A different way of being:

supply teaching in special schools

Stella Cattini-Muller

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MA Dissertation (UTC RD1 TM)

"My attitude has definitely changed through my experiences as a supply, especially with regard to entitlement for all children to have an education. My first assumption, in a PMLD school, was that there was no way I could educate those kids in spite of my experience. That preconception has been challenged over and over again and turned around. Not only do I believe educational right to be very important, I also see that the National Curriculum, which I criticised so much has evolved a process which addresses the needs of these children and can, in some way, be monitored and recorded, and it's a different way."

(Teacher A 2002)

abstract

A different way of being, - the title for this study reflects the observations and concerns of supply teaching in special education, a previously unresearched area which is investigated from the perspectives of the supply teachers themselves, the schools and their support staff, the providers of the service and the researcher's own participatory experiences. The data obtained through interviews, questionnaires and the researcher's diary is substantiated by a study of policies, documents and a broad literature base which aims to set the study in its historical and educational context and to inform on current issues, policies and related relevant research.

The rich conversational data gives an illustrative and detailed picture of situations encountered in the special school classroom and the initiative, commitment and negotiation of teachers striving to operate in a system in which both the medical and social models of disability are to be considered when addressing the complex needs of individual pupils. It also reveals the pivotal role of the support staff and addresses the responsibilities they assume in ensuring safety and maintaining continuity.

The study also explores systems of support and training available for this liminal teaching group, also affected by the rush of initiatives and changes in policy, which assist in the effective delivery of a responsive curriculum and inform on essential practical issues. The findings highlight gaps in specialised knowledge, and some areas of concern related to this complex and different way of working which indicate needs for additional training and support and finally offer suggestions from the study group for a more structured form of continuing professional development.

Contents

a**cknowledgments**

I would like to share my gratitude for all the people in my study group who gave up their valuable time to speak to me and for their rich and honest contributions to this research. My appreciation extends to the many wonderful, caring and enlightened Learning Assistants and teachers I have worked with and learnt from during my ‘apprenticeship’ in the field of special education. It goes also to the Heads of Schools who have given me confidence in my skills and invited me back!

I need to thank my tutor, Penelope Harnett, for supporting me from afar, by encouraging e-mails, through two bereavements and family illnesses. It was her confidence in my efforts which persuaded me to continue.

Thanks go to my friends, Jenny, Lesley and Silvia, with whom I had many discussions about this work, and to Silvia, particularly, who read through the finished draft and gave feedback. A retrospective thank you to Eammon, who, in 1997, coerced me to cover his ‘special’ class, thus setting me off ‘on the different way’.

The most important person to acknowledge and thank is my dear husband, Gerhard Muller-Kosack, who has been my constant mentor and kept me on track in the most difficult of times and given me both practical help and moral support.

1 introduction

a personal challenge

This study seeks to explore the experiences of supply teaching in special education. Its autobiographical context stems from a period of reflexivity and subsequent career move into an undiscovered area of work after a long and varied experience in mainstream teaching. Working within this framework, very unfamiliar at first, challenged many assumptions and moved me to describe the experience as 'a different way of being'; a visiting teacher in special[1] schools - a daunting, humbling and illuminative initiation. During my first experiences, I witnessed a very different culture and ethos, and the challenges faced by the stranger entering this field, treading unknown territory.[2] I was motivated to rethink the way I perceived events, the way I acted, and, initially, rather to simply experience that different way of being in order to begin to understand the processes involved. There were skills I could access but a great deal to learn and discover, from ways of communicating and teaching (Fergusson 1994, Bradley 2001) to dealing with very complex and personal needs (Miller 2001).

theoretical context

The social, inclusive, model of disability focuses on those needs, on what a child can do and how she/he can be educated. It is a reaction to, and move away from the more conservative and exclusive medical model of containment which focuses on disability or medical conditions. The development of responsive curricula creates a paradigm shift from the medical to the social model, a philosophical, historical and political process the visiting teacher may be unaware of. The dilemma of needing to access aspects within the confines of the medical model and, at the same time fulfilling the role of educator within the broader social model, led to this research and forms the crux of the study.

the field of enquiry: methods

How these tensions are negotiated in practice emerges from the data obtained through the exploration of different perspectives through interviews with supply teachers and support staff in this field, and also through questioning schools and providers. The research objectives for this study are as follows:

[1] Corbett, J (1996:50) struggles with the word 'special,' preferring to see it as 'demonstrating difference'. I would like the reader to bear that in mind since I have used the word many times in the text, in the absence of an alternative and because it is the term most commonly used.

[2] At this time, I was concurrently developing a personal project, the Dzga Learning Support, which aimed to bring literacy and numeracy skills to children in a very culturally and physically remote area of the Gwoza Hills, in NE Nigeria, where language and communication presented some challenges (Cattini-Muller 2000). This very different educational environment was originally to be a focus for an action research project but circumstances prevented me from returning there. It was then that I discovered that there was a field of study much closer to home which I also wanted to explore.

- to increase my knowledge by informing myself more fully about current issues, policies and research which may be relevant to the role of the supply teacher in special schools
- to research relevant training systems currently in place both nationally and locally which are available to supply teachers
- to explore the experiences of other supply teachers, and schools they serve, to identify any areas of concern as yet not addressed
- to record my personal experience and research findings to inform and improve practice

The triangulation of approaches to data collection includes documentation and literature, conversational evidence and participatory observation. Personal study[1] set the research topic in its historical context and gave me insight into the changing nature of the special school, curriculum development[2] and the philosophy and implications for inclusion (Norwich 1996). I also tracked the changes in policy and the impact on teacher professionalism and time, the increase in demand for supply teachers and the changes in provision.

research questions

The research questions are as follows:

- What systems of support and training are available to supply teachers who go to special schools?
- What are the main observations and concerns of supply teachers in special schools?
- What are the main concerns and observations of special schools employing supply teachers?
- How has my personal experience of supply teaching in special schools informed my understanding?
- How can the findings of my study be of future use in informing practice?

The research progresses through the exploration of these questions to build a broader picture of the topic, highlighting the differences in special education and the needs of schools and visiting teachers within that structure. I discuss the findings in relation to my own participatory observations and the literature base, balancing these against the theories and policies which influence educational processes.

[1] Researching the impact of changes in SEN policies during my mainstream career (Cattini-Muller 1999a) later led to further study of policies for special education. I gained a clearer understanding of the continuum of needs and the related implications for special schools since the introduction of the first Code of Practice (1994). Coupled with the advances in medication, (Conway & Baker 1996) the climate and balance of the special school is changing as children with more complex & diverse needs are able to attend.

[2] The placement study (Cattini-Muller 1999b) addresses the development of a whole school curriculum.

2 literature review

2.1 introduction

The literature review, search and personal observations include exploring the theoretical frameworks for SN teaching and models used to form a literature base for skills and knowledge needed for the visiting teacher. It aims to develop a clearer understanding of the debates in special education and the changes in political will and ideology which have led to the curriculum structures now in place, which have altered the climate and status of the special school. It also serves to contextualise the framework within which the visiting supply teacher seeks to operate.

The literature search found no works specifically on the topic of supply teaching in special education so I took a lateral approach and drew on practical and research literature which would illuminate the areas of study investigated in the interviews and looked at current writings, articles and documents which include research into changes in supply teaching, special education, debates, policies, teacher training, curriculum and accountability. I give an overview of the recent history and background of special education in general, and then look at issues which involve visiting teachers to the field and to more practical considerations in everyday working situations. I have drawn from literature which has interested me in my course of study and in my professional work as a teacher and which may be of informative interest and provide some background knowledge to others entering this field of work. My personal log describes some of my own experiences as a supply teacher in special education:

> I sat on the bus, exhausted, so much of the first day etched in my mind, every new detail, every new experience, the wheelchairs, the silence, the fear, then the laughter, the singing and the excitement ... today I started to learn a very different way of being ... (Cattini-Muller 1997).

2.2 supply teaching

There is a remarkably small amount of literature pertaining to issues around supply teaching in general. Dougherty (1998) has written a very simple, practical and informative book which covers areas such as induction, expectations, demands and career aspects of supply teaching. At a more scientific and analytical level, the status and management of supply staff, training, attitudes and resourcing is tracked historically and researched in a compilation edited by Galloway & Morrison, (1994) They conclude by looking at the situation for these ‘professional substitutes in education’, from a national level, at curriculum initiatives and continuing professional development, at a local level with the introduction and impact of LMS (local management of schools) bringing a steady growth in private supply teaching agencies and at the institutional level with budgeting and responsibility for cover falling on the Heads of schools:

> This is the arena in which macro-level initiatives, directives and decisions are shown to

intersect at the micro-level with school priorities and the day-to-day impact of teacher absence and disturbance to routine (Galloway & Morrison :183).

2.3 government policies

Equally, the introduction and implementation of government policies and guidelines over the last two decades have had major implications at the micro-level on the nature of special education and for all agencies involved in its growth and development. The 1981 Education Act (Warnock) presented a major shift in attitudes to special educational needs, encouraging a multi-disciplinary approach involving parents in the process of assessment and made an explicit commitment to integration and training. The1988 Education Reform Act, on the other hand, gave little consideration to the needs of special schools but was later appendaged by A Curriculum for All (1989a) which committed schools to develop clearly defined policies, shared aims, and a raising of standards through a broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated curriculum. At the same time there was a gradual shift in financial resourcing of provision for special educational needs from LEAs to schools. Evans & Lunt (1992) examine some of the ethical issues related to statemented funding in mainstream schools, now driven by performance indicators to compete academically.

Wedell (1990) gives a detailed historical description of the developments in provision for children with special educational needs over the half a century leading up to this and welcomes the advances in awareness of special educational needs and the recognition of differing individual needs for all areas of education, in general, which includes special education.

The following, more recent, documents have relevance to the knowledge base required for those who enter this field of work, either as permanent or temporary teachers. The 1993 Education Act was significant in raising the profile of special needs, re-enforcing the regular updating of teacher knowledge and skills. It sought to refine the process of identification and assessment of individual educational needs with the establishment of special educational needs co-ordinators, (SENCOs), in mainstream schools. An annual declaration of provision was required and this led to the introduction of the first Code of Practice (1994). Meeting the needs of children in mainstream schools legally bound the providers with the responsibility for adequate and programmed provision enabling more of those children to be included rather than excluded. The Dearing Report (1993) made recommendations for revision of the new National Curriculum (NC) for children with special educational needs and consultation with teachers.

Florian (1998) presents the arguments for and against inclusive education which is at the core of the government's education policy and programme for action, Meeting Special Educational Needs (1998), and concludes that there is a basic philosophical agreement about equal rights,

that the goals set work towards increased inclusion and that, where special education is necessary, that all children have 'the opportunity to develop to their full potential' (David Blunkett 1998:3).[1]

2.4 curriculum development

a decade of debates

I reviewed some of the relevant literature by authors, major actors in the field of special education over the last decade, who debated and presented the effects of some of these policies and who worked, during that time, through the processes of developing 'an increasingly more responsive curriculum' (O'Brien 1998:147). It is hoped that this review will give some indication to the newcomer of the radical changes which have taken place in a relatively short period.

The need for change in special education is discussed by Ainscow (1989) who places particular emphasis on new curriculum developments, staff discussion, pupil-teacher relationships, self-esteem, evaluation and a greater sense of purpose. Dessent (1989) looks to the future and a 'unified rather than a dual system' and envisages an idealistic scenario where all special schools will be housed as a smaller part of a larger whole.

Barthorpe in relation to the 1989a Act (1991) (89) abbreviates 'broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated' to 'BBRDs' and addresses the difficulties encountered for teachers during such periods of radical change presenting some practical approaches to accessing the curriculum. Gains (1991) also recognises the insecurity of change and likens the curriculum challenge, its history, the struggle and processes to the ingredients of an, as yet, untried recipe but believes that the outcome will focus ideas and bring positive results. The controversy and on-going debates over the NC (National Curriculum) continue, its relevance and the ensuing determination for staff, children and parents to maintain some control over the curriculum in special settings are discussed by Byers and Rose (1994). Byers (1996:177) later refers to the improved changes in the NC as a welcome move away from 'a narrow and impoverishing curriculum'.

meeting the curriculum challenge

Here I examine some of the curricula developments and changes, structures and learning systems which now affect knowledge and inform practice. The quantity of literature reveals how curricula in special schools have developed through the last decade to meet the challenge of new initiatives and the changing population of children attending special schools. Addressing the

[1] A new document is due at the end of this year (2002).

issues and concerns of A Curriculum for All, Bovair & Upton (1992) also emphasise the importance of whole school policies for effective implementation and draw on initiatives and practical evidence of this, especially in relation to MLD schools. Carpenter, Ashdown & Bovair (1996/2000) emphasise the challenges that confront teachers faced with a growing number of children with a diversity of complex needs and the need for creative and inventive ways to deliver the curriculum. My first observations at an MLD school [1] (Cattini-Muller1999) present an illustrative example of the progress that can be made in just a few years with a whole staff commitment to developing a flexible and responsive curriculum and a literate environment for all pupils across the whole age range.

forward planning

Tim O'Brien (1998) discusses the potential of the 'millennium curriculum', the teething problems encountered after years of rapid educational reform, attainment targets and league tables, and states the need 'for a paradigm shift away from a child's difficulties and onto a child's needs' (1998:147). He emphasises individual need to meet 'the increasing complexity of learning styles' and stresses that the inclusive process has to be embraced by all to be wholly effective.

Marvin (2001) focuses on and works through the developments of a curriculum content for children with PMLD, profound and multiple difficulties, guided by the statutory requirements of the NC and the broader recommendations of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA 1996a) on whole school planning which enables demonstrable achievement, progression and continuity and which takes into account the interests, needs and communication issues of children. The struggle continues in creating the right balance between the delivery of a curriculum and the individual needs and care of children. Research by Halpin & Lewis (1996) refers to these tensions suffered by some special schools striving to meet curricula needs which may appear in conflict with child-centred philosophies. Ouvrey (1991) goes some way to addressing these problems by creating a flexible, interactive model which caters for the complexity and overlapping of needs. Sebba et al. (1995:45) also suggest that fruitful differentiation needs an awareness of teaching 'as a process as well as a product' and develop models for relationship and negotiation between teachers and learners.

political will v. practical reality?

Following on from the tensions outlined above, I link my literature here to those who describe the issues of conflicting or overlapping models. Norwich (1996:4) believes that we must live with and work through these dichotomies, stating that 'there is no ideological purity in

[1] MLD schools (Schools for children with moderate learning difficulties) are being reassessed and renamed as Schools for Children with Complex Needs.

education' and that fixed concepts of the medical versus the social model are counter-productive and leave no room for blending of ideas and diverse perspectives. Barton (1995) describes the social model and the way society sees and deals with the issues, and states that education for all has to consider politics, power and socio-economics.

The medical and psychological models are explored in great detail by Bailey (1998:54) who looks at the positive and negative aspects of both with regard to special education and seeks to 'harness the strengths' of the medical model and the evaluative skills of the psychologists, in order to cross boundaries and provide the best guidance and intervention for all children. Oliver (1998) recognises a gradual and significant shift in attitude away from seeing problems located in the individual, rather to seeing them as a social creation and believes the greater task ahead is to develop an educational practice which embraces that concept and lessens the focus on deficiency. The changing language used in special education is addressed in many contexts, specifically by Corbett (1996), who explores the deconstruction of outdated and derogatory labels and the dilemma of constructing a politically correct use of words to address issues of special needs.

the way ahead: inclusive practice

For the inquiring newcomer to the field of educational change frequently confronted with the terms inclusive, inclusion, inclusive education, the texts included in Clough & Corbett's collection (2002) give as many interesting and enlightened viewpoints as there are authors contributing. Wedell (2002:137) concludes that we need to experiment, with, act on and draw from all sorts of models and that 'being 'eclectic' seems to be the only relevant policy and Corbett demonstrates her interest in how teachers, in practice, are working towards the evolvement of an inclusive education system:

> What I am learning is that it is an ongoing process. You don't just do *inclusion* and then that is it. Practitioners have to be responsive, interactive, reflective and willing to adapt. They need to be receptive to learning (Corbett 2002:147).

2.5 teacher training

professional development

During the late 90s, the intensity of research and study which has taken place to address the need to raise teacher awareness and knowledge for an inclusive education system pinpoints a powerful shift in political will and professional commitment to achieve clarity and purposeful practice. I researched literature, policies and journals for articles pertaining to training and skills for special needs work and accessed several covering a variety of issues regarding professional development, initial teacher training, attitudes and perceptions.

initial teacher training and continuity

Garner's work **(**1994) with newly qualifying teachers demystifies the special school experience, seeing both the strengths in applying their own skills and also recognising the gaps in their knowledge, preconceptions and attitudes. With Miller (1996**),** he later reports on the findings of the Special Educational Needs Training Consortium (SENTC) which dealt with issues such as the reduction in specialist training over recent years, the need for initial teacher training, induction, continuing professional development and funding for training.

Hughes & Brayton (1997) also look at initial teacher training for special educational needs and identify differing experiences in the provision of access for students to special education and discrepancies between training and preparation for eventual classroom practice, ethical issues, paperwork and policies and management of support staff, identifying a need for a continuum of training into practice. Julian & Ware's research (1998) into qualifications in special education, echoes the need, again, also re-enforced by heads of schools, for a much wider training which provides a balance between understanding of the NC and specialist knowledge which equips teachers for the increasing complexity of needs they are faced with.

changing attitudes

Hastings et al (1996) measured the preconceptions, assumptions, expectations and perceptions of student teachers learning about children with SLD and ascertained that those who had experienced personal contact with individuals with disabilities were more likely to hold more positive attitudes towards them, thereby highlighting a need for a broader approach to SEN training. Similarly**,** Brownlee & Carrington's (2000) interesting project challenges attitudes in pre-service teacher education, addresses the new paradigm of inclusive schooling by structuring opportunities to work alongside a disabled peer, to examine attitudes and beliefs and express uneasiness and anxieties. The students conclude that coursework was limited, practical knowledge lacking and did not prepare them adequately for the diversity of needs they might encounter and that with the personal contact they started to see the person, not the disability. Bishop & Jones (2002) also see the value in lowering levels of anxiety and addressing fears through a proactive experience.

continuing professional development

The issue of training also extends to supply teachers. In their study for the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2002)[1] Barlin & Hallgarten report on the rapid increase in supply teacher usage in the last decade. They call for policies to improve the quality and status of supply teachers, recommend equal entitlement to paid CPD (continuing professional

[1] IPPR: Institute for Public Policy Research on Action Needed to Address Rise in Supply Teacher

development) and training outside working hours and other initiatives such as partnerships between LEAs and private agencies. They highlight the increase in demand for supply teachers to meet school needs. Hallgarten says:

> The rise of the supply teacher is a classic example of several education policies, economic circumstances and societal changes creating one unintended consequence (IPPR press release, 2002: 2).

2.6 demands and supply

The literature has aimed to follow the chronological progression of these changes and highlights the consequences for human resources. With the even more radical changes that have been taking place in the restructuring of special schools in terms of extra workload[1] there has been much pressure on teacher time. The releasing of teachers to facilitate the process has led to more need for cover and it is here where private teaching agencies have responded to meet this demand and fill the gap in the market.

private agencies: meeting the demand

Literature on the research conducted by private supply teaching agencies with reference to special schools is not readily available. I refer, therefore, to information literature freely available through Internet sources and to e-mail correspondence with management members of major agencies dealing with the provision of supply teachers to special schools who supplied details of the services they offer and how these evolved, the specialised courses offered, methods of evaluation and continuous updating to meet demand. Cornwall, G. of Protocol Teachers states (2002, e-mail correspondence) that the 'inclusion agenda has clearly impacted on the provision of staffing to cover special needs'. The development of special needs provision and courses was a reaction 'to feedback and market forces' says Rose, D. (2002, e-mail correspondence) of Select Education and includes details of a team of specialist contributors to courses.

training provision

Teachers can access details and dates of free courses, which vary from agency to agency, from their websites[2], advertised weekly in the Times Educational Supplement or directly from agency

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Spending, 2002, www.ippr.org.uk/press/index.php?release=70. This now published in Barlin & Hallgarten 2002.

[1] This might include developing polices, curriculum training, planning, INSET, courses, parental reviews, report writing, inter-disciplinary collaboration, assessment and evaluation.

[2] There are many supply teaching agencies used by special schools. I have quoted here the websites of those from whom I received feedback from my inquiries regarding training and courses. Information is available on these websites www.selecteducation.co.uk/teaching, www.protocol-teachers.com, www.capitaers.co.uk.

offices. Some sites describe specific courses and training for supply teachers in special education, ranging from PMLD to autism and working with visual impairment. Useful and detailed information is found to describe the differing features of particular kinds of school and the sort of routines and systems of working to expect. Agencies respond to areas of need for training and follow government guidelines. The latest initiative for supply teachers, Meeting the Challenge (2000), calls for improved standards, continuing professional development and quality marks for agencies. However, no mention is made in the document regarding supply teachers specifically for special education.

2.7 down to business: into the classroom

From the competitive world of business and market - led forces, I move on to review literature relevant to the structure of daily work inside the special school. I searched for literature to explore and describe the different needs and ethos in special education, areas such as the role of learning assistants, team management, strategies, dealing with outside agencies, resources, welfare needs, curricula, evaluation and assessment. Much of this literature is of value to visiting teachers who wish to enhance their learning and awareness of what they might find on first entering a special school.

the learning support assistant

Since the learning support assistants, (LSAs), are usually the main human resource for information in a special school classroom, I review some of the literature regarding their changing role in the new climate of inclusive education. Simon (2001) looks at the multi-faceted role of the LSA, explores the changes in it, and how the additional responsibilities, curriculum knowledge and training has transformed the LSA into a ‘paraprofessional’. She outlines government measures for increasing their status but concludes that the recognised value of the LSAs in raising standards is not, however, reflected in their salary structure and hopes that a ‘career ladder’ will follow to provide incentives for added qualifications, training and experience. The government guide (2000) on working with teaching assistants outlines suggestions for induction and higher level training, clarity of roles and responsibilities and more effective deployment. NASEN (2001) also believes that the government should develop a ‘consistent structure for LSAs’ in special education which gives opportunity for ‘career progression’. At the chalk face, there is much to be learnt about the diversity of backgrounds, personal histories and work experiences of LSAs in special education from their stories recorded by O’Brien &Garner (2001), a powerful collection of accounts, illustrating the complex nature of their work, the kinds of qualities and attitudes required, and their dedication and commitment.

multi-agency collaboration

There are many more adults in special schools, representing a range of disciplines, all of whom need to be identified and communicated with by a visiting teacher. Collaborating with a team of other professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, nurses, as well as, sometimes, a number of assistants, demands time and consideration, says Lacey (2000), who discusses the challenges which face those working with PMLD but stresses that sharing of information and expertise is essential, for no one 'agency can have the depth of knowledge and skills' to address such complex needs. Writing about the relationship between teachers and speech and language therapists, Miller (1996) discusses the development of positive exchange of skills and a better working relationship with more time allocated to sharing of knowledge and joint planning. Graham & Wright (1999) conclude from their research that, where possible, the professionals involved in special education embrace the philosophy of inclusiveness. McConkey (2002) sees the models as roads converging, a fusion of education and other services and advocates a holistic approach as the way forward to meeting the health, social and educational needs of the child and its family.

behavioural issues

The Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (Circular 9/94:23-26) and Circular 10/98[1] refers specifically to special schools and the structuring of written policies which ensure consistent and positive approaches for all and which involve individual pupil agreement on behaviour management. Swinson & Cording (2002) argue the case for training in assertive discipline techniques and 'praised-based' strategies, claiming that increases in teachers' conscious use of positive feedback is an 'essential element in the process of improving behaviour and learning.' Hewett (2001) explores the theme that challenging behaviour is normal and helps the reader to understand why children and young adults with severe and multiple learning disabilities might respond in different ways. He tackles the issue of attitudes towards behaviour control and seeks to present some theory and practice for an empowering means to allow the person to help her/himself to learn how to behave.

Preece, (2001), a teacher, discusses how behaviour management strategies in special schools can be a valuable resource to share with mainstream teachers. So too, Douglas (1999) and Hart (2002) also give useful and practical strategies for understanding anger, recognising and reducing triggers for anger, measuring own empathy and attitudes, body language and responses. There is much to be learnt on this theme from hearing the insights, perspectives and strategies of the learning assistants interviewed by O'Brien& Garner (2001) I quote here just one example, from Spencer's story:

> Some children will have had more tellings off and beatings than you can imagine before

[1] Circular 10/98 - Section 550A of the Education Act (1996): The Use of Force to Control or Restrain Pupils – these guidelines inform the structuring of policies at a Local Authority level and subsequently at the school level.

> they come to an EBD school. The adults who work with them have to find another way, - a different way. (O'Brien & Garner 2001:.81)

communication modes

When entering the field of special education, the visitor is often confronted with a visually different environment, and communication systems to suit a variety of complex needs. In this section I have chosen to highlight just a few of many authors to illustrate some elements of the diversity of need and provision in practice and the wide range of skills required to address these.

Fergusson (1994) describes a learning environment for PMLD and SLD which involves all members in a group and a differentiation in methods of communicating information geared to individual needs, for example with Makaton[1] signs, symbols and photos. She calls for raising the standard of signing for all adults involved with children. Some of the issues which arise in adult responses to individual pupil behaviours, and actions in group settings, are researched and addressed by Ware (1996:29-44). She demonstrates that there is a theory behind what may seem like an intuitive practice and that, with organisational strategies, increased awareness and careful self-monitoring, staff can give all pupils with PMLD a more increased rate of responses.

Potter & Whittaker (2001 p.145-158) look at the delicate and skilful balancing of communication enabling techniques for classroom management and learning for children with autism. These might include the structured use of TEACCH[2] to maintain levels of concentration, minimal speech approach to encourage independent communication, the use of PECS[3], timetables and symbols[4] for daily routines and the effective deployment of adults. The authors identify an area of special education which requires very specific knowledge and the training of all staff involved.

A whole school strategy to enable a child with Asperger's Syndrome to access the curriculum and remain with his group is discussed by Roberts (2000: 83-102) in an educative and informative collection on supporting pupils with pragmatic difficulties. This group approach required careful planning and co-ordination and she describes the processes involved, the strategies for behaviour, rules, boundaries, consistency and awareness of adults. She outlines the gradual development of security, and the child's eventual inclusion in all areas of school and home life, which made the stresses of the initial efforts worthwhile.

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[1] Makaton is a basic signing system using the key signs from the British Sign Language. Used a lot in school, it has a selective vocabulary of important everyday words. Information on this and other signing systems can be found on: www.inclusive.co.uk/infosite/symbols.shtml.

[2] TEACHH – Teaching and Education of Autistic and Communication handicapped CHildren

[3] PECS – Picture Exchange Communication System

[4] Symbol systems and signing systems - information available from Inclusive Technology Website: www.inclusive.co.uk/infosite/symsyt.shtml and www.inclusive.co.uk/infosite/symbols.shtml.

2.8 the learning environment

In his recent manual on the support of children with multiple disabilities, Mednick (2001**)** presents an illustrative, informative and visionary approach to creating a sensory learning environment. He is immensely practical and at the same time idealistic in his expectations for a totally inclusive system. He states:

> Children with multiple disabilities are entitled to be enlightened, empowered and enabled, as are all children. The onus is upon us and society to bring this about (Mednick 2001:3).

Although he aims his work at potential provision in mainstream, he describes many of the technical objects, room layouts and supportive equipment which might be found in special schools. For the newcomer or returner to the field, he demystifies technical language, illustrates communication modes from manual signing to rebus symbols and computer technology and gives explanations for many complex phrases like, for example, 'tactile defensiveness,'[1] 'criterion-referenced approach'[2] 'vibro-tactile' and 'orthotics[3]'.

steps towards the future: a responsive curriculum

The new edition of Enabling Access by Carpenter et al (2001) can be likened to the investigator's bible for theory and practice of curricula for children with moderate learning difficulties. Many knowledgeable authors, some already quoted, have contributed to this valuable work. Among them, Carpenter& Ashdown (2001:1-14) respond to the new initiatives over the last years which have moved from recognising entitlement for all children, to policies geared to enabling access to a broader and richer curriculum, to the present day with the latest developments in pre-scales (QCA 2001) and a government commitment to continue towards an inclusive education system. Byers (2001:214-25) discusses the progress made in school development and classroom practice, and is aware of the challenges and tensions still existing, seeing the teachers as the major agents in contributing to change. Potter (2001:305-14) covers new developments and issues in teacher training for special educational needs over the last five years.

[1] tactile defensiveness: a heightened sensitivity to touch, movements or sounds, resulting in an excessive and adverse reaction

[2] criterion referenced approach: this measures achievements and attainments based on what the child can and cannot do relative to a defined criterion. It is more formative and feeds into continuous assessment

[3] orthotics: mechanical aids which assist and enable the person to produce body movement safely and correctly (e.g. strappings and splints) - definitions are taken from Supporting Children with Multiple Disabilities (Mednick 2001)

forward planning

Detailed research by McNicholas (2000), on teacher assessment of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties indicates the variations in approach, recording and monitoring and the problems encountered in maintaining consistency and recommends in-service training and government attention to training needs and procedures for curriculum assessment.

Many of these concerns are also addressed by Lawson et al (2001), research development officers for the latest curriculum and assessment guidelines for children with learning difficulties (QCA 2001). They outline the development and progress of this project, conducted in consultation with schools, both mainstream and special. They describe these guidelines as the most extensive so far and an indication of government intent to deliver a high quality of education for all. These are non-statutory guidelines, subject based in line with the National Curriculum but allowing for flexibility of schools to decide whether, for example, to work on cross-curricular themes or to be subject-specific. Lawson (2002) later gives a clear description of the subject booklets, the refining of the pre - scales, the first three of which are further broken down with examples to illustrate attainment, guidelines on school planning, skills, content and assessment. The supportive document on target setting (DfEE/QCA, 2001) gives plans for a school improvement cycle and differentiated performance descriptors for the core subjects.

small steps - big rewards

Karen's story (O'Brien & Garner 2001) describes an exciting moment when a visiting supply teacher gave her a different strategy for helping a child to write one of the letters in her name. Karen persevered for several weeks until the child wrote her whole name:

> We started dancing round the room because we were so happy for her (O'Brien & Garner 2001:33-4).

This literature search has been an enlightening process in discovering links to theory and practice in special education and has led me to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the intense commitment of the schools, which I have visited as a supply teacher, to the implementing of policies and practices which move towards a richer and more diverse education for all the children concerned.

3 sources of data/methodology

3.1 sources of data

I identified a number of data sources which I hoped would adequately address the research questions. Government documents, policies, guidelines and literature studied helped to describe the wider picture and provide the background information for the field of study. I then narrowed the focus down to a more local level to include education authorities, supply teaching agencies, schools, teachers and LSAs, drawing, in addition, on personal experiences.

My local and main data sources consist of some documentary evidence from agencies regarding training and procedures, practical data and information from schools, conversational evidence from teachers and learning support assistants, written evidence from heads of schools, from my personal narrative, and related literature.

My first aim was to explore the kinds of training and support available to supply teachers, especially those who have little prior experience in this field. This appears to have been an unresearched area although the agencies providing supply cover for special schools have created courses and training days to assist their clients. The private supply agencies compete for business, offering incentives to support and attract teachers to this area of education, hitherto less popular, either because of lack of experience in the field, or because, prior to the 1994 Education Act, knowledge of special schools and what happened inside them was not in the public eye. I hoped to gain access to some of their research and information.

Secondly, I drew on the experiences of supply teachers in the field who are sent to special schools and also on the experiences of those who work alongside those teachers, the Learning Support Assistants and the Heads of schools. I invited interviewees to comment on issues which might highlight their interest or concerns. Certain aspects of experience were investigated during the course of personal study and later formed the basis for interviewing procedures.

3.2 methodology: approaches

The approach to this study was mainly qualitative (Eisner 1998, Denzin & Lincoln 2001)**. T**here were also elements of an ethnographic approach in this study in that we, as supply teachers, are often entering a different kind of field, a new territory with very different ways of interacting. I constructed a blending of methods, a triangulation (Denzin 1989, Cohen & Manion 1994) using three sources of data evidence, documentation, interviews/questionnaires and a research diary. My personal experience of being both in the field and researching the field has a participatory

observational element (Spradley 1980, Adler& Adler, 1998). Spradley describes differing levels of participation. I identify myself as an active participant, one who is learning the language and culture of special education as part of my work and at the same time observing others and widening my field of study. My aim was to explore this field experientially from the differing perspectives and ways of being and seeing, contrasting these against a personal career in mainstream and special needs and balancing the practical considerations with some study of the theory of special education. The three methods of data collection are described in the following sections.

documentation

- national sources: official data, policy documents, (Ozga 2000), literature, training procedures, Education Acts, Initial Teacher Training, Local Management of Schools, inclusion, curricula, classifying data (Hitchcock & Hughes 1999)
- local sources: written evidence from LEAs/agencies - training programmes, incentives, advertising, methods of feedback, evaluation, previous research
- schools: samples, individual programmes of learning, pupil profiles, record sheets, timetables, abbreviations, vocabulary, planning, curricula.
- current writings: literature on supply teaching, Learning Assistants, current issues in special education, theoretical literature, journals and research articles to inform and support findings and to interpret documentary sources (Macdonald & Tipton 1993)

Some of the national sources of documentary data have been accessed through the Internet, others through Government departments, from libraries and schools.

I made a first attempt to contact local sources for information on provision of supply teachers to special schools, selection, screening, training, courses and relevant policies. This was in the form of letters to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the North London area and to supply teaching agencies but these approaches yielded little return. I found from the replies I did receive from some LEAs that responsibility for supply cover had been relinquished to individual Heads of schools. Letters were sent to agencies advertised in the Times Educational Supplement who offered special needs (SN) work. In these I asked for information on previous relevant research and historical developments in teacher supply, guidelines for special education, training workshops and evaluation. At all times when corresponding, ethical issues of discretion, anonymity and the independent nature of my study were emphasised. I received only two replies and these were unable to help. Some written and Internet evidence of training, and some insights into the function of the agencies came from the e-mail requests I later made and contact with agencies and is described in my analysis.

I began to make a collection of documents I came across during my work in schools, making copies of typical timetables, programmes for physical welfare, occupational and medical needs, feeding and dietary requirements, IEPs, lists of abbreviations, collating of materials such as daily and weekly plans, policy statements, curriculum information and other relevant information.

The literature search found no works specifically on this topic. I decided on a lateral, contextual approach which underpins the study and draws from practical and research literature to illuminate the areas of study investigated in interviews, and from current writings which include research into changes in supply teaching, special education, debates, policies, teacher training, curriculum and accountability.

interviews

- to investigate the training and support provided for supply teachers in special schools
- to investigate the experiences and observations of special schools employing supply teachers, that is, those who work alongside them, the Learning Support Assistants
- to investigate the experiences and observations of supply teachers in special schools

My original aim was to conduct the three sets of interviews to explore the different perspectives of the field of enquiry, considering some of the areas of interest and concern mentioned earlier. Following on from my correspondence with the supply agencies, it was clear that no information regarding research and training would be given by interview at the recruiting offices without consultation and further communication with Senior Management, so I continued a communication by telephone and e-mail and finally received e-mail details of training, to be discussed later, and some contact with managers.

At this point, it seemed appropriate to ask permission for access to supply teachers who work for agencies to be invited for interview. This proved, as I had anticipated, to be a delicate area, and after much discussion during many e-mails, three of the agencies finally allowed a letter of invitation from myself to be given through the agencies to their teachers explaining the focus of the research. The third agency took a stronger role and contacted some of their teachers directly before issuing the letter and the only three interviewees which resulted from this approach came from that initiative.

Finding my access to teachers as sources of data was becoming frustrating and time-consuming, I decided to network as much as possible myself and through word of mouth gained access to two more interviewees, finding four more in the course of my own teaching work. I also then became more confident about telling others what I was doing, and this had a ‘snowballing’

effect and, as a result, I also started to find LSAs who were willing to be interviewed. My initial invitation to this group had been via the Head of the school, explaining the study and asking for a letter to be passed on to an LSA with some experience. This yielded nothing. Time to spare for interviews seemed problematic in terms of meeting up at an independent place, so in fact, four of the teacher interviews, the latter ones, and all of the LSA interviews were conducted over the telephone at a pre-arranged and convenient time.

I felt that I also wanted to hear the perspectives of the Heads but knew that the interview approach would make too many constraints on their time, so decided, after all, to compile a questionnaire for Heads which was sent out to as many as possible, in varying types of special schools, with a stamped address envelope for return. This was done over a period of time, always with the covering letter, the first set asking for permission to interview an LSA, the second set, omitting that request since it had not proved useful.

structuring the teacher interview

In all, I collated fifteen hours of interview sessions. In structuring the teacher interview, I looked at issues which had arisen for me personally during the course of my own work and in my previous studies, some of which might be investigated further in this work and so planned a semi-structured interview (Wengraf 2001, Edwards & Talbot 1994) which would invite interviewees to comment on areas which might highlight their interests or concerns while at the same time leaving space for discussion and expansion of their responses through establishing an ethos of rapport and empathy (Carl Rogers 1967). Emphasis was placed on the social interaction of the interviews, the valuing of the interviewee (Stenhouse 1984) and the manner in which the data is recorded. I found that note-taking during a telephone interview was less inhibiting than in a face to face interview where maintaining eye contact is so crucial. In face to face interviews, I mostly used a tape recorder. On the two occasions when that was not possible, I used my skills from working as a counsellor, and took pointer notes, filling in the details immediately after the interview.

As the interviewer, it is important to examine the nature of one's own values, judgments and prejudices, trying to avoid bias (Brenner, Brown & Canter 1985) and to be aware of what might influence the course of an interview, such as the type of questioning employed. Literature read highlighted the importance of good preparation and procedures for recording (Wellington 2001) and the classifying and grouping of topics, such as those listed below, for exploring through questions. My interview notes were later typed onto an interview guide sheet. (McCracken 1988) stresses the importance of the literature review in defining problems, refining categories and assisting in establishing the field, or 'domain' for exploration during interviews.

There were main area headings which guided the structuring of categories and which were sub-headed with reminders and prompts for use during conversations. The areas included the following and form the basis of my data analysis:

- knowledge understanding of curricula in special schools
- background knowledge/history of special education
- roles of multi-disciplinary team/outside agencies
- training available/professional development
- differing processes involved in SN teaching e.g. sensory environment
- teamwork/team management
- individualised learning/targets/expectations
- means of communication, signs, symbols
- continuity, stability of children, physical welfare & needs
- safety with equipment, technical gadgetry, technology
- medical conditions, information, medication, complexity of needs
- procedures, structures, rituals, timetables
- strategies & approaches for specific kinds of school e.g., EBD
- challenging assumptions

Emerging from the interviews and based on the professional experience and initiatives of the interviewees came another category, that of suggestions and ideas for improvement and change.

structuring the LSA interviews

I used the same areas of interest with the planning of the LSA interviews but geared my questioning rather to how the assistant would relate to the visiting teacher and how information would be imparted. I felt the questioning should be more informal so the interviews were less structured and I relied on their experiences and observations as a guide to gaining a more rounded view, following leads from them. I allowed space for issues which were less relevant to teachers but of greater importance to the LSA and their prescribed roles and responsibilities.

constructing a questionnaire for Heads

Constructing the questionnaire for Heads of special schools was a simpler procedure involving sixteen questions, some inquiring into the accessing, regularity of use and information provided for supply teachers in the school. Other questions were framed which would indicate what input the schools made and what they would welcome regarding priorities, experience, skills, qualities and training, asking for suggestions, experiences, observations and comments. These were sent directly to heads and deputies of schools, the first posting along with an explanatory covering letter about my research and a request for an interview with an LSA, for whom an invitation

letter was included. Half of the questionnaires were eventually answered and returned but only one interview with an LSA resulted from that process.

personal log/research diary

- participatory observation – actual work within the field of study, observing self and others
- written record, notes, accounts of structure of working days
- personal experience of being in the special school environment and contrasting with past experiences of teaching (Clandinin & Connelly 1998), notes and information on issues which may be relevant to my study

I have some written notes of my past experiences as a supply teacher in special education. However, since September 2001, I kept a diary of all my part-time work as a supply teacher. This data also provided insight into the roles and responsibilities of LSAs and other agencies in the schools. These writings constitute my personal field notes. Some questions I have considered during this process:

- What was the impact on me?
- How have my assumptions been challenged?
- How has my experience of special education informed my understanding of the role?
- Am I conscious of the level of participation I am functioning on? (Spradley 1980, Hammersley 1993, Blaxter et al, 1996)

3.3 issues of ethics, access and validity

ethics

There were some areas of ethical concern and confidentiality to consider (Children Act 1989, Oliver 1990, Soltis1990, Clough & Barton 1995). When obtaining permission, attention was paid to the fact that this research was independent of any school or agency and that all findings and information would be anonymous. Since the field is quite small, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Children are protected in this study and their interests are represented by the schools, LSAs and teachers. I have disguised the identities of interviewees and Heads of schools. I have also been careful not to include in my examples any references to specific children who may be recognised. This has meant that certain critical incidents have been omitted from the data presentation. Letters of the alphabet allocated to interviewees and children are random and have no connection with initial letters of names. Since I have been an active participant during this process I suffered some concerns about whether to divulge the nature of my work automatically when working in a school, not wanting to appear intrusive or to alter the balance of relationships. I decided to informally tell the Heads of schools I visited more regularly and only to mention it to others in the context of invitation to interviewing. My notes

were made out of school and were always in relation to my own practice, performance, observations and relationships to others.

access

In accessing information from private supply agencies, the initial gatekeepers and suppliers in this field, the problems encountered were as predicted and highlighted a difference of focus between the providers and those who actually do the work in the schools, the floating population of supply staff. These issues then became part of the process of the research, to clarify intention and to examine the role of the business world in education. Advertising on agency websites did not seem a viable means of access to teaching staff so some changes in my strategies were made and I relied much more on human resources and relationships. Direct access to research done by supply agency companies was not possible, although I found approaching different people in the same organisations gave rise to further leads (Blaxter et al. 1996) and access to materials which were of interest and relevant to the study.

It is not clear as to why there was little response from those LSAs who, I believe, were handed an explanatory letter by the Head inviting to interview. Was it because it was given by the Head and therefore had implications for what could be freely expressed? In order to gain more of a perspective from schools I decided to include the simple questionnaire in my research. Teachers certainly appeared more autonomous in their reactions to interviewing but the small number of contacts through agencies also suggested a possible lack of trust in the independence of the study. Could it be connected to an agency they might be working for? I had anticipated that teacher professionalism could also be seen to be being challenged, with teachers reluctant to raise or divulge concerns which might appear to make her critical of a system, school, or agency or to highlight lacks in their own experience and skills, raising issues of intrusion. Personal contact and preparatory explanation appeared to be the most satisfactory approach to gaining and maintaining trust and ensuring sensitive discussion (Fontana & Frey 1998). I was prepared to find that age, gender or race might have had some bearing on the interview relationship, age, particularly, in my case, but once there had been an agreement to enter into the discussion these issues seemed immaterial and I found that the interviewees were pleased to have a forum in which to express their views.

validity

Through exploration of the main research questions my aim was to gradually build a fuller picture of the topic, highlighting the differences in special education, the theoretical models which influence practice, the culture of the special school and the needs of the visiting teacher within that structure. The diversity of methods used to address those different perspectives helped to validate the data for research, that is, the triangulation between the primary sources of

data obtained through interviews and questionnaires, and through the participatory, observational aspect of personal experience, set against a background of secondary sources of data obtained in documentation collated and related literature. For example, interviews were transcribed from note-taking as closely as possible to the spoken word, exploring 'the experiences of other supply teachers in special education',[1] the materials from supply teaching agencies were gathered from the Internet and correspondence, expanding the 'research into training systems in place'[2] and the ethnographic field notes and observations of the participating researcher show 'findings to inform and improve practice'[3]. Hitchcock &Hughes (1999: 106) discuss the latter:

> The researcher engaged in ethnographic fieldwork or participant observation, for example, will anyway be simultaneously engaged in a validating process as she collects data, moves backwards and forwards between description and explanation, data collection and fairly inductive analysis.

[1] This relates to second research question: What are the main observations and concerns of supply teachers
in special schools?
[2] This relates to my first research question: What systems of support and training are available to supply teachers in special schools?
[3] This relates to my fifth research question: How can the findings be of use in informing practice?

4 data analysis: presentation of findings/themes

4.1 introduction

The data from the interviews was typed soon after sessions from the taped recordings or from my handwritten transcripts. I used a record sheet which had a similar format to the interview guideline I had constructed. So, to begin the conversational data analysis (Silverman 2001:167-177, Hitchcock & Hughes 1995: 305-308), I familiarised myself with the data material from interviews, reading and re-reading them to look for patterns and themes which recurred with frequency (Hitchcock & Hughes, (1999:71-182). I isolated general units of meaning from the transcripts and key phrases which were significant in relation to the research focus and those themes I had chosen to investigate, based on my own experiences. To remain grounded in the data, I worked through each transcript, comparing comments and incidents, looking for similarities and differences in those general units of meanings, colour coding and highlighting themes as they developed (Strauss & Corbin 1990: 42-48).

As, I became more familiar with the patterns in the data, I found that themes overlapped and merged. So I started to re-classify the categories according to their importance for the interviewees, emerging with the seven main themes are outlined later. With so much rich and descriptive conversational data it was difficult to decide what was to be used and how to use it (Bryman & Burgess 1994), so I then collated and grouped the sections of interviews directly related to the main concepts identified. I then refined the process further by linking quotations expressing similar feelings or addressing particular issues. This helped to further isolate the most relevant material. I chose samples from those interview texts to substantiate my abstraction of the main data.

The small-scale questionnaires sent to Heads and deputies of special schools were quantified according to the factual and descriptive statistics in the replies. I looked for frequency, similarity and variables in responses to questions by cross checking the material, looking for links and relationships between answers and isolating differences. I used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative description in my presentation of the statistical results from this process.

Firstly, I present my data here organised according to seven main themes which emerged from the interviews with supply teachers and Learning Support Assistants. I use the actual words of interviewees where these seem pertinent to the nature of a theme, or where the spoken evidence ‘thickens’ the description of data. Secondly, I supplement this with the data collated from questionnaires. Discussion will take place later in the following chapter (5) on the interpretation of the findings and the corresponding links to my research questions. (Quotes by interviewees are accompanied by letters A-Q and the date, and notes by the researcher as SCM, and the date).

4.2 training

I looked first at initial training and qualifications, then at continuing professional development and finally to some of the areas of concern where training provision might be required.

initial training

Training and experience is widely varied in the cases of the teacher interviewees, ranging from those who did initial training in special education and had never worked in a mainstream school to those who had worked in mainstream, sometimes with a focus on special educational needs and had then moved over to special education, learning through the new experience. Others had entered special education with no previous experience of teaching, some with experience of teaching at very different levels and some with prior experience in a voluntary capacity or having incorporated a module or modules with their initial training. Those trained more recently have received input or modules pertaining to special needs. It was widely suggested that all teacher trainees, whether intending to work in special education or mainstream should be engaged in some form of practical experience in a special school during training in order to understand the wide spectrum of needs and the differing approaches to learning encountered in an inclusive education system. Work in other fields outside teaching, such as counselling, care work, theatre and drama, has also added to the diversity of experience and skills brought into the special school.

> I think the supply teacher going into special schools especially for the first time definitely needs some training or support -perhaps if they had already spent just a day in a school to get over the initial shock and worry of doing something so different from what they may be used to (LSA L 2002).

continuing professional development

Although training has been inconsistent, the majority of teacher interviewees stated that the situations they encountered in special schools were so different that no one form of training would be adequate to cover such diverse needs and that knowledge and skills were accrued from practical application in everyday work. Further training was either suggested or offered by the schools, agencies or by personal interest and/or need. Longer term supply teachers were more likely to benefit from INSET[1] days within schools, access to other courses through schools and to informal training and support systems within the school network, such as induction about classroom practice and management. However, the majority expressed a need and an interest in certain specific areas such as dealing with challenging behaviour, methods of restraint and non-verbal communication skills. Some were aware of and had taken advantage of the training days most immediately available offered by supply agencies on specific aspects of special education such as signing. Others had recognized the value in attending some of these but were restricted by time and salary loss if they attended weekday courses:

> Most people have no idea what goes on in special schools ... there should be more training after going on supply when you find out what your needs and interests are. (Teacher F 2002).

learning through experience

Although most felt that previous experience was important and training preferable, they had gained much of their knowledge from working alongside others, who were able to share skills and teach by modelling. Teachers, like the one quoted above, saw their own training needs emerging through their practical work and could therefore identify specific areas of concern for which they would be prepared to take up further training if it was freely available and did not incur any loss of salary. All those involved with children with challenging behaviour expressed the specific need for training in behaviour management and restraint (PI),[2] and those involved with children with SLD and PMLD felt they would benefit from training in methods of non-verbal communication, learning strategies and awareness of the particular and different emphases in special education. Most suggested that some form of prior induction would be an advantage for supply teachers with no previous experience in this field, with two thinking this should be a compulsory provision:

> I feel that all supply teachers who go to special schools should be provided with paid days to prepare them for the very difficult and different experiences they might have. I feel this is a basic necessity for all, and important for many reasons, like safety, hygiene, behaviour, restraint, for example (Teacher A 2002).

The training suggestions mentioned above include some of the themes which have emerged from the second and third research questions which aim to explore the main observations and concerns of supply teachers in special schools and those who work alongside them in the schools. I found the data emerging as a 'reflective dialogue' between the two groups and therefore decided that both perspectives should be looked at together. Behavioural issues form the second of the seven broad categories which have developed through the process of studying the data.

4.2 behavioural issues

taking up the challenge

> It's hard to find ways to be with challenging behaviour (Teacher B 2002).

Finding the way to understanding and managing challenging behaviour, reading and interpreting behaviour signals was a concern of all those who had done cover work in special schools, especially with MLD and EBD. Even those most experienced teachers found new situations daunting but had developed some strategies and an awareness of appropriate questions to ask

[1] INSET- In service education and training
[2] PI- Physical intervention, the term now used for restraint. Since all interviewees used the word 'restraint', this term is used throughout the data presentation.

the Learning Assistants, such as the existence of behaviour policies and sanctions. These were not always immediately accessible or relevant in the short term. The Learning Assistants were less concerned about general policies than about the specific strategies they used within their classrooms. Their main concern was to maintain stability and all said they felt responsible initially for discipline and protection of pupils:

> It's about reading behaviour signals, and acting upon them, it's how our kids communicate ... When their stability is threatened in any way their behaviour starts to go haywire. I know how to calm them down, I'm used to it...it's not a failure on the teacher's part ... (LSA M 2002).

learning from others

Most interviewees had experienced feeling deskilled, professionally threatened and fearful of the potential dangers in some situations and described some stressful and challenging initiations. However, those who took up the challenge stressed the importance of respecting the judgement and professionalism of their Learning Assistants, and the need to understand the differences in approach and expectations and to be open to learning, taking the lead from others who have particular knowledge and experience. All interviewees felt that much of their own learning came from observing the children, reading their reactions to each other and to a new person, from conscious listening and sensitivity to the environment:

> It's difficult to plan...it's like taking the emotional temperature of the class and finding ways in to delivering whatever it is you're supposed to be doing (Teacher D 2002).

being prepared

Being better prepared was the lesson learnt from the first experiences, such as knowing the sort of questions that should be asked and the importance of consulting the support staff. Fear of appearing unprofessional or losing face sometimes led to problems with safety and discipline. One LSA working with secondary aged pupils with challenging behaviour expressed some frustration over this lack of communication:

> If I'm not asked for help, I just sit back. If I'm asked, I start a rapport (LSA M)

Another LSA actively initiated the need for information sharing by inviting questions from the supply teacher. The need to be alert to the unpredictability of certain situations and the immediacy of most important and relevant information for short term work was expressed by all interviewees. The LSAs also felt they wanted to share certain details, such as, needing to know what could trigger a problem with challenging behaviour, but stressed that there could be information overload and confidential matters would only be shared if the teacher was to be in the school for some time. All teachers realised that it was impossible to be told everything initially, but liked to have some briefing about individual pupils where appropriate. It was widely recognised that rapport with pupils and understanding of needs developed over time:

> It's very frustrating in EBD, because it's not always an obvious disability. You can't see the disability -it's what underlies it, the reasons behind it and the gradual understanding of their needs which makes it easier to accept ... its learning through this experience. (Teacher E 2002)

training needs

Seeing other teachers in action and dealing with challenging situations is a bonus, and a learning experience that most felt could be offered as a form of training. All teachers said they would have benefited from some training in skills to deal with anger and some prior knowledge about the different behaviour patterns one might encounter, for example, a silent autistic child whose potentially obsessive behaviour problems may not be immediately apparent, a child who moves very quickly to leave the room and is a potential danger to her/himself and others or a child with Tourette's syndrome who constantly swears:

> Some supply teachers try to get it right and show authority -sometimes they don't always realise that they should not confront - before they know it there'll be no pupils left in the room! (LSA F 2002).

The greatest concerns voiced by all were the issues of physical restraint and pupils leaving the classroom in anger or distress. Most went, like teacher I, 'in at the deep end.' None had prior knowledge about the legal responsibilities involved in these situations, or about correct methods of restraint, behaviour policies, conflict management and resolution.

4.4 medical concerns

first experiences

Similarly, in SLD and PMLD schools, the supply teachers had concerns about their overall responsibility for what happens during the day. The complex medical and physical needs of the children was an area of knowledge the new supply teacher had no previous experience of. Only two interviewees had previously worked in this way, and another had done some voluntary work as a student. The others, although experienced in other fields, recognised this as an area they had no knowledge of and felt unprepared for such a physically different environment and, initially, this was a cause for some anxiety:

> I was shocked and scared by the sight of children with tubes in their noses, in wheelchairs, unable to move or speak...I felt suddenly de-skilled, unsure of their needs, unsure of what I could do there as a teacher (Teacher A 2002).

crucial information

Others reported feeling overwhelmed, unequipped, terrified and obsessed with the need to know everything about each child. All valued the immediate support of their Learning Assistants who were wholly engaged in the welfare of the children and who, for the most part provided reassurance that these matters were under control. Those with prior experience knew which questions to ask to obtain an immediate overview and most found that there was information

about the daily needs, feeding profiles, allergies and preferences of each child visibly available on display in the classroom. All teachers felt that, whilst not divulging all confidential and intimate details about children to strangers, the LSAs provided them with the most immediately important medical information crucial to safety, such as, for example, the likelihood of a child fitting, having an asthma attack, being sensitive to sunlight or being tube fed:

> I would say that when I start a new day that the physical and medical needs would take priority over the educational and social...it's important for me to know of anything potentially dangerous or life-threatening (Teacher A 2002).

the need to know

A teacher returner found she knew much more in the way of medical conditions and what to expect than about the developments in curricula which had come about in her absence. Those new to SLD and PMLD felt they wanted to inform themselves more fully about conditions and syndromes, suggesting a pack of information for the supply teacher about the way a school functions, with paragraphs about each child, information about how to identify a fleeting fit, how to distinguish falling asleep from being ill, how to touch children whose limbs are disabled or how to tell if a child is in distress:

> I was told by one colleague I asked about a specific syndrome I had never heard of that the trend now is not to dwell on the disability or label the child. Later that day one of the LSAs told me all about the syndrome - she'd looked it up on the Internet! I felt better for knowing and it didn't change the way I saw the child...professionally I wanted to know as much as I could about everything (SMC notes 2000).

The example above typifies the experiences of others who were very aware of how specialised and different the new situation was and the kind of language used, and of the varied approaches to sharing the vast amount of new information there is to retain. The unanimous feeling from teachers was one of initial anxiety at assuming overall responsibility and therefore needing to continually check and ask questions. At the same time they were conscious of the amount of responsibility falling on the LSAs dealing with the immediate physical needs and practicalities of the day which they see as an equally important a part of the routine and timetable as the educational activities:

> People don't always understand - things are different here, this is how it is, there's a lot of welfare stuff to deal with before we even get started ... (LSA Q 2002).

4.5 health and safety

safety first

I outline here the data concerned with the category of health and safety issues which took priority for all teachers and LSAs interviewed. Before 'getting started' on the teaching side of their day, teacher interviewees reported on the many practical safety issues which often took

precedence over educational processes, especially for those who were employed for day to day cover:

> The curriculum seems secondary where health and safety are concerned ... for short term cover, safety comes first (Teacher C 2002).

Questions of health and safety were raised by all teachers and are linked with medical concerns. They ranged from issues connected to behavioural incidents in MLD and EBD and potential dangers and accidents connected with technical equipment in SLD and PMLD. Teachers new to these situations described these issues as daunting and strongly felt the burden of responsibility, welcoming all information which forewarned any possibility of risks and problems. The LSAs made this a priority in information sharing, and were quick to notify teachers about children who were likely to throw objects, hit others, run away or be unsafe with utensils or scissors.

> If there is a dangerous situation we must react ... anything that's a safety issue I have no problem about informing (LSA L 2002).

technical equipment

All teachers new to PMLD expressed feelings of initial incompetence and fear when faced with the complex technical equipment used in schools. Keeping the non-mobile children safe when moving them in and out of wheelchairs or into hoists was their main concern. Correct use of straps, locks, brakes and operation of hoists and standing frames was something which was learnt through use and experience and from the informal induction by the LSAs. Although the LSAs are conscious of the individualised physical needs of each child and always willing to demonstrate correct usage, all suggested that basic hands on training should be an essential provision prior to working in special schools, the safety of children being one of the most important considerations:

> The difference in special education is that the safety and security of the children is paramount (Teacher D 2002).

responsibility

All teachers referred to the weight of responsibility they felt and the need to be constantly vigilant and mindful about such matters as logistics of staff ratios for trips out, ensuring childrens' dignity and safety when changing for physical activities, for hygiene and attention to dietary needs and procedures for feeding, where necessary. The physical safety of the teachers themselves was a cause for concern when lifting and carrying. Working with trained staff made this easier but some teachers were unsure about which adults working with them were legally allowed to help lift a child, for example, a student or a volunteer, and indeed how that child should be lifted:

> I had no idea how to handle the children physically, how to lay them down, how many adults should be involved (Teacher C 2002).

grey areas

Dealing with emotional and behavioural problems such as pupils leaving the classroom in anger or distress, legal responsibilities, concerns about their safety and return, locking doors, whether to intervene to protect a pupil in a conflict, physical contact, restraint and emergency procedures were 'grey areas' highlighted by most teachers covering MLD and EBD:

> End of an EBD day- why am I teaching here? I found I sometimes didn't care what I achieved educationally but I wouldn't compromise safety. Restraint is a big area of concern; do I protect another student in danger? It's a grey area (Teacher G 2002).

4.6 teamwork

positive experiences

Working together with a team was for some, a new but welcome experience, particularly where health, safety and behavioural issues were concerned. Those who had previously worked in special schools, early years and primary age groups had less concerns about the presence of other adults in the classroom. First reactions to teamwork varied depending on previous classroom situations. Half of the teachers had always worked with a team in some way, finding it useful and effective and a less isolating way of teaching. Those with secondary mainstream experience found they had to adjust to a different approach to classroom management, having sometimes several adults in the room sharing the educational activities and helping individuals:

> I felt like I was on the spot at first but the staff were very supportive I relied very heavily on them for help and guidance - they were amazing (Teacher I 2002).

> Sometimes they're more nervous of <u>us</u>, not being used to support or other people in the classroom (LSA L 2002).

Being prepared initially to consult the Learning Assistants and take advice from them led to more positive relationships for the majority of interviewees who remarked on the patience of their support staff when constantly plied with questions.

co-operation

Working together and keeping good relations was considered a major factor in the smooth running of a day, teachers seeing the LSAs as the most important and immediate source of information and support, recognising the value and continuity of their secure relationships with the children. For most, this came naturally, although a few were inhibited by issues of control and feelings of disempowerment. Those who came with a fixed agenda of their own or found it difficult to allow the support staff to induct them into the workings of the classroom engendered feelings of frustration which sometimes contributed to problems in class management:

> In my experience, a lot of disruption would be lessened if supply teachers would rely on your help and information and take some advice. Working together is so much easier ... some of them need to be a bit humbler (LSA F 2002).

However, teachers all felt that the success of a day's supply teaching was indicated by the reactions and comments of their support staff. Those who initiated a continuing dialogue for improving situations found the responses constructive and informative. LSAs pointed out the importance of giving positive feedback where it was due, valuing contributions to the wellbeing of the children and recognising those teachers they would hope to work with again in the future:

> I'm not embarrassed to ask. I try to learn as much as possible, they have a lot to teach me. They are my biggest resource. It depends on the way you ask. If you expect confirmation that you did things perfectly the support staff might resent that (Teacher B 2002).

professionalism

Mutual respect and recognition of skills and expertise was considered to be the most important aspect of teamwork. Frictions sometimes came about where classes had experienced a number of supply teachers which had affected routines and stability, resulting in the LSAs having to take on more responsibility. Most teachers showed sensitivity to these issues and expressed concern about possible resentment on the part of LSAs whose salaries, they felt, did not reflect the amount of skills they employ and the responsibilities they take on:

> I sometimes wonder whether the support staff feel resentful because they earn so little money and take on a lot of responsibilities; their role is undervalued (Teacher G 2002).
>
> I feel a great sense of responsibility and we don't get paid for that - the supply does (LSA N 2002).

On occasions, the LSAs felt they would have been better able to take the class themselves but for the legal responsibility and sometimes felt frustrated but found indifference[1] and non-participation even harder to accept. Facilitating the support staff and optimising their skills was a learning process for teachers who came fresh to special education, finding their resourcefulness invaluable and crucial to the well being and stability of the class. Willingness on the part of the supply teacher to be flexible, understand the blending of roles, interact and share skills and ideas was an important factor for LSAs:

> It's hard for some people to work with support staff in an equal way but we believe working as a team includes the comfort and happiness of the children and all, including the teacher ... sometimes they use skills and talents we haven't seen and the kids enjoy a different slant on things, so we learn a lot from them (LSA L 2002).

4.7 curriculum

accessing knowledge: 'getting started'

Understanding and accessing the curricula in special schools was a professional challenge for all teachers interviewed. This section outlines the data from teachers and highlights their main observations, concerns and challenges:

[1] Among this group LSA L described two sub-groups which she named 'the knitters and the sitters!'

> I think it's a shock and they should make students work for a month in a special school to see what the levels are and even with statemented children in mainstream – one needs to know what is taught in special education (Teacher D 2002).

Of the interviewees, with experience of or trained in special education, one, from outside the UK, had attended a short course to acquaint herself with NC, and three had re-entered as supply teachers more recently so had not yet had the opportunity to apply the new curricula. Those with experiences of mainstream teaching, either in UK or overseas, had no prior knowledge, and one overseas teacher, newly trained in mainstream, took her first teaching post in the UK in special education following some supply work in the field. Only those teachers who had recently worked in mainstream or support work in the UK had any working knowledge of the Code of Practice. Any other policies were unknown to all. Irrespective of information or experience, accessing the curriculum for special education was a learning curve for all.

developing awareness

> Although I wasn't acquainted with the special school curriculum until recently, I began to feel that no child should be left out of this process. I was very impressed by the pre-stage levels which give some context to work within (Teacher A 2002).

Gaps in knowledge led to some teachers accessing information from books to gain a broader perspective of the processes involved. Mostly, however, the understanding came through practical application, observation and informing from colleagues. For overseas teachers this meant adapting to a new system of education as well as a specific system operating in special schools, an on-going learning process for some. The priority for all was finding ways to adapt the curriculum to suit individual and complex needs and to tap into the resources and information in place immediately available to them. One overseas teacher had been given information about the NC by her agency but was unaware until she went into a special school how it was modified or adapted. Planning systems in place and access to individual education plans give a clearer picture of structure, progression and needs at the micro level and ensure continuity.

drawing on experience

> It took me a while to adapt to the new teaching style....I did not know how to access the students ... at first I pitched too high ...it was so much more rewarding once I had found a 'way in'. If I kept the students on task I felt I'd succeeded (Teacher P 2002).

All teachers, like this drama teacher who moved into special education, challenged with making big adjustments in expectations and approaches, drew on their past experiences, skills and talents to find ways through. Those with early years and primary mainstream experience found this helpful in gauging levels and gained confidence by building up a repertoire of appropriate activities and accessing creative ideas and resources. Teachers who had moved around from

school to school or worked in more than one at the same time found inspiration from varied approaches to organisation and teaching techniques. Most teachers felt they would benefit from some practical books of ideas for supply teachers in special education. Drawing, too, on the experience of LSAs and tapping into their pool of resources and knowledge of the practical side of the curriculum was seen as a great advantage, as was any opportunity given to observe or work alongside other teachers.

differences

Some teachers made comparisons with mainstream teaching and commented on the wide range of activities which happen during a day in a SLD/PMLD special school. Keeping the environment safe was considered by most to be more important, certainly in the short term, than delivery of the curriculum, the priority in mainstream schools. All those working in SLD/PMLD found they had to learn to adopt an alternative attitude to learning and to pitch their ideas for an even wider and more diverse spectrum of needs than they would have encountered previously and to acquaint themselves with the usage of tactile and sensory equipment and aids. Managing the deployment of other adults for focused individual and group curriculum work was a new experience for most:

> It's an eye opener after mainstream...there are not so many constraints, the pace is slower, it can be individual and child focused (Teacher F 2002).

All those teaching in MLD and EBD recognised the importance of continuity and stability in following the prescribed timetable but felt that creative variations and flexibility in approach were necessary. Generally teachers felt more competent in this field since it was closer to their previous experiences. Methods of assessing and evaluating were different, especially in SLD/PMLD, and difficult in the short term but teachers found the feedback from LSAs useful in determining success rates.

differing opinions

There were varied reactions to the relevance and understanding of curricula in special education. As outsiders entering a new field, first impressions and assumptions were challenged by practical application and growing awareness:

> Being creative seems like the answer, say like using drama for those with few verbal language skills, but it could cause chaos... so the curriculum is subservient to sitting down and behaving – a containment – that's sad, because the kids are entitled to a broad curriculum (Teacher D 2002).

Some questioned the constraints and relevance of a curriculum and expressed ambivalence about their own effectiveness as temporary educators in accessing appropriate strategies to deal with the complexity of needs:

> What you do for short term cover academically is not so important as keeping the class contented and calm. I'm not convinced that some areas of the curriculum are relevant, say in MLD, but I do feel it's important for the students to achieve; they need basic literacy, numeracy and everyday skills (Teacher J 2002).

Making the breakthrough to linking the delivery of a creative curriculum to the needs of individual pupils sometimes demand very different perspectives, commitment and perseverance on the part of those teachers who enter the field of SLD/PMLD work. Learning to read pupils' signals, responses and reactions to curriculum activities is part of a complex learning process that all agreed could only be achieved in situ, but equally all would have liked to have felt more prepared for the processes they might expect to work through:

> Sometimes it seemed more like childminding than educational in PMLD. I felt very ineffective at first and couldn't see how to educate, couldn't fulfil my role as a teacher, - I learnt to start to adapt and work out ways to teach the curriculum and record progress (Teacher C 2002).

4.8 Communication

Communication is a key theme running through all aspects of the data. Working with children who have no verbal communication skills is a challenge faced by those visiting teachers who, in this section, went to SLD and PMLD schools or special language or autistic units.

developing skills

> Communication with children who have no verbal skills was difficult at first but again I learnt through experience that one came to understand a child's needs by observing their facial expressions, eye, hand and head movements (Teacher A 2002).

Two specialist trained teachers were fluent in Makaton signing, another had attended courses in signing and autism organised by her supply agency. A teacher who moved from mainstream took a course in Makaton as a result of working with language impaired children. Some had picked up basic signs from regular use and from modelling by LSAs and seeing the responses of children. Teachers with less signing skills initially relied more on the LSAs to indicate the best ways to communicate with particular children or to read non-verbal signals and interpret responses. Some relied on their dramatic skills using hands and facial expressions to show meaning. Reading the individual education plans and learning targets for a class was a means for most teachers to assess needs and find ways to communicate. Observing the techniques employed by speech therapists was a useful learning experience for some. Those who returned to the same classes over time experienced a greater feeling of success, familiar faces and voices being all important:

> At first I thought there was no way to communicate. Their responses are so subtle that it takes time to begin to read them and measure progress but it is very exciting when that moment comes ... that's the benefit of returning for longer term work (Teacher O 2002).

Teachers who sensed a good 'communication' between an LSA and a particular child found it productive to facilitate that rapport for the stability of the child and the satisfaction of the assistant.

visual symbols and systems

Learning to 'think visually' was seen as an important skill for use in non-verbal communication since every activity and instruction in the day is marked by a picture, or object of reference, (OR), of some kind. Most teachers had some familiarity with PECS and TEACHH[1] but said they would have liked to know more about the application and progression of these and similar systems which are in regular use in most special schools. Consistency of use was emphasised by the LSAs particularly as an important part of continuity and the educational process:

> We use Makaton or a visual timetable. We have a set pattern for the start of activities to ensure continuity. We feel structures and routines in the day are important. If teachers don't know signs I model by example. We want children to enjoy visitors and learn to communicate with them. If the children have been willing to communicate, then that's a sign the day has gone smoothly (LSA N 2002).

4.9 data from questionnaires to Heads of special schools

The data obtained from Heads of special schools provides a third perspective on the subject area. Of the twenty questionnaires sent out nine were returned. Here I present a summary of the responses to my questions which were centred around the subheadings below.

accessing supply teachers

All reported contacting between one and four different supply agencies at some point with only five using them on a regular basis. Altogether eight different supply agencies were mentioned as possible sources for supply cover. Other sources were personal contacts, teachers recommended by other Heads and regular supply teachers known to the school or previously employed there and this was the preferred route for four schools.

purpose and frequency of use

All schools stated that the main reason for cover was staff sickness, three schools using supplies for long term illness and one to cover a temporary vacancy. Five schools used supply cover for releasing staff to attend courses and three to enable staff to have non-contact time. Other reasons given were to release teachers for curriculum development and review meetings. Four schools used cover for these purposes. Four schools used supply teachers on a regular basis, three of those every week. Three schools used supply teachers to cover longer term, with one of those

[1] See *communication modes* (2.7)

employing three long term supply teachers at the same time. Only one school made occasional use of cover.

information about the supplies

For day to day cover, most felt that they had little information about their supplies, unless they were previously know to them, other than an introduction from their agency. For longer term, six Heads had received CVs[1] from agencies and three said they would arrange a trial day, if possible. They felt that this financial investment was worthwhile to test suitability. Two found contacting Heads of other schools to be informative.

training and preparation

Schools were unanimous in their need to know of any previous training or special education experience, particularly in areas specific to individual schools, such as in PMLD, SLD, EBD, autism. In response to a question focused on useful training and preparation for supply teachers in special schools, the main areas of concern were classroom management skills, dealing with challenging behaviour, understanding of the curricula for special schools, knowledge of target setting such as IEPs and ELGs[2] and also induction into the British system of education.

skills and qualities

When asked to state what they considered to be the most important skills or qualities of a supply teacher working in a special school, two thirds of Heads rated flexibility, sense of humour and an understanding and respect for the needs of their pupils as essential, followed closely by experience, ability to work in a team, patience and knowledge of the curriculum. Two mentioned enthusiasm and one, knowledge of non-verbal communication skills.

information for the supply teacher

Two thirds of the Heads or deputies felt that there was sufficient information readily available in the classroom for visitors to pick up the timetable, study the IEPs and planned activities in order maintain some continuity in curriculum delivery. One third either briefed the teachers themselves prior to the start of the day, especially regarding specific areas of concern such as challenging behaviour, or gave a school pack or written sheet with information about the school ethos and main school policies. All said that the practical everyday information about the running of the day, routines and individual childrens' needs were given to visitors by the LSAs. Introductory visits, trial days and induction were offered by two thirds of the schools to potential longer term supplies.

[1] CV – curriculum vitae
[2] IEPs -Individual Education Plans ELGs- Early Learning Goals

feedback: measuring the success of a day

The majority of heads relied on their support staff to provide feedback to the supply teacher and about the supply teacher. When time allows, about two thirds of Heads said they try to informally observe and also to have a brief chat at the end of the day. Longer term teachers would be part of a regular monitoring system mentioned by two Heads. In all cases the success of a supply teaching day would be measured by the pupil responses, comments from support staff, smooth running of the timetable, informal visits by some Heads to classes and teachers' evaluations on a longer term basis. Good relations with staff and pupils was, for all, a crucial factor for success.

past experiences

All those who responded when asked to comment on past experiences of supply teachers in their school had similar reasons for making the decision to re-invite or not to re-invite. The main ones reasons given for not re-inviting were lack of engagement and communication with the pupils and not working together with the support staff, that is, leaving them to do everything. All said that those who did communicate well, were interactive and willing to learn the school system and work as a team were the ones they wanted to keep employing. This comment reflects that view:

> I believe it is a sharp, hard market that is self-selecting-good teachers like us and want to come back and we want them. Less successful ones look for an easier school; we never ask for them (School R, 2002)

observations, insights and strategies

Heads had developed a number of approaches to optimise the use of supply teachers in their schools through observations and past experience. Careful selection, where possible, either through maintaining a good relationship with their agencies, feeding back regularly or using their own bank of supplies or those recommended by colleagues was the majority approach. In addition to this, the establishing of the trial days mentioned gives both teachers and schools an opportunity to test suitability before commitment to any longer term placements. This was seen as an investment and insurance in the long term. However, all said that day to day supply can be more problematic since these are the very times when schools are in most desperate need and there is less time to spend with the teachers:

> In an ideal world we'd like induction for all, including children - but when we're desperate enough to need a supply, that's when time is hard to find (School S, 2002).

5 data analysis: discussion of findings

5.1 introduction

My data findings highlight some significant areas for discussion in the light of my own participatory observations and notes from the research diary. I also make links to any relevant research studies or related theory, literature, documents and policies studied which serve to throw light on the research questions, inform understanding and address some of these concerns:

- the need to be more informed about medical issues
- skills and training needed for behaviour management
- concerns about health and safety
- the importance of interpersonal relationships and teamwork
- skills and training needed for non-verbal communication
- accessing the curriculum for special needs
- general preparation and training needs

Time constraints did not allow comparison with mainstream supply teachers, but there were sufficient 'other' teaching practices amongst the study group to illustrate contrasting experiences. At all times when the 'teacher' is mentioned in the text, it is to be understood that I refer to the *supply* teacher in special education. The following sections focus on the elements of the data, listed above, which add to the complexity of that role. These include addressing differences in training and experience, priorities, attitudes and perspectives, interpersonal relationships, means of communication and accessing the curriculum. Quotes from LSAs and teachers refer to information in the chapter sections on data presentation. I omit the date since they are all from 2002. Quotes from my personal diary are abbreviated by SCM (for Stella Cattini-Muller).

5.2 the need to be more informed about medical issues

unprepared for the task?

Unlike a mainstream classroom where the children sit down with pencils and books ready for lessons, the teacher entering a special school classroom, in the case of a PMLD/SLD school, is confronted with pupils who may be in wheelchairs, who may have physical or mental impairments, who may have little or no language or who might display unfamiliar responses to a stranger. Entering as an educator, the teacher with no prior introduction begins to question how she can fulfil this role, feeling overwhelmed, shocked, unprepared, fearful, deskilled and lacking appropriate training, all emotions described by such interviewees.

understanding the complexity of needs

'They're here because they've got these needs' (LSA Q,) said a Learning Assistant one day, patiently helping a frustrated child to move her legs in a 'walker'. Prior to the Education Act of 1971, children with such complex disabilities and medical needs were under the auspices of the Health Services. A lot has happened since to redress the balance, in the way of subsequent educational reforms and advances in medicine, and to enable all children regardless of their disabilities to an education to suit their needs. Before considering those educational needs the first priority of the teacher is to acclimatise herself[1] to this very different situation and inform herself of the medical needs and potential dangers in a special school classroom. Understanding those needs and the immediacy of wanting to know as much as possible (SCM, 2000: 4.4) falls against a backcloth of constantly debated political and social issues to do with the appropriate language of special needs, categorisation and labelling and a lessening of the focus on deficiency, (Corbett 1996, Oliver 1998), an historical process and gradual paradigm shift between the medical and social models in special education that the teacher may not necessarily be conscious of but is often affected by. The complex details of a child's illness or condition are not readily accessible to a newcomer, both for ethical and confidential reasons. Whilst beginning to understand and embrace the philosophy behind this, the teacher is nonetheless primarily concerned with everyday practical and functional issues which impact on safety.

seeing beyond the disability

Though being as prepared and informed as possible is reassuring and important for the confidence of the teacher, seeing the child 'behind the disability' is not an automatic skill that can be instantly acquired. It is an initiation process that can be distressing at the onset. The example below, from my own experience (SCM diary 1999), illustrates the importance of being 'present' with the child and also warns off assumptions that children with no verbal skills have no hearing:

Teacher:	What's wrong with A.?
LSA:	Oh, he's fine, look he's smiling at you!
Teacher:	No, I mean what's *wrong* with him?
LSA:	I think he wants a biscuit...talk to him, he's listening to you!

The experience, example and influence of support staff help to dispel fears and anxieties and form a substantial part of the teacher's informal induction at the classroom level. Studies with students at the national level by Hastings et al (1996), Brownlee & Carrington (2000) and Bishop & Jones (2002), prove the value and significance of providing proactive experiences in special education to increase awareness, challenge assumptions and alleviate concerns.

5.3 skills and training needed for behaviour management

working with behaviour

'It's hard to find ways to be with challenging behaviour' (Teacher B). This statement is representative of all those teachers who did work in MLD and EBD schools. Previous experience or not, difficulties encountered with behaviour management indicate a particular area in which teachers feel they have insufficient skills and strategies. On my first day in one MLD classroom, a very large pupil started to climb out of the window (a ground floor but with possible access to the street) whilst also wielding a yard stick to ward off his classmates. I tried to remain calm and avoid physically attempting to prevent him when the LSA arrived and with two sharp words ordered him down! This incident illustrates how professionalism is challenged and the safety of pupils threatened in such situations. It also illustrates that there are many variations in approach and that reactions to challenging behaviour do not always follow a planned strategy.

developing approaches

Anxieties about access to policies, the legality of physical restraint, methods of conflict resolution, strategies for working with rather than against aggressive behaviour and knowledge about specific types of behaviour (e.g. autism, Tourette's syndrome), are issues that demand a greater training input and preparation. Hewett (2001) looks at attitudes towards behaviour and Swinson & Cording (2002) argue the case for conscious use of positive approaches. The Government Circular on the Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (1994:9, 23-6) determined structures for school policies and consistent and positive approaches to working with behaviour and the Education Act (1996: 10/98-550A) gives guidelines for policy making on physical intervention. Lack of knowledge[2] about these policies and related issues is a common professional concern in the study group. At the classroom level the role of behaviour management is often seen to fall on the LSAs who have formed relationships with the pupils and who can 'read the signals' (LSA M).Conflicting ways of working with behavioural issues can be damaging for progress and both LSAs and teachers stress the importance of briefing and sharing of essential and immediate information.

continuity and stability

Consistency of approach and stability is an essential element in maintaining continuity, as this example illustrates:

> Today I sensed some dissent amongst the three support staff. It became clear that there was a conflict of opinion about the handling of a child with very challenging

[1] I refer to the supply teacher as *she* throughout this section

[2] I recently acquired access to a thorough and explicit school policy on behaviour and physical intervention which has informed my understanding. However, this information is not automatically given to supply teachers. None of the interviewees had been given access to such a policy.

> behavioural responses. A strategy had been informally worked out between two of them and the third, more recent to the class, had then adopted an alternative method, confusing the child and undoing previous efforts, thereby triggering a 'crisis reaction.' I found myself powerless in the teacher role but able to employ my skills as a counsellor and mediator (SMC diary 2001).

It also typifies the teacher's reliance on the support staff for maintaining continuity and the onus of responsibility which falls to them to understand and recognise the nuances of behaviour and the danger triggers. I refer mainly to first encounters; as relationships develop, the teacher's knowledge and confidence develops. The 'untold stories' of LSAs illustrate the many different ways there are to reach understanding and empathy and confirms the complexity and importance of their role in classroom behaviour management (O'Brien & Garner, 2001). Practical strategies for understanding anger and our responses to it can be found in the works of Douglas (1999), Preece (2001), and Hart (2002).

5.4 concerns about health and safety

safety is paramount

'Safety is paramount' (Teacher A) I wouldn't compromise safety' (Teacher G). Closely linked to both medical and behavioural issues are concerns about safety. Teacher responsibility extends to ensuring the safety and well-being of the children in their care. In special education this demands an even greater degree of vigilance and supervision, the children being mostly dependent on the adults around them for maintenance of security and all welfare needs. As is clear in the data, these practical considerations take precedence over other emphases more familiar to the teacher. Initial information is not so much concerned with the curriculum agenda for the day but rather about warnings, being alerted to potential dangers, and particularly, in PMLS/SLD, anything which pertains to the health and safety of pupils, such as medication and dietary information. (LSA L, Teacher C)

insecurity regarding safety

Levels of trust must be placed in support staff and conscious intention to inform oneself about safety matters must override feelings of incompetence:

> I have to ask the same sorts of questions time and time again. The problem is, every situation is different, every child's wheelchair is different, each child's needs are different. When one to one attention is needed, as in B's case, where the 'nutrition bag' has to be monitored every couple of hours, I have to place complete trust in the LSA. I wouldn't know what to do (SCM diary 2002).

The insecurity of teachers regarding these issues pinpoints again the value of pre-practice experience, witnessing systems in place, assisting without being ultimately responsible, a gradual move towards greater conversance with procedures and equipment.

5.5 the importance of interpersonal skills and teamwork

exchanging skills

The findings show that successful work hinges on fostering positive interaction and relationships between teachers and LSAs. Lacey (2000) emphasise the importance and the challenge of multi-disciplinary co-operation when addressing complex needs. The priority of the team, in all its breadth, is to respond to the needs of the pupils so co-operation, respect and skills exchange are crucial to that end. There are many professionals involved in special education, and the number of Learning Assistants in each class relates to the intensity of needs in the group. Reactions to teamwork vary depending on past experience, personality and willingness to share. For some it is initially threatening to their autonomy, others find it reassuring and welcome:

> I depend so much on the LSAs in this class, it's a high risk class. We cannot take our eyes off M. for one moment. We take it in turns because it's so exhausting; they're very supportive towards me and always seem to be right there when it matters ... (SCM diary, 2002)

working together: common aims

The overriding understanding for the teacher is the importance of the role of the LSA and the need to develop co-operative relationships. The overriding priority of the LSAs is for the smooth running of the day and the comfort of the pupils (LSA L). The major part of my practical learning experience has been from observing the actions and reactions of LSAs, and from their feedback and example. Dealing with the group dynamics and interpersonal relationships demands a more eclectic degree of professionalism, entering situations with sensitivity, as a visitor, being prepared to let go of personal agenda and with a willingness to interact and be open to learning.

working with the LSA: the 'paraprofessional'

'Their role is undervalued' (Teacher G). This comment expresses a widely held view that the responsibilities, curriculum knowledge and training have transformed the LSA into a 'paraprofessional' (Simon, 2001) and that the role is heavily understated. While the government guide (2000) calls for more training and induction for LSAs, both Simon (2001) and NASEN (2001) advocate that these improvements in their status and professional value should be measured by improved career opportunities and increased financial remuneration, opinions echoed by the study group.

5.6 skills and training needed for non-verbal communication

learning a different way

Unfamiliarity with methods of communicating, particularly with children who have few or no verbal skills, and insecurity about understanding needs, behavioural, medical, physical, social or educational, highlight a need for further training in the use and application of a wide range of communication systems and visual references. Fergusson (1994) advocates the importance of all adults being involved in the differentiation of communication methods and the use of signing. Because of the individuality of needs, even those teachers with prior training or experience still face the challenge of identifying and familiarising themselves with the appropriate means to optimise communication with a particular child, every new working situation presenting a different learning experience.

understanding responses

Reading signals and interpreting responses, in practice, is a subtle and complex skill which develops over time through observation and experience. The child's emotions, needs, comfort, preferences and distress are expressed in many differing ways which are not always obviously interpretable. A colleague reported her sense of intrigue when she once entered an assembly hall in a PMLD school to hear the headteacher remarking on the particularly happy atmosphere she was 'seeing' that afternoon. My colleague was unable to distinguish this collective mood. Here I quote an example from my diary which illustrates that a response can very strongly indicate something quite different from what one might expect:

Teacher:	(moving to comfort a child who had reacted adversely from being squeezed tightly by another child) Come on, (taking the child's hand) let's play over there!
LSA:	Actually, it's best to move away from him for a while-he's tactile defensive. (SCM diary 2001).

Understanding and responding to pupil behaviour is less of an intuitive and spontaneous action that it may initially appear to a newcomer. The adult responses are often part of well discussed and organised strategies to meet targets[1] set for individual pupils:

Teacher:	(to child pointing to his choice of snack) Good, B, you'd like some crisps! Here you are!
LSA:	No, don't give them to him until he looks at you and signs 'PLEASE'. That's one of his targets (SMC diary 2001).

Ware's study (1996) presents the theory behind this practice through her detailed research into adult responses to pupil behaviour by monitoring classroom interactions, communication processes and evaluation, giving strategies for increasing both frequency and quality of responses, staff awareness and effective classroom management.

[1] Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Early Learning Goals (ELGs) may contain details of pupil

working with the systems in place

The findings point to the value of optimising resources which are already in place, both human and practical, for the most effective way of maintaining continuity. LSAs who have individual relationships and rapports with particular pupils serve as a mouthpiece for translating and relating their needs and responses. Familiarising oneself with any whole school or class strategies for individual behaviours (Roberts, 2000) is an important step towards understanding structures and multi-disciplinary approaches. The use of visual symbols and systems is not simply an introduction to the timetable for the day but an integral part of the child's life; it is their language, their means of language exchange and self-expression. Potter& Whittaker (2001) also put emphasis on the training of staff in communication systems used with autistic pupils. It was not until I personally worked alongside a teacher in an autistic unit that I began to understand the significance of the structured use of symbols, maintenance of eye contact and very simple direct speech. Understanding and working with sensory and technological means of communication (Mednick 2000) also demands further skills and experience.

5.7 accessing the curriculum for special needs

entering a different field of experience

A picture begins to form in the findings of a more complex, caring and contained environment which the supply teacher enters with an educational purpose and yet finds herself mainly concerned with matters of health and safety. It is then when questions like "When do we get started?" and "When does the teaching begin?" are asked. "What do I teach and how do I teach?" reflect the professional challenges presented by this work. The uncertainty of addressing the issue of curriculum delivery emerges as an insecurity, particularly for short term teachers. Working within an environment where medical, physical, social, emotional and psychological needs are as important a consideration for the pupil's development and learning as are educational processes requires a willingness to step aside from the expectations and conventions of mainstream teaching and to adopt different and creative ways of working with a complexity of needs. Works linking theory to practice by Bovair & Upton, (1992) and Carpenter et al (1996/2000) address this curriculum challenge.

gaps in knowledge

Entering a new field with little or no prior knowledge of the historical developmental changes in policy and curriculum which have impacted on special education (literature 2.3) is a common experience. Those who have experienced the struggle in the development and implementation of

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targets. Weekly/termly targets are often displayed for adult access.

the NC[1] are more able to draw parallels and make comparisons, awareness and understanding coming mainly through practice and experience:

> I have to enter these schools with humility, leave behind my own agenda, the need to get everything in order. I know I have the resources – it's a matter of recycling them and shaping them to suit the situation (SMC diary 2002).

My own interest and move towards special education after a long service in mainstream, however, also prompted some exploration of the theories and debates of the last decade (2.4), the radical changes in curriculum, and the ensuing insecurities and controversies (Barthorpe 1991, Gains 1991, Byers & Rose, 1994). These and others have informed my personal understanding of the links between theory and practice. This study led to investigation into the progression of political and educational changes in special education which are reflected in the literature search and reveal the continuing struggle to work within the paradigm shift to find the right balance between difficulties and needs (O'Brien 1998, Marvin 2001), between product and process (Sebba et al. 1995), and between meeting curricula needs and remaining child-centred (Halpin & Lewis 1996).

finding a way through

The findings demonstrate the teacher needing to work within this complex system which challenges her skills, resources and knowledge base. Concerns about ineffective teaching and fears about safety and medical issues run alongside the teacher's challenge to discover the processes at work within a special school, learning through observation and team co-operation to finds ways in to access information available to deliver the broad curriculum required to address the many complex and individual needs. Making the breakthrough to linking the delivery of a responsive (O'Brien 1998) and creative curriculum to meet these needs demands very different perspectives, commitment and perseverance, with teachers relying heavily on feedback from their support staff to indicate success.

5.8 general preparation and training needs

The issue of training addresses my first research question which investigates systems of support and training available for supply teachers who work in special schools. I have left this section till last because it cuts across all other areas mentioned. Where literature regarding training has linked to other areas of concern, it has been referred to in those sections.

[1] NC: National Curriculum. Developments, details and general guidelines on curricula, planning assessment and monitoring progress for special schools can be found on the NC website: www.nc.uk.net/ld/GG.

training experience

What visiting supply teachers bring to their work in special schools in terms of training, skills and work experience both in teaching and other fields is both rich and very diverse. Those with specific special education training or some input into initial training are in the minority. Garner & Miller (1996) report on the findings of the Special Educational Needs Consortium which addresses the need for initial teacher training and induction in special education. Training for younger teachers in Britain includes SEN in mainstream but what happens within a special school is an experience which fosters a greater awareness of and understanding of the wider spectrum of needs and very different approaches to teaching and learning. It would therefore be of value for all educators, students, practising teachers and supply staff to experience some time in this field. My initiation into special education came only after 30 years of varied mainstream teaching.

practical training

It is clear that there is a need for practical experience at all levels of teacher training, whether initial, continuing, returning or entering as supply teachers. The opportunity to spend some time in special schools to experience the ethos and the different way of working (Teacher A) would be a welcome form of induction and research quoted earlier, (2.7 & 5.), reflects this need at a national level. Although it is not always the case, some form of pre-training and preparation is considered essential by schools and teachers alike, although this group is not yet included in the guidelines on supply teaching[1]. Support and informal training lies chiefly within the schools, the onus falling mainly on the LSAs:

> I do think all teachers who do supply work in special schools should be sent into a school to work with a class teacher for a couple of days and be paid while training (LSA L 2002).

There are benefits and drawbacks for both groups, the longer experienced mainstreamers and returners and the newcomers with less, little or no experience or those from overseas. The first group had more comparisons to make with past experience but felt deskilled, needing to re-learn processes, draw on their past experiences and resources and adopt different ways of interpreting learning and communicating. They questioned more the relevance and application of curricula. The second group had fewer points of reference relying more on the immediacy of learning in situ and, except for one overseas specialist trained teacher, had less comparisons to make.

[1] A new government document is due soon in response to the consultation document – Supply Teachers: Meeting the Challenge (2000)

training opportunities

It is currently being accepted that the status and management of supply staff in general is changing to meet demands and professional training requirements, and proposals have been made to establish quality marks for providers to:

> ensure that all the key stakeholders in the supply teachers labour market take some responsibility for driving up quality – and that everyone benefits as a result (Supply teachers: Meeting the Challenge, 2002 1.5).

Further recent research has also been done to address these developments in teacher demand and supply (IPPR report, 2001). With the curricula changes in special education over the last ten years, even those returning to special education found gaps in their knowledge and the understanding of the processes involved. Where permanent teachers have access to continuing professional development and in-service training, longer term supply teachers are sometimes able to benefit from this. However, it is left to the short term supply teachers to engage in further training on their own initiative. As mentioned earlier, in special education, 'it's a self - selecting process'- those who cannot adapt to this different way of working find alternative posts. Those who find their personalities and capabilities suited to the work are more likely to become committed and open to different ways of working.

bridging the gap: supply agencies

The question of training possibilities is addressed mainly by those supply agencies which have links to special schools and, through their evaluation processes, have responded to the gaps in need by providing opportunities for teachers to develop their skills and acquire useful information. Preparatory information and details of training course in special education is available on agency websites (2.6). Access to training is free for those who work through agencies but requires a time commitment. Although some teachers take advantage of the courses, others are reluctant to lose the potential salary which even a day's training might incur. My personal route was originally through an agency initiative. However, unlike many, my situation at the time enabled me to have the resources and time available to enter a more extended course of study. If training days were salaried as are the occasional induction days offered by some schools to a prospective cover teacher, more people would be likely to engage in further training. There are no details of any research done in this area available for comparison.

specific training needs

Since every situation is different and pupil needs so varied and individual there is no one complete training or induction which could encompass everything one might need to know or be aware of. Training, therefore, needs to be a continuing process with teachers identifying areas within the work for which there are further skills to be acquired. Training needs emerge through

practice and teachers have identified the specific areas where there are gaps in their skills and knowledge, mainly behaviour management, restraint, communication systems, health and safety and curriculum:

> Training should include a compulsory module, a week of training, to be sent off to a special school. Then there should be further training after you've had some experience and find out what your needs and interests are (Teacher F 2002).

6 conclusion

summary of the findings

I begin with a summary of the findings from this research. They highlight the challenges faced by supply teachers in special education caught in a wave of professional need and seeking to find ways through to accessing new skills to address the many complex needs they are confronted with. The findings show that there are many gaps in acquisition of knowledge, practical concerns and teacher learning needs at classroom level, which, if adequately addressed through additional training and induction would increase teacher confidence and improve practice. The findings pinpoint specific areas of training need, such as behaviour management, health and safety, curriculum development and communication and interpersonal skills, and look at the provisions which might be available to this group of professionals which has slipped through the net. The findings are backed by literature which helps to present the wider picture of change and development and by my personal observations which bring the focus back to how this affects teachers in the classroom.

the role of the supply teacher

The impact government policies and curricula changes have had on the teaching profession, at a national level, over the last decade (chapter 2.2 and 2.4) has increased the demand for more supply teachers, 'substitute professionals' (Galloway & Morrison 1994), in all fields of education. At a local level, the role of a supply teacher entering a mainstream school is that of a professional educator employed to fulfil a need and deliver the curriculum in place of a class teacher. Not always an easy task, but easier to define that the multi-faceted role of the special school supply teacher. In the presentation of data we have described some of the complexities of that role for which the teachers, LSAs and schools have identified certain aspects of the work which would be enhanced by more specific additional training and preparation.

working with the changes: a different way

The changes precipitated by the implementation of inclusive policies have also impacted on the population of children in special schools as more children are included in mainstream schools. At the other end of the continuum of need, children with more complex and diverse needs who would previously not have been able to attend school are included in special schools due to medical advances and are accessing education. This 'ever-changing landscape of learning difficulties' (Carpenter & Ashdown 1996) means that teachers will be constantly challenged to find new and individual ways to meet needs. Preparing in advance for all eventualities in such situations is an impossible target for the supply teacher who needs to place trust in the structures in place and embrace the flexibility of her role within that environment. 'There's no fixed way here – it's different every day' (LSA Q).

working with the dichotomies: medical/social

The supply teacher has to work through this aspect of discomfort in her role feeling sometimes insecure in what is described in the data as a secure and supportive environment, structured and staffed to address the needs of the pupils at all levels of need. The research relates to the theoretical paradoxes discussed and debated in the last years (Corbett 1996, Norwich 1996, Wedell 2002) with schools functioning within opposing paradigms in a culture of change. On the one hand, supply teachers need the immediacy, in the short term, of medical information, such as diagnostic labels and syndrome description for essential access - practicalities like the safety of children being most important. Then, on the holistic side, ideally, they need, in the longer term, to understand issues of entitlement, curriculum and political correctness in the use of language and terms. The findings show a dominance of important concerns about medical, behavioural and health and safety issues. We explored this negotiation between the immediate and practical needs of the supply teacher and the longer term need to be informed and conscious of the political and social ethos of the special school and also to be engaged in some form of induction to address these.

finding a way through

Both sets of needs can apply and schools operate between the two. Finding a way through and adjusting to this different way of being and working requires certain qualities frequently referred to in the data. The ability to work as part of a team, to interrelate and learn from others is an essential aspect of the work and the findings show the strengths of the support staff in maintaining stability. Understanding and respecting the needs of the pupils through the acquisition of specific communication skills is a necessary precursor to the teacher being able to find a way through to accessing her own skills in curriculum delivery. Lack of knowledge about the philosophy behind entitlement for all, the structure of the curriculum and its context within the educational spectrum reveals another missing link in training and awareness. Literature presents continuing discussions about the pedagogic principles underlying the curricula of special schools and ways in which they may be applied (Ware 1996, Lewis & Norwich 2001).

training: whose responsibility is it?

The demand for more training or preparation is apparent but the means of accessing it are more complicated. Looking first at the national level we find research which addresses the need for initial teaching training in raising awareness in special education and shows the value of practical experience and curriculum knowledge of the whole spectrum of needs. How is the gap to be bridged between what the schools and teachers would consider important to know and learn and where is the provision for that? Latest initiatives for raising standards in general supply teaching (2000) indicate forms of continuing professional development and tightening of

standards, with some responsibility falling on the supply teaching agencies[1] but also stressing the complications of working with a floating population.

How does special school supply teaching fit into this provision? At the local level, from the findings we see that the onus falls on schools to consider the value of investing in some very basic form of prior induction, to the LSA who has an obligation to instruct at classroom level in the interests of safety and continuity, or to the teacher herself to access training from the courses offered by those supply teaching agencies which have filled this gap in the market, if that is the route through which they obtained work. Since every situation is so different and pupil needs so varied and individual there is no one complete training system or induction which could encompass everything. Training, therefore, needs to be a continuing process with teachers identifying areas of need where there are further skills to be acquired. The need is expressed, however, for training to be freely and frequently available and a prerequisite for those with no prior experience in the field of special education.

the way forward: suggestions for further action

The problem may lie in economical responsibility for provision of free training rather than the political will and educational purpose. There have been some moves by teaching agencies to address the basic needs of this liminal group in order to supply a better service to schools. However, a more standardised and agreed approach to free training, support and paid placements might serve to improve practice and benefit schools. More tangible information in the form of introductory booklets, information packs and access to policies, health and safety regulations and videos of good practice are all suggestions from the study group.

future trends?

In 'recording' the voices of this particular group, who by the nature of their employment, find themselves on the margins of provision and continuing professional development, we see, nonetheless, that their experiences and concerns show a commitment and willingness to extend their skills and knowledge. The diversity of their working situations adds richness to their contributions. Their demands appear justifiable but are they realistic in the present climate? Trends suggest differently. On the one hand we see moves to improve the status and standards of the supply teaching group and on the other hand we hear of the latest initiative to employ thousands of Teaching Assistants to cover non-contact time and occasional sickness as contra-indicative of that intent, a move which would surely impact on special education. My studies and the practical experience of supply work in special schools have led me to reassess my own attitudes, adopting a different way of being, thinking and teaching and discovering the part I can

[1] Suggested in Supply Teachers: Meeting the Challenge is the awarding of quality marks to supply teaching agencies.

play in that role. It has proved a worthwhile investment for me and has helped me to understand the continuum of need within special education, and to place it in relation to, and as part of, a gradual process of educational change, a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive system for all. The future of that national commitment, and its impact at all levels, must surely require sustained financial investment coupled with congruent political intent.

Abbreviations

BBRD	broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated
CPD	continuing professional development
CV	curriculum vitae
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ELGs	Early Learning Goals
IEPs	Individual Education Plans
INSET	In service education and training
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Services
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
MLD	moderate learning difficulties
NASEN	National Association for Special Educational Needs
NC	National Curriculum
OR	object of reference
OT	Occupational Therapist
PECS	picture exchange communication system
PI	physical intervention
PMLD	profound and multiple learning difficulties
PSHE	physical, social and health education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SCAA	Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SCM	Stella Cattini-Muller (researcher)
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENC	Special Educational Needs Consortium
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator
SENTC	Special Educational Needs Training Consortium
SLD	severe learning difficulties
SMT	Senior Management Team
SN	Special Needs
TEACHH	Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped children

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