felt that the public aren't aware of the contribution people in services can make to their communities. Many participants cited the use of some form of reflective practice. Some discussed the need to reflect on learner experience, others discussed empathy towards learners, and some used the term "reflective practice". It's interesting to note that those that cited reflective practice were all working as educators and all placed reflective practice at the core of how they carry out their roles. Other participants used variations of reflective practice.

Most of the participants saw the value of engaging in reflective practice. Fionn told a story of himself and a trusted colleague setting aside time over a number of months to observe each other in the classroom setting, followed by giving constructive feedback to one another. This experience helped build trust in his colleague, and the results were shared with the school principal.

Fionn 26:53

"Reflective practice, I'm big into reflective practice? Yeah. That was one of the things when I was doing the masters. We did a lot of reflective practice. And in doing the diploma. There's individual reflective practice..... So one thing that I did in the school, there was a teacher next door.....She sat in my class one day, observing me teaching, and then I sat in her class. And then we wrote down different things. We fed each other back.... 'when I was looking at you teach..... I thought things you were very good at.....,'. Maybe I noticed certain problems that are in the class.....Certain things, mightn't necessarily be within our control. So we built up a strong communication around it, and...."

John 28:11

"Was it open and honest?"

Fionn 28:16

"You have to trust. That's why you are there..... You know the way, when you're teaching after a while you have to write the reflection. When you hand in your monthly plans, you have to write down your reflection, 'this went well and that went well'..... But ultimately, for me, I always thought thatI didn't know who I was writing it to. Okay, I'm writing for myself but..... Why am I boring some inspector or some principal who was reading it? So I'm just gonna write something that will keep ticking the box. Whereas if someone said how it went, you can write it down, like actually speaking of it to another person. No one ever replies to how your month went. Nobody's giving you feedback."

John 29:25

"Yeah. anytime I've done it I found it to be brilliant."

Fionn 29:30

"That's one of the challenges for school I think they should open up the idea of reflective practice"

Staff Agency

Services that participants flagged as being truly learner centered, focusing on the outcomes for their service users, seem to do so with staff that are given the agency to make meaningful changes in how the service is delivered. Being able to make these changes seems to be done through reflecting on how the current practice is working and making changes accordingly. This is done through engaging with the learners, identifying desired outcomes, and having discussions with colleagues to agree on a definitive means of achieving those outcomes. Key to reflexivity is having the agency to change practices. there was a stark contrast in the perceived agency of the staff who see their role as that of educator and those who perceive their role as one of carer. Those in the caring role saw their practice as being weighed down in bureaucratic processes. With many practitioners citing the need to carry out risk assessments and having these risk assessments approved at managerial level as a major hinderance in their being able to carry out their jobs.

Medb 27:39

“You've got the power trip thing. So did the team members in a particular scenario *'pipe down now, this is the way we do it. This is what works. Now they(SEN learners) don't go out. That's what they like. they're not going to raise any dust. leave them as they are. Are you going to do that?'*.....For me as opposed to going in and punching in your eight hours a day, if you can go in, make somebody's day a little bit better or help somebody experience something. or help someone learn something that they haven't learned before. I'm into that, you know, I'm not into just grinding down the clock.”

John

“Absolutely. 100%”

Medb

“But what I was gonna say was the amount of good staff we have, and they're just bewildered, because they're not allowed blossom, or they're not allowed to have a good idea. There was a girl there, she said to me ‘They'll move you, they'll put you somewhere worse, where there's less staff.’ When she came first, she had great energy, she'd great ideas. Somebody will always see something that you don't see.”

One participant pointed out that the hierarchies that have come to exist in services very often feeds down consequentially to the SEN learners as the end user. Some staff find creative solutions to circumvent managerial structures.

Grainne 53:35

“I do think there needs to be an overhaul of the whole system of hierarchy. I think it's too extreme, the hierarchical system where I work.....The policies are so strong that I can only speak to my line manager. I can't approach anybody else with an issue. You know, and like the Student council is a great way of getting past that, but it can be hard to move forward because of that hierarchical system, I think.”

John

“But that can be manipulated then by staff as well.
The Student’s council. And I've heard of instances where.....”

Grainne

“OH, I always feel like I'm pushing the learners to bring up issues. They might not be saying that they have an issue, but I know it's pissing them off. I definitely feel like I would have a big voice in the Student’s counsel, even though I'm just there to facilitate I don't share that too much. But I do..... I don't think I'm using it for my own benefit, though.

I think I'm kind of advocating on their behalf, that they should self-advocate”

Educators on the other hand seemed to view managers as individuals who create an environment to facilitate the practitioner carrying out their role. Many educators talk of how they were given support without question when it came to applying reasonable accommodation or looking for community work placements for example.

It was very interesting to hear managers talk of how staff need to take on extra responsibility if they are expected to have agency. That this wasn't a condition of having agency, but rather expected and evidenced. But all these positive practices seemed to incorporate some level of reflexive practice.

Finnegas 33:41

“What we're trying to build here is that you have a team of people around you and not just a key worker, but you have somebody who's helping manage the plan and has the conversations, they're not responsible for everything. So in our service here, if it is about employment, if that's really a goal. I have a team working on that, and we work beside your day supports team. So if you end up getting the job on a Saturday, we have the flexibility if you need support on the Saturday to be there..... We have the flexibility to do that and if the day support team can't do it, the Careers and Employment Team will do it until we can build a sustainable piece into it. If we're all nine to five, Monday to Friday, and then you stay at home for the rest of the time, sure who's helping you get out at night or join a club? So new directions in my view, if we're going to implement it, we need to start to develop some other supports some other alternative models that are more flexible. So you might have a 40 hour week contract but these are the three lads you're supporting. You're the team leader

for them, connect whatever you like and work whatever hours you need to be working to make sure that they have a good life. Then you can be more innovative. You don't necessarily have to be sitting in a centre at nine o'clock. You don't have to be Monday to Friday, you can work around it.”

35:01

“So you're talking about giving more agencies here to your employees?”

Finnegas 35:07

“Totally , but then hold the agents to account. ‘What's the plan for John? Can we get a quick look and it's not about that plan.’ There's an old phrase..... we use it a lot in our place, plans are nothing, planning is everything”

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

One must ask oneself why Inclusive education has been legislated for over 43 years since the 1980 Whitepaper (Shevlin, 2016) and there are still significant gaps in people with intellectual disabilities accessing employment and living in poverty? Reports identifying the Skills gaps of people with disabilities and the employment opportunities (Kelly & Maitre, 2021, p21-23) found that a significant number of people with disabilities are at high risk of unemployment and on average three times more likely to experience deprivation and twice as likely to be unemployed. The involvement of private companies in the allocation of Special further Education points to a market led approach to service provision. Lynch (Lynch, 2012, p. 96) describes market led education policy thus...

“The move to make education into a marketable commodity has implications for learning in terms of what is taught (and not taught), who is taught and what types of subjectivities are developed in schools and colleges (Rose 1989, Olssen and Peters, 2005). In a market-led system, the student is defined as an economic maximiser”

Not having access to normative practices, that are commonplace in mainstream post-primary schools such as career guidance officers, and the positive pressures that come from being in a mainstream classroom, mean that these learners do not have access to the same information that mainstream students take for granted. SEN learners very often find themselves isolated from learners in mainstream classrooms through separate infrastructure provided through educational policy. Not having the appropriate language to engage in discourse involving their future choices, learner’s parents and primary carers often act as gatekeepers to social inclusion and have a big influence in the learner’s interaction with their community. This manifested through restrictive measures limits the learner’s opportunities for progression. The role of parents in the education seems to play a significant part in learners decision making process. It is understandable that parents would have a role to play while the learner is still a child and even on into their early twenties. But the evidence shows that parents significantly influence learner’s choices for the majority of their adult life.

Several participants discussed how the voice of the SEN learner is seldom heard due to gatekeeping mechanisms by institutions claiming that they have the interests of the individual at the core of their decision. In so doing, several participants felt the voice of the SEN learners was lost as they became subject to bureaucratic systems. Files full of medical reports and ongoing surveillance by medical personnel throughout their educational career could

very well leave learners in a situation where they are powerless to speak for themselves. Normalised practices within SEN such as the involvement of occupational guidance officers went largely unquestioned by participants. The lack of career guidance counsellors was not an issue for many practitioners who had a relationship with the occupational guidance officer, an occupational therapist. Mike Oliver (1985, pp. 84-85) talks of community care having “profound implications for institutions which are the major method of segregating various groups” and there being a subtle shift in power away from formerly institution based professions. Being held to a different set of standards and alienated from mainstream education through the use of specific linguistic terms, which learners are reliant on others to help them to make meaning, led many SEN learners to become quiescent (Gaventa, 1980).

Funding models for SEN learners differ considerably from those in mainstream education. The fact that special schools are funded under primary schools and therefore have no budget to employ a career guidance counsellor, was a significant finding during the interviews. Mainly because it opens the door to the involvement of medical professionals in the guise of the occupational guidance officer. This individual, in nearly all examples given, has students earmarked for HSE funded services in their local community, be that education or day services. And the focus on learners’ social skills development takes the emphasis away from academic achievement. This in turn means that learners are not accessing further education and are instead, sent to private providers to continue their educational development. Many of the participants reported having reduced expectations of learners. This is one of the reasons given by Howe and Griffen (2020) as an argument against the use of differentiated teaching practices in school settings. One must wonder how any young adult hasn’t developed social skills to such a degree that they have to enter into a programme to support them to do this?

Reference was made on several occasions of students coming to further ed from an autism unit or being in a lower ability group. This, combined with the reference to medicalised files held within the special school suggests, for me, that SEN learners are subject to ableist practice with schools receiving funding to remove students from mainstream classrooms, facilitated to do so through the policy using the continuum of provision (Howe & Griffin, 2020) and learners becoming subject to the stigma (Spassiani & Friedman, 2014) associated with practices of micro-exclusion (Cologon, 2013). Both Foucault (1961(2006)) and Oliver (1985) discuss how institutions serve as an example to the rest of society of the consequences of not conforming. This sentiment was very much in my mind when Oisín discussed how

students from other schools would accept invitations to events in the Special school where he had been principal, but invitations were never extended from those schools when they were hosting events. SEN children in Irish schools are seen to have a low self-concept (Gallagher, et al., 2020). Fionn agreed that the ability of SEN learners in special schools was declining throughout the time he had spent in the school. Why is this? Medb alluded to evidence that suggested that more SEN learners were able to access mainstream post-primary and FET education and that this meant that the severity of impairments presenting in HSE funded centres was increasing as more places were becoming available. This would coincide with what Brigid discussed in relation to her HSE funded program.

The absence in discourse around achievement of qualifications was evident. Half of the participants interviewed discussed the gap in suitable pathways for learners to progress into further education. There was instead a lot of talk of learners meeting personal goals and these being documented and tracked. Plans and schemes of work were dismissed by many as being too structured. This was more evident in HSE funded facilities than those of FET. Post primary settings were very much in line with the practices of the HSE funded facilities evidenced by the involvement of community care professionals.

Only two of the participants seemed to practice, what I would consider, the social model. Meeting the learner “at the door” as I tended to put it. What I meant by this was that every person attending a course was equal on arrival. There was no file or knowledge of any requirements prior to the educators engagement with the learner with scaffolding only being put in place as required when issues arose. The almost unconscious need to categorise learners according to their ability to socialise was a very strong narrative throughout the interviews. And it seemed to be this, learners were being examined upon.

The agency of staff also seemed to play a considerable part in the ability of practitioners to be learner centred. Where practitioners spoke of having a lack of agency there was reports of a great deal of oversight from managerial practices and also a correlation in SEN learners finding it difficult to transition out of these centres. These tended to be HSE funded adult day services. Practitioners who spoke of being part of the decision making process discussed involving learners deeply in that process and using reflective practice as a key element within that process.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Introduction

At the beginning of my studies on this research question I had hoped to gain insight into which school of thought works best to approaching the provision of curriculum for people with Intellectual disabilities in post primary education, allowing them the best opportunity to realise their own potential when accessing FET by:

- measuring the current throughput of learners from adult day services, training programmes
- Identifying potential avenues for future learners to progress into Further Ed from special schools.
- Inform best practice in area of special education provision.
- Highlight potential opportunities to increase provision of training given to learners with intellectual disabilities.

In primary and post primary education the EPSEN Act (DES, 2004) makes provision for resources within mainstream schools without diagnosis to increase inclusion of marginalised groups within these settings. The focus away from diagnosis led approach to general allocation of resources under a Department of Education and Skills circular in 2017 (DES, 2017) meant that children could avail of resources in the classroom that negated possible impairments. However, there is evidence to suggest that SEN learners find themselves subject to exclusionary practice through the use of the continuum of provision (Howe & Griffin, 2020). Many SEN learners find themselves in special schools or segregated units after many years in mainstream classrooms. This form of ‘inclusion’ is regarded by Colgon (2013) as micro-exclusion. Once the transition occurs into these specialised units the emphasis changes from academic achievement to social skills development. The career guidance counsellor gives way to the occupational guidance officer and their standardised assessments give way to assessment of needs. Many learners fail to be given the opportunity to access further education due to ever widening gaps in academic achievements. This gap in educational provision from the special school to further education has created opportunities for state sanctioned private providers that are reliant on a regular supply of SEN learners to satisfy funding criteria.

Current Solas policy (2020) identifies the need to support SEN learners in FET, recognises the presence of “separate dedicated provision” and draws on the need for educators to have

the additional skills required to handle the trauma that many of these individuals experience through marginalisation and related to their impairments. Pathways towards progression have been identified but the disjointed nature of further education provision across the 34 programmes offered means that there appears to be no active enforcement of the strategic plan (ibid). Many existing services providing adult education for young SEN adults are grounded in models of care. This means that there is a heightened risk that learners will be exposed to ableist attitudes and interventions from professionals motivated by narratives routed in the health policy.

Areas of further study

Outcomes for SEN learners are not tracked on the whole. Future longitudinal studies would be beneficial to identify how many SEN school leavers accessing HSE funded services progress on to employment or further education. Considering the length of time they are placed in remedial training courses focussed on development of social and life skills training it would also be interesting to see at what age these learners manage to progress on to FET study or secure employment, if they manage to do so at all, and what benefits this has to their mental health and wellbeing.

The gap between Junior certificate training in the special schools and FET course is significant. Bridging programs, such as the one Finnegas is involved in, should be given greater consideration. Comparative studies across service providers and internationally would identify possible pathways towards societal inclusion for people with SEN.

Positive practices

Positive practices exist throughout special education provision. Many learners who formerly would not have received early intervention can now access this in pre-school settings and this seems to have knock on effects throughout the education system, leading to greater inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in society as a whole.

Resistance from teacher representative bodies to engage in training that led to specific outcomes for SEN learners is concerning, meaning that they are “not required to engage in any CPD to specifically support inclusive education practice.” (Kenny, McCoy, & Mihut, 2020). However, the current adoption of universal design for learning (UDL) and move away

from differentiated learning practices along with awareness from some practitioners of Bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1981) means that practices are changing within schools to include SEN learners on the whole.

Community placed training facilities were generally regarded as a move towards an inclusive model. This expansion of services was commented on by the majority of participants. Some participants working within those services saw this new approach as being generally a positive move away from the old model and moving towards one of community inclusion

It was extremely obvious for me, having conducted the interviews, the level of care and respect qualified teachers had when they talked of their students. Every one of these individuals seemed to engage in some form of reflective practice as part of their work and there always seemed to be an element of hope when they expressed their feelings regarding challenges they, or their students faced. Medically qualified participants didn't seem to share the same outlook and could have been viewed as being more pessimistic in their outlook. That's not to say that they had no empathy for their learners. The positive sentiment expressed by all participants was heartening throughout the interview process.

A Long way to go.

A review of the EPSEN Act is currently underway. It is believed that this review may make provision for supports to follow learners from post-primary into further and higher education (Government of Ireland, 2022). Ireland still has a long way to go in terms of becoming fully inclusive. With somewhere in the region of 129 special schools throughout the republic of Ireland (Madigan, 2022), medicalised models are still very much the reality for learners with intellectual disabilities. Transition rates of children from post-primary into further education are considerably better for learners who attend mainstream, as opposed to specialised education (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021), with geographic location and access to segregated schools (or lack thereof) playing a large role in both.

Final Conclusion

Is the current model of inclusion working? A move toward the social model of disability is slowly gathering pace, technological advancements mean that people with SEN are better able to negotiate the environmental barriers that once defined them. Although much discourse has led to positive changes in how SEN learners are included in Irish society, the nature of clinical practices have altered and the same set of linguistics that historically perpetuated the exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities is still in existence today.

All discourse is filtered by a set of assumptions given to us by the culture and historical conditions that we are born into. The current narrative around SEN learners is still very much rooted in medicalised, positivist models. Children who fall behind in mainstream education are relegated to the special school. These special schools, being under the remit of primary education have no mandate to prepare these learners for state examination and work with HSE occupational guidance officers to place these individuals in community care, often privately run. This shifts the burden of the state from one of provision to a model of regulation. Power structures are exacerbated and dominated by the continuing success of the powerful institutions which do not have to expend as many resources to maintain power as the powerless have to expend to achieve parity of power. John Gaventa (1980, p. 23) writes

“The ruler rules, not by solving others’ problems, but by having none of his own.....
Once power relationships are developed their maintenance is self-propelled”.

SEN learners, not having a dominant culture (Spassiani & Friedman, 2014) remain trapped in state sanctioned provision due to a number of issues including internalised ableism, being subject to multiple mechanisms of power and without cultural identity I fear that this cohort will remain subject to well established narratives. Freire (Freire, 1970, p. 30) talked of the need of the oppressed to free themselves and the inability of the oppressor to become the liberator. For change to occur it must happen from the learners themselves and representative bodies. The 1980 white paper (Shevlin, 2016, pp. 188-189) that lay the foundations for inclusive education recommends integrated education for people with learning disabilities should be the first consideration before other option. The involvement of medical practitioners and the lack of cohesion between education bodies to implement clear pathways for SEN learners into FET would suggest that inclusive settings are not being given due consideration and the department of education and the HSE are still, very much, painting by numbers.

Bibliography

- AHEAD. (2022, November 03). *Equal Status Acts 2000 & 2004*. Retrieved November 2022, from Ahead.ie: <https://www.ahead.ie/equalstatusacts>
- Alfrey, L., & Jeanes, R. (2023). Challenging ableism and the ‘disability as problem’ discourse: how initial teacher education can support the inclusion of students with a disability in physical education. *Sport Education and Society*, 28(3), 286-299.
- Barnes, C., Mercer, G., & Shakespeare, T. (2010). *Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction*. London: Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Bearne, E. (1996). *Differentiation and Diversity in the Primary School* (Vol. 1). Taylor & Francis.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: a practical guide for beginners*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1981). *The Ecology of Human Development : Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Burch, L. F. (2018). Governmentality of adulthood: a critical discourse analysis of the 2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice. *Disability & Society*, 33(1), 94-114.
- Citizens Information. (2022, Decmeber 6). *Special needs education*. Retrieved from citizensinformation.ie: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/the_irish_education_system/special_education.html
- Cologon, K. (2013). *Inclusion in Education: Towards Equality for Students with Disabilities*. Sydney: Children and Families Research Center.
- Deegan, G. (2022, Nov 9). *School must pay €12,000 to girl with Down syndrome who was forced to spend most of day in foyer away from classmates*. Dublin: The Irish Times.
- Department of Education and Skills. (2017). *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Derrida, J. (1997). *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- DES. (2004). *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs*. Dublin: Houses of The Oireachtas. Retrieved from <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/act/30/section/7/enacted/en/html#sec7>
- DES. (2017). *Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Durkheim, E. (1933). *The Division of Labor In Society*. New York: Macmillan.
- Feely, M. (2016). Sexual surveillance and control in a community-based intellectual disability service . *Sexualities*, 1-26.
- Foucault, M. (1961(2006)). *Madness and Civilisation*. Oxon, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1966(2002)). *The Order of Things*. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1973). *The Birth of the Clinic*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1975(1991)). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1981). *The History of Sexuality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1994). Power. In M. Foucault, *Power: essential works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fraser, N. (1981). Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions. *Praxis International*, 3, 272-287.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Random House.

- Gallagher, A. L., Galvin, R., Robinson, K., Murphy, C. A., Conway, P. F., & Perry, A. (2020). *The characteristics, life circumstances and self-concept of 13 year olds with and without disabilities in Ireland: A secondary analysis of the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) study*. Dublin: PLoS.
- Gardener, H. (1984). *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*. London: Heinemann.
- Gaventa, J. (1980, January). Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley. *American Political Science Association*, 1-29.
- Giroux, H. (2011). *On Critical Redagogy*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Gough, I. (1979). *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Government of Ireland. (2015). *Supporting Access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability*. Dublin: Inter-Departmental Group.
- Government of Ireland. (2004). *Equality Act*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- Government of Ireland. (2015). *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2023*. Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- Government of Ireland. (2022). *Minister Madigan announces opening of public consultation in review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- Government of Ireland. (2022, September 28). *Ministers Foley and Madigan announce details of €9.6 billion education funding in Budget 2023*. Retrieved from gov.ie: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/8ba6b-ministers-foley-and-madigan-announce-details-of-96-billion-education-funding-in-budget-2023/#>
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- HEA. (2022). *Programme for Access to Higher Education*. Retrieved May 2023, from hea.ie: <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/path/>
- Health Service Executive. (2015). *New Directions Interim Standards for New Directions, Services and Supports for Adults with Disabilities*. Dublin: Health Service Executive.
- Howe, C., & Griffin, C. (2020). Is Ireland at a Crossroads of Inclusive Education? *REACH Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, 33(1), 44-56.
- HSE. (2011). *Time to Move on from Congregated Settings A Strategy for Community Inclusion*. Dublin: Health Service Executive.
- Kelly, E., & Maitre, B. (2021). *Identficiation of Skills Gaps Among Persons With Disabilities and Their Employment Prospects*. ESRI. Dublin: ESRI.
- Kenny, N., McCoy, S., & Mihut, G. (2020, Septembwr 23). Special education reforms in Ireland: changing systems, changing schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-20.
- Lewis, E. O. (1933). Types of mental deficiency and their social significance. *Journal of Mental Science*, 79, 298-304.
- Lynch, K. (2001). Equality in Education. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 90, 395-411.
- Lynch, K. (2012). On the Market : Neoliberalism and New Managerialism in Irish Education. *Social Justice Series*, 12(5), 90.
- Maclean, I. (1998, January). Foucault's Renaissance Episteme Reassessed: An Aristotelian Counterblast. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59(1), 151.
- Madigan, J. (2022). Dáil Éireann debate - Thursday, 16 Jun 2022. Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative Reseach Design* (Vol. 3). London: Sage.
- McConkey, R., Kelly, C., Craig, S., & Shevlin, M. (2015, September 16). A decade of change in mainstream education for children with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Ireland. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 31(1), 96-110.

- McIntosh, P. (2002). An Archi-texture of Learning Disability Services: The use of Michel Foucault. *Disability and Society*, 65-79.
- NCSE. (2004). *Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act 2004*. Dublin: Oireachtas Ireland.
- NCSE. (2013). *Continuum of Education Provision for Children with Special Educational Needs: Review of International Policies and Practices*. Trim: National Council for Special Education.
- NCSE. (2019). *Initial Teacher Education for Inclusion*. Dublin: National Council for Special Education.
- O'Brien, J. (1990). Developing high quality services for people with developmental disabilities. In H. Bersani, & V. Bradley, *Quality Assurance for People with Developmental Disabilities: It's Everybody's Business*. London: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- O'Donovan, M.-A. (2021). The Elusive Inclusive University: What Does This Look Like for Students With Intellectual Disability? An Irish Perspective. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 18(1), 68-74.
- OECD. (2020). *Mapping policy approaches and practices for the inclusion of students with special education needs*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Oliver, M. (1985). The Integration: Segregation Debate: Some Sociological Considerations. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 75-92.
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach*. The Netherlands: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Paden, R. (1987). Foucault's anti-humanism. *Human Studies*, 10, 123-141.
- Paradis, E., Nimmon, L., Wondimagegn, D., & Whitehead, C. R. (2020, June). Critical Theory: Broadening Our Thinking to Explore the Structural Factors at Play in Health Professions Education. *Academic Medicine*, 95(6), 842-845.
- Pickett, B. L. (1996). Foucault and the Politics of Resistance. *Polity*, 28(4), 445-466.
- Rogers, C. (1967). *On Becoming a Person*. London: Robinson.
- Rogers, C. (1992). The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60(6), 827-832.
- RSM. (2017). *A qualitative study of how well young people with disabilities are prepared for life after school*. National Disability Authority. Dublin: RSM PACEC Ltd.
- Scanlon, G., & Doyle, A. (2021). Transition stories: Voices of school leavers with intellectual disabilities. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 49, 456-466.
- Shevlin, M. (2016). Historical Overview of Developments in Special Education in Ireland. In B. Walsh, *Essays in the History of Irish Education* (pp. 181-201). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Solas. (2020). *Future FET: Transforming Learning*. Dublin: Solas.
- Spassiani, N. A., & Friedman, C. (2014). Stigma: Barriers to Culture and Identity for People With Intellectual Disability. *Inclusion*, 2(4), 329-341.
- Tomlinson, S. (1982). *A Sociology of Special Education*. London: Routledge.
- UNESCO. (1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. *World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality*. Salamanca: United Nations.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Welcoming learners with disabilities in quality learning environments: a tool to support countries in moving towards inclusive education*. Retrieved November 2022, from UNESCO.org: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380256>

- United Nations. (1948, December 10). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved November 2022, from UN.org: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- Van Aswegen, J., & Shevlin, M. (2019). Disabling discourses and ableist assumptions: Reimagining social justice through education for disabled people through a critical discourse analysis approach. *Policy Futures in Education, 17*(5), 634-656.
- Walsh, T., & Ryan, A. (2015). *Writing your thesis*. Maynooth: MACE Press.
- Wolfensberger, W. (1994). The growing threat to the lives of handicapped people in the context of modernistic values. *Disability & Society, 395-413*.
- Wolfensberger, W., & Thomas, S. (1983). *PASSING: program analysis of service systems*. Toronto: National Institute of Mental Retardation.

Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

**Department of Adult and Community Education
M. Ed Ethical Approval Form**

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Brief Title of Thesis | A study of Progression of Learners with Intellectual Disability from Post-primary Education into Further and Higher Education in Ireland |
| Student name: | John Connell |
| Supervisor(s): | Dr. Margaret Nugent |

Research Methods

Please outline

- Proposed methodology
- Methods of data collection
- Types of analysis

The proposed methodology will involve data collection through semi-structured interviews. Current supports for learners with intellectual disabilities provided within the Department of Education and Skills are not transferred into Further and Higher education. I wish to examine if market led practices are resulting in many of these learners being excluded from further, meaningful education possibilities due to an inherent culture of ableism among practitioners and policy makers.

The data analyzed will be subject to a preliminary analysis before being coded into themes. Following on from this, the researcher will use these themes to establish meaning making in the discourse's paradigms, meaning repertoires, values and attitudes, talk and practice, theorizing about concepts and drawing general inferences. after this stage the data is written up in the form of findings. These processes will be presented within the thesis for scrutiny by the reader.

Participants

Please outline

- Who will take part?
- Where will the research take place?
- How will you gain access to or recruit participants?
- Does your research involve gatekeepers?

Interviews involving eight to ten teachers and instructors from post-primary and further education settings will take place in person where possible, in a setting of the interviewees choosing. This may be in the participant's own community or in a place/setting they feel has significance they wish to convey to the researcher. Participants will be recruited through social and professional networks established throughout the course of the researcher's career minimising the involvement of external gatekeepers within the process. However, it is understood and recognised that, as the primary gatekeeper, there are inherent biases which must be acknowledged within the study, such as, the researcher's involvement in frontline services to adults with intellectual disabilities and the fact that they have a child with a disability, currently in the school system.

Demonstration of Ethical Considerations

Please outline the ethical issues which will need to be managed during the course of the thesis

Please discuss

- How you will obtain informed consent
- How you will ensure that participants are protected and sensitively managed
- What types of power relationships (student/employee/employer/colleague etc.?) exist in the research and what steps will you take to manage these?
- If gatekeepers are involved, what procedures have been agreed?
- How will you limit the collection of personal and sensitive data?
- How will you anonymise the data?
- How will you secure the data?
- How and when will the data be destroyed on completion of the MEd?
- Any other issues that you consider important or that your supervisors have raised in discussions?

Consent will be indicated by each participant through a signed "INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS"

The right of the individual to give informed consent is paramount. Informed consent must be recorded but does not necessarily have to be obtained in written form.

Due care will be taken by the researcher to consider the wider context and how any individual's participation in the research may lead to repercussions for that participant or for others beyond the immediate research context as per Maynooth university's Research Ethics Policy.

It is envisaged that the research will use a collaborative discourse model with peers in their field, creating equality, drawing out information and exploring alternative perspectives through dialogue. In collaborating with peers and colleagues, it is expected that the power dynamics will be minimal and any potential gatekeeping issues will be minimal, leading to open discourse between participant and researcher.

Participants data will be collected and stored in digital format. Particular attention will be paid to the completeness, integrity, and security of data records. Data will be stored in a safe, secure, and accessible form, held for an appropriate length of time, to allow for future reassessment or verification of the data from primary sources.

To ensure this, all primary data (anonymised where relevant and feasible) should be held for a minimum period of **ten years** following publication in accordance with Maynooth university's Research Integrity Policy.

Contact details identifying participants, including names and places of work, will be anonymised, and will be held in digital format on Maynooth university's servers and encrypted to prevent access by anyone other than the researcher. A copy of this contact list will be supplied to the supervisor on the programme, providing a failsafe if unforeseen issues should arise during the course of the study and minimising the exposure of research participants data.

If, at any time, the participants make a disclosure of a criminal nature, it is clearly outlined within the information and consent form that the researcher is obliged to report any matters to the relevant authorities.

Please append a copy of your information sheet and consent form to participants.

Further information on Maynooth Research ethics policies including research integrity is available here <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/research/research-development-office/ethics/ethics-general-policy-documents>

Declarations

I confirm that the statements above describe the ethical issues that will need to be managed during the course of this research activity.

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Postgraduate Student | Signature: Date: |
| MU course director | Signature: Date: |

Please email a copy of your completed ethics form to your supervisor and cc Michael.J.Murray@mu.ie; angela.mcginn@mu.ie

You will receive a reply within 10 days of submitting the form

For Department Use Only**Supervisor use only:**

Date Considered: _____

- Approved
- Approved with recommendations (see below)
- Referred back to applicant
- Referred to Department Research Ethics Committee

Recommendations:

Appendix B: Consent Form



INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. I am John Connell, a *master's student*, in the Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University.

As part of the requirements for *Masters in Adult and Community Education*, I am undertaking a research study` under the supervision of *Dr Margaret Nugent*.

The study is concerned with the progression routes for People with Intellectual Disabilities through the school system into Further and Higher Education.

What will the study involve? The study will involve the interviewing of educational practitioners in post-primary special education and further education to ascertain their views on the preparedness of school leavers to access further and higher education and the current mechanisms in place to assist them in carrying out these processes.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Department of Adult and Community Education. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because of your experiences of student transition through the education system, from second level to further and higher education or other options.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, we hope that you will agree to take part and give us some of your time to participate in a one-to-one interview with a researcher. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are published. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Maynooth University.

What information will be collected? It is hoped that you would be willing to talk about your own experiences in your career and how you apply this knowledge to your role as an educator, particularly within the field of Special Education. It is also hoped that you will be able to critically reflect on progression routes for people with intellectual disabilities from post-primary education to enable them to best meet their personal goals.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time unless you give explicit consent to allow this. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Dr. Margaret Nugent - Research Supervisor, Dr. Angela McGinn – Course Director & Dr. Michael Murray – Course Director.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be digitised and kept on Maynooth University servers in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. The names, places of work will be anonymised and completion of the research, this data will be destroyed.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as a thesis or additional summary report, discussed at internal group meetings, presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? Due care must be taken by the researcher to consider the wider context and how any individual's participation in the research may lead to repercussions for that participant or for others beyond the immediate research context, as per Maynooth university's Research Ethics Policy. I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part although, it is possible that talking about your experience may cause some distress.

What if there is a problem? At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. You may contact my *Dr. Margaret Nugent, Margaret.Nugent@mu.ie* if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: John Connell, 0876188794, *john.a.connell.2022@mumail.ie*

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in John Connell’s research study titled “A study of Progression of Learners with Intellectual Disability from Post-primary Education into Further Education in Ireland”

Please tick each statement below

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I’ve been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with John Connell to be audio recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data up to Fri 28th April 2023

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

[Select as appropriate]

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I agree for my data to be used for further research projects

I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects

I agree for my data, once anonymised, to be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive

Signed.....

Date.....

Participant Name in block capitals

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed.....

Date.....

Researcher Name in block capitals

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact Michael Murray (michael.j.murray@mu.ie) or Angela McGinn (angela.mcginn@mu.ie) Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Qualifications and Training of Practitioners

- What sector do you work in (FET, POST-PRIMARY, Day Service)
- What is your primary degree, how did you end up working with learners with ID and how are your skills applied to your work?
- How long have you worked in this sector and why?
- Have you been involved in any CPD (Continuous Professional Development) to improve your approach to your job?
- Do you engage in reflexive practice?

Notes

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

What Supports are in place for learners with Intellectual Disabilities

- What sort of backgrounds are learners coming from?
 - Level of disability
 - Home environment
 - Prior schooling etc.
- Are good transition plans in place for learners moving from post-primary on into Further Ed. What sort of transition plans are in place? Are they used? How is this funded?
- What supports are in place within the School/training centre for the learners?
 - Learning environments (Access, Assistive Technology etc)
 - Curricula
 - Support from various different professionals within the service (is there a rehabilitation officer, guidance counsellor)?

Notes

Expectations of Learners

- In your opinion would teachers or practitioners have a high or low expectation for learners with ID?
 - Why do you think this?
 - Do you think that learners with ID are over medicalised
- Are the expectations of learners realistic? Do you find learners tend to internalize an ableistic attitude towards their own abilities?
- How are learner's goals and expectations managed? Are they encouraged to make mistakes?

| |
|--|
| |
| |

