

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND, BRISTOL

TOWARDS A THEORY OF A PROFESSIONAL TEACHER VOICE

How can I improve my teaching of pupils
with specific learning difficulties
in the area of language

By

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2000

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**A dissertation submitted to the Department of Education in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the award of MA in Education.**

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It is with sincerest thanks that I wish to acknowledge the following

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My MA in Education colleagues, Maureen, Marian, Bernie, Sally, Paul, Caroline and Karen, for the fun we had learning together.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

This work was submitted for assessment under the criteria **ALM, BLM, CLM, DLM, ELM, FLM, and GLM.**

ALM Conceptual Domain

The assignment demonstrates that the student can use and organise coherently relevant ideas, perspectives or theories to interpret and/or explore issues under study and in addition can critically analyse and/or evaluate those ideas, perspectives or theories showing the ability to synthesise and/or transform ideas in the process of developing an argument.

BLM Literature Domain

The Assignment demonstrates that the student can reference an extensive range of relevant literature and utilise it in the development of analysis and discussion of ideas including critical engagement with that literature.

CLM Contextual Domain

evaluating research outcomes.

ELM Ethical Domain

The assignment demonstrates that the student has an awareness of the ethical issues in or associated with the area of study, showing sensitive engagement with the appropriate ethical framework for the interpretation of ideas or for practice. In addition, there is exploration of some of the problematics arising in relation to ethical dilemmas or decisions.

FLM Values Domain

The assignment demonstrates that the student can clearly identify and analyse the basis of their own value position and where relevant, the value position of others in relation to the area of study, and critically evaluate associated claims to knowledge.

GLM Action Domain

The assignment demonstrates that the student can explore the relationship between theory and practice in the workplace, and use reflection to develop personal theory and refine professional practice, with due regard to issues of equity and social justice, critically evaluating professional development and/or outcomes.

Word Count 21,702

ABSTRACT

The wording of my research question shows a new focus in dealing with pupils with specific learning difficulties in language. During my research, I came to understand the need to study teacher practice in order to encourage learning by such pupils.

I researched a conversational test, which focused on language usage, to identify pupil needs. Through this test, I developed a useful screening procedure for teachers, and listed conversational behaviours indicating a specific learning difficulty in the area of language. Next, I addressed pupils' identified needs in individual and class lessons. I developed useful strategies as I investigated the adaptation of my teaching to facilitate these pupils' needs.

My experiences led me to question the assumptions in the literature on specific learning difficulties in language. These uncertainties caused me to probe my own previous assumptions in my own thinking. The progression in my own thinking matched the progression in my practice. Through reflection on my practice, I came to recognise and articulate my personal values around education. I discovered that my teaching style conflicted with these values at times. I developed ideas on the relationship between

learning. I discovered that I came to understand educational theory by developing my own theory of education. The collegial learning on the MA course of study, which I experienced, was empowering. My colleagues and I proposed changes in a spirit of community and support. This research has given us a voice and method to articulate our theories now and in the future.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

– a practical example of a specific learning difficulty and a dissertation overview.

I also hope to follow in the footsteps of Irvine and Schumacher.

An eleven-year-old pupil of mine wrote this. He intended it to read ‘I also hope to follow in the footsteps of Irvine and Schumacher’ – two famous Formula One racing drivers. He was a bright, articulate, intelligent boy who attended school regularly and worked consistently to the best of his ability. He could discuss the Formula 1 racing scene and describe how to take apart and reassemble a go-cart and engine - there is a sample of his written and oral ability in appendices 1a and 1b - but he always wrote his clever ideas in scrambled letters and with inconsistent spellings. As a primary school class teacher for

discover their thinking on learning, and could I adjust my teaching to accommodate it? In other words since my pupils didn't learn to read and write in the way in which I taught, could I learn to teach in the way in which they learned?

A dissertation overview - chapter by chapter.

In the following chapters, I describe how I endeavoured to improve my practice. I struggled to understand the problematising of my practice and finally came to an awareness that

professional development is grounded in personal development; and personal development is not an 'add-on' procedure so much as a life-long transformation of understanding.

McNiff et al., 1992, p 25.

In chapter one I detail how I tried to develop an understanding of specific learning difficulties. I found that there appeared to be little classroom-oriented research or practical help to enable teachers to address this issue. Engaging with various research methodologies during my studies for this MA in Education opened a new vision on such classroom dilemmas. Gradually I established the aims of my research study and developed my research question - **How can I improve my teaching of pupils with specific learning difficulties in the area of language?**

In chapter two I explain how, because my young pupils had no access to State provisions for their difficulty, I tried to identify elements within my own practice that affected their learning. I considered how my own personal theories of teaching and

In chapter four tells the story of the research project. I sought to improve my pupils' learning and my own practice. The value of critical reflective thinking became apparent as a central element in my chosen action research methodology. It was seen in changes both my classroom practice and testing processes as well as in the process of change that occurred in my own thinking. This research is presented in three reflective cycles.

1. Identifying a pupil's learning needs in the area of language.
2. Teaching language lessons to address those needs.
3. Applying strategies, which were useful when teaching an individual, to class teaching.

Chapter five outlines the significance of my research, its effects on my own learning and that of others. I attempt to articulate an evaluation of the educational theory I have constructed in previous chapters. Finally I locate this theory in the transformational continuum of learning. This dissertation intends to address my pupils' specific difficulties in the area of language but its construction and writing have given me, the teacher, the professional language to articulate, understand and overcome a classroom difficulty.

Chapter six, the conclusion of this research, revisited its initial aims and their effectiveness in addressing my research question. I concluded that, in researching my pupils' needs, I engaged in both professional and personal development. As my research advanced I had found it necessary to refocus my research question and change the title of my dissertation

Towards a theory of a professional teacher voice:

What is specific learning disability / dyslexia?

The starting point of my research in 1997, was a personal course of learning around dyslexia or specific learning disabilities. Both terms were synonymous in the current literature in Ireland.

Until recently, I naively considered books the major source of knowledge, so I searched for a personal knowledge around dyslexia, which might improve my teaching practices, by reading widely. Gradually I developed an understanding of the historical perspectives on dyslexia taken by the relevant specialists, both medical and physiological. Broca (in 1861) and Wernicke (in 1874), (cited in Hornsby 1988) identified the parts of the brain, which contribute to specific learning difficulties because these very parts control the mechanics of expressive language and the understanding of speech. The focus moved from language to a visual element of dyslexia when Kussmaul (in 1877, cited in Ott 1997) discovered that some stroke patients were word blind or 'dyslexic' even when their sight, speech and intellect remained intact. Berlin (in 1887 and mentioned in Miles and Miles 1990) first used the term 'dyslexia' in work with children. In 1925 the American S.T. Orton (in J.L. Orton 1966) gave it the meaning 'twisted symbols' in his characteristically big word 'strephosymbolia'. His work appeared to be a premonition of the work of dyslexic writer and researcher Ronald Davis (1994) who believed that the dyslexic person's mind's eye could hover, like a helicopter, over print removing its two dimensional image and allowing print to be viewed from many different angles. Over a century and a half 'dyslexia' had meant different things to different people. In this research project I hoped to define it within terms relevant to a class teacher.

approach to dyslexia, was delivered in a didactic style. This style of pedagogy was at variance with the learning styles being promoted for dyslexics during the course and it almost overwhelmed the participants by communicating large amounts of factual knowledge. On completing the course, I personally felt disempowered and less able to cope in my practical classroom situation with dyslexia.

A refracted mirror image of this phenomenon - inverted and reversed - occurred following my enrolment on the MA in Education Programme with the University of the West of England. I discovered a method of applying some of my new knowledge around dyslexia to my classroom practice. During the modules on Researching Education and Teaching for Learning I realised that educational research, and action research more than any other form of research, could be relevant to practitioners and to the improvement of educational practice (Hitchcock and Hughes 1997; McNiff 1988; Whitehead 1993). So in structuring this research I consciously engaged in a variety of research techniques in order to develop evidence-based practice and professional development.

These techniques are detailed in Chapter 3 - Methodology.

Current policy and provisions for those with specific learning disabilities.

During 1998, I considered the incidence, diagnoses and services for pupils with specific learning difficulties in Ireland. I noticed that recent research suggested that between 2% and 8% of the population experienced specific learning disabilities, which were often termed dyslexia, and 2% to 4% had a severe form of it (S.E.R.C. 1993; Lawrence and Carter 1999). Currently the preferred psychological test for dyslexia is the WISC 111 (Welchler Intelligence Scale for Children 1992). In Ireland, State assessment for dyslexia is not available until a child has spent 4 years in school and received 2 years of learning support. Our Department of Education and Science (Circular 8/99) re-

Two Problem Areas

Current State policy and provisions raised two problem areas;

- the dearth of educational provisions for those diagnosed with specific learning disability including dyslexia;
- the late diagnosis of these disabilities.

So in this project I aimed to investigate early diagnosis and tried to improve the learning opportunities for pupils with specific learning disabilities in a mainstream school.

Specific learning disability in the classroom.

The scrambled writing, on the first page, was an easily identifiable symptom of specific learning disability in the classroom. But the visual confusion it showed was not the only way in which this disability was manifested. In my classroom practice I observed that specific learning difficulties affected the pupils' oral language comprehension, syntax, ability to follow directions, continuous reading comprehension as well as the visually affected areas. These observations were supported by the findings of Orton (1994) as well as McAnaney and Sayles (1999) who suggested specific learning disability was manifested in difficulties with receptive and expressive language.

So how were the problem areas of receptive and expressive areas of language taught?

Designing a teacher-based assessment for language was necessary. Assessment and testing were an essential element of the teaching and the learning process - a natural part of a teacher's craft. Teachers used them daily

to access continuous detailed information about pupils' knowledge, their understanding of concepts and their mastery of skills.

Department of Education and Science, Government of Ireland 1999, p60.

If the teacher-based assessment could identify learning disability, it might provide new information and challenge the necessity for psychological assessments.

This background information posed research questions.

- How did I teach language to pupils with specific learning disabilities and could my teaching be improved?
- Was early intervention possible?
- Could I, the teacher, assess language skills?
- Could this assessment identify a specific learning disability?
- Could any of the above activities improve or change professional practice?
- Could the project add to school policy decisions in the areas of both language and specific learning difficulties?

In this first chapter I have outlined my concern for pupils with specific learning difficulties, and described

– how I read and attended courses to increase my understanding.

Despite these efforts over the past two years some of my pupils still wrestle with language processing difficulties on a daily basis. This research addressed their needs not by looking for a cure or remedy in a previously published programme, but by examining

study my practice to see how I could most effectively do this.

CHAPTER TWO CONTEXTUALISATION

In chapter two, because my young pupils currently had no access to State provisions for their difficulty, I tried to identify elements within my own practice, which affected their learning. Since my pupils had not learned in the way in which I have taught them to date, in the course of this project I want to see if I can teach them in a way in which they can learn. This will mean altering my practice. To demonstrate this I must show you, the reader, what my current practice was; how it developed during my teaching career; how it could be related to respected theories of teaching and learning. Issues around teaching style and learning capacity were considered and other values which underpinned my practice. Finally, I also placed my research project in the context of both the research debate and current policy thinking on specific learning difficulties in language.

SECTION 1

The locational context of this dissertation

relation to the entire population of pupils of similar age. I next used diagnostic tests to identify these pupils' specific areas of need and provided a learning support programme to attempt to address them. In this project, I decided to use standardised language tests (named in appendix 4a). Their value to this research was (a) to check my practice in administering, scoring and interpreting standardised language tests correctly; (b) to examine their usefulness in identifying expressive and receptive language, which would in turn signal a specific learning difficulty in language.

What did the research entail?

To explore my practice in delivering appropriate curricula, I included the teaching of individual pupils as well as class groupings as part of this project. In order to support pupil learning, my role as a learning support teacher also involved contact with class teachers, parents, speech therapists or other parties who were engaged in the pupils' education. I called on their expertise within their own fields to provide comments on my developing practice during this research project.

Who were the research participants?

Current research suggested that between 2% and 8% of the population experienced specific learning disability and 2% to 4% had a severe form of it (SERC 1993; Lawrence and Carter 1999). I included 12 pupils in this research project as they formed a representative population of pupils with severe difficulties, being 3% of my entire school population. Because of the concern about early diagnosis mentioned in Chapter 1, I selected most of the 12 pupils from 1st class or lower (6 years or under).

dissertation as I described the development of my practice - from my initial teacher-training values around teaching and learning to my current practice. I recalled how I came to recognise and articulate my personal values around education through reflection on my practice. I also discovered that my teaching style could conflict with my educational values.

My practice was.....

My initial thinking on teaching and learning was based on the teacher training I received over thirty years ago and on the educational theories current at that time. Piaget's theory on the necessity for readiness for reading and stages of development was in favour and phonics, as a system of word attack, was never mentioned.

Thirty years later a behaviourist methodology was still evident in my practice. I wrote about this in the Researching Education module of this MA in Education (McDonagh 1999a) when I investigated the learning of dyslexic pupils who had auditory difficulties. At that time, after assessing pupils, I delivered learning programmes - like medical prescriptions - that would remediate the faults that I considered prevented my pupils from being able to read. I believed, then, that knowledge could be measured and my role as a remedial teacher was to fill in the gaps in my pupils' learning. On reviewing my initial year as a learning support teacher, I realised that I planned my teaching very much in the behaviourist mode described by Pollard (1997), Skinner (1954) and Gagné (1965). I instructed the children in the skills that *I* decided were important; when the pupils responded *I* corrected and assessed their efforts, and continued with the next incremental phase of instruction. My students generally listened passively. My teaching reflected Skinner's (1954) definition of the *laws of effect and exercise*, which explained how stimulus, response and reinforcement brought about learning. I had devised clear, logical, linear and developmental steps - as discussed by Gagné (1965) - by breaking the curriculum into small, simplified chunks and reinforcing them.

The next paragraphs show changes in my teaching during this MA course – towards a more holistic approach. By reflecting on what I was actually doing in the classroom in a systematic manner, I tried to develop a deeper understanding about how I might live my values in my practice.

In the first few weeks of the 1998 school year, I attempted to construct a personal understanding of my own practice with the aid of colleagues – three class teachers of pupils who received learning support from me. With their assistance, I tried to improve my performance (Tharp and Gallimore 1988). The discussion method of learning, which these colleagues and I used, was both informative and enjoyable. Through it I recognised and utilised the value of relationships in learning. In practical terms, I identified issues and clarified teaching methods and resources during these discussions. This was how I came to devise weekly schemes (appendix 1c) incorporating skills which formed the basis of everyday speaking, listening and recalling – the building blocks of language - as well as reading, spelling and writing. I planned these skill areas taking into account my pupils' own experiences (such as hobbies, home and surroundings).

My aim, in making these changes in my practice, was to give my pupils the tools to construct their own learning (Pollard 1997).

The new skill areas I introduced were

- (1) Listening, receptive and memory skills,
- (2) Discrimination and memory skills, and
- (3) Motor skills.

- (1)

Discrimination and memory skills, in experiential terms, meant being able to remember what one heard and answer questions accordingly. Both skills are vital in constructing one's own knowledge. The experiential activities my pupils used included, matching games, classifying and recalling objects in order, reproducing and continuing patterns from memory, snap, dominoes, and sequencing pictures to make a story.

(3)

The motor skills section of my work corresponded initially to the sensory motor stage, which Piaget (Pollard 1997) associates with children of up to 2 years of age. I believed that Piaget's stages of development implied that learning could be measured and, when a defined amount of learning was achieved, one moved to the next level or stage. Many of my pupils functioned at a stage beneath their chronological age. Although I haven't sufficient grounds to disagree with the stages defined by Piaget, I found, in practice, that they were not totally age appropriate. I have come across some pupils, who were deprived socially or emotionally, and did not follow these defined stages.

Constructivism and the value of relationships in learning.

All the new skill areas (mentioned above) which I introduced, involved pupils working together (see appendix 5c). Constructivism as described by Pollard (1997) was now obvious in my classroom as I afforded my pupils opportunities to extend their learning and skills at their own pace (McDonagh 1999b). My pupils grew in confidence as they realised that they were becoming proficient in each new skill that they themselves have perfected, often quite independently of me (McDonagh 1999b).

The greatest success I recorded in McDonagh (1999b) was a paired reading programme. This form of reading was a peer-scaffolded or adult-scaffolded shared reading programme, which I introduced in my school (appendix 5 and item 14 in data archive 3).

reading scores (McDonagh 1999b). Through it I recognised the value of relationships in the learning process. It also gave the pupils an opportunity to feel good about themselves and their learning without *me* valuing their work, as had been the case when I used a behaviourist style of teaching.

During that project (McDonagh 1999b) I provided opportunities for my pupils to construct their own knowledge. In my practice, I gradually came to realise a value that I hold, around teaching and learning, that learning *together* is essential. So I proposed (McDonagh 2000) using this naturalistic and holistic style of teaching and learning as a vital component in my dissertation project. I decided to teach language not in a behaviourist style (Skinner 1954) but in a holistic, naturalistic way (Chomsky 1965, 1972; Lyons 1977 and Modgil and Modgil 1987) because I believed that pupils learned through conversations and working together.

SECTION 3

By what criteria can I assess the outcomes of this project?

I have detailed my practice so that you, the reader, could assess if I made improvements in it during the course of my research project. I suggest that this dissertation might be viewed within the following criteria, which were in line with the thinking I developed during my reflections on my practice over the past two years.

1. there was active pupil involvement;
2. teacher made use of pupils ideas and ways of thinking in making new knowledge accessible;

entirety.

The following research debate shows that practical activities in education are value-laden.

The value I held around the right of every child to learn according to their strengths featured in my thinking on the research debate in the area of specific learning difficulties.

This value grew out of my search for a definition of specific learning difficulties that would explain the phenomenon as I observed it in my various teaching roles. As a classroom teacher, I saw it in pupils' inaccurate writing. As a learning support teacher, I saw it in pupils who could not remember visual or aural sequences or learning strategies. As a tutor of dyslexics on a one-to-one basis, I saw it in bright pupils who could not visualise words or concepts. As a programme co-ordinator, devising suitable intervention programmes for diagnosed dyslexics, in a reading workshop scenario, I saw so many diverse faces of it in pupils. I concluded that a specific learning disability was 'independent of overall ability and conventional teaching' (British Dyslexia Association 1996).

Parents of dyslexic children often said 'he's just like his uncle X, didn't do well in school, but X is a millionaire now;' or 'teacher said he's inattentive and careless' or 'I know he spent ages learning his spellings and he knew them last night, he just can't remember them in the weekly test' (see appendix 7e for the source of these quotations). I believe that parents' experiences supported the definition of specific learning disability as a neurological-based, familial disorder which interfered with the acquisition and processing of linguistic information (Orton Dyslexia Society 1997).

saw it as disorder or deficit.

I believed that re-enforcing the giftedness of pupils who had a specific difficulty could be empowering to the learner and greatly aid the education process. This value of celebrating a personal strength was a tenet of my personal epistemology and it was within these parameters that the classroom interventions of this research project were located.

Expressive language was a feature of language learning according to the literature.

Like research into specific learning difficulties, research into analysing children's language was influenced by two major disciplines. Traditionally researchers were orientated towards psychology but in more recent times, linguistics were influencing the current major theories in the field. The arising research debate centred on the contrasting assumptions of the Skinnerian (1957) and Chomskyan (mainly 1965) perspectives on language. Skinner followed from the thinking of Piaget. He supported the behaviourist approach claiming that language was learned through practice and reinforcement. This learning could be explained as a cut and paste procedure. His followers used a 'scientific, empirical' research methodology. Chomsky challenged the views of Skinner. He promulgated the ideas of competence and performance, which meant knowing the rules of grammar at a tacit level then bringing this competence to the surface at a performance level. Reflecting on my classroom practice, I came to realise that I held with the Chomskyan theory as it explained how those learning a language could gain an understanding of the creative nature of language. Many definitions of dyslexia agreed that expressive language is precisely the area of deficit for example: 'dyslexics fail to achieve oral language skills' (World Federation of Neurology, 1968); 'oral language may be affected' (British Dyslexia Association, 1996); 'dyslexia is a specific language-based disorder of constitutional origin (Orton, 1994).

use language - other crucial elements of a child's personality and potential are cultivated.

Department of Education and Science, Government of Ireland 1999, p12

This emphasis was absent from the previous curriculum (Department of Education, 1971). This change in emphasis encouraged me to re-evaluate existing school policy because the key role of oral language in the curriculum had not been embraced to date.

In this dissertation chapter I began with the value of justice that I hold. I suggested that because my pupils were denied State access to a suitable curriculum, and that I must alter my practice - during the course of this project - to give them their right to a suitable education. I identified other values in my practice: the right of every pupil to learn according to his own strengths; the work of the teacher to teach the *child*, and not skills; quantitative measuring of learning replaced with the value of relationships in learning. They were values I did not live up to fully when I operated a behaviourist mode of teaching and which, on reflection, I learned to include in my classroom. I developed ideas of the relationship between teaching style and learning capacity that informed the methodology of this research project.

OVERVIEW

In this chapter I describe my search for an appropriate methodology to research change. Both my pupils' language needs and my practice changed during the course of this project. I believe that my practice is transformational and developmental. So, unlike the dominant research theories, which are static, the elements I investigated in this research project were neither static nor easily quantifiable.

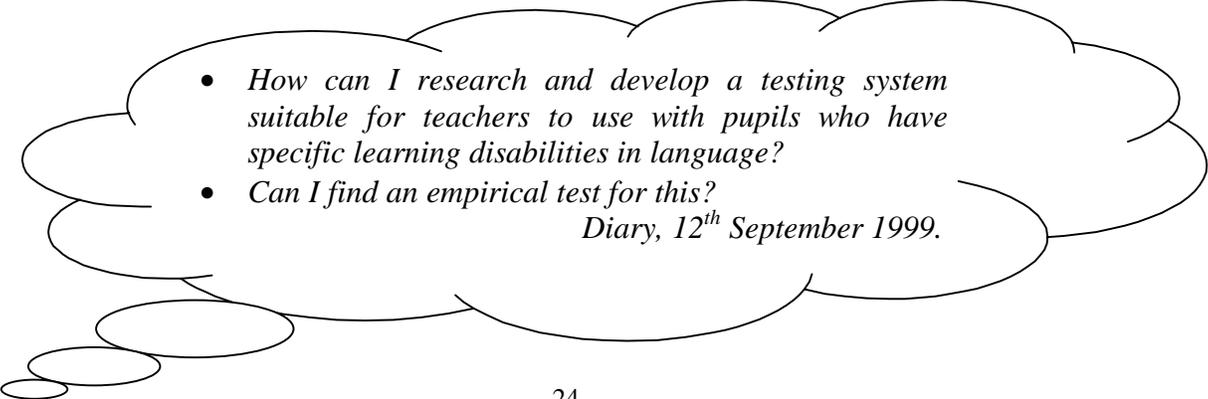
My journey of discovery, which involved considering the main educational research paradigms – empirical, interpretive and critical theoretic - was at times confusing and frustrating as well as illuminating. In addressing the question 'how can I change my practice to improve the learning of pupils with specific learning difficulties in an area of language?' I needed to find a methodology that validated many aspects of teaching which were very personal and generally only observed by teacher and pupil.

The day after my very first meeting and discussion with colleagues engaged in this MA in Education, I wrote the following day in my reflective diary.

The comments I wrote were the lens through which I approached this research project. I tried to develop an understanding of my practice and how it might be investigated within the three main research paradigms – empirical, interpretive and critical reflective. In Section One of this chapter, I set about finding suitable methods and a research methodology for assessing specific learning difficulties in language. Section 2 described a pilot study and how this suggested the benefits of an interpretive methodology. Finally, I decided to research my practice within the critical theoretical paradigm. The ethical implications of this choice of methodology are explained. In essence this chapter is about how I changed my own thinking processes and moved towards increasing forms of awareness and openness in thought and action. To illustrate this I insert thought or speech bubbles into the text of this chapter. They contain reflections from my diary (see data archive item 16 in appendix 3) that demonstrate my changing ideas.

SECTION ONE

Finding a suitable research methodology for assessing specific learning difficulties in language.

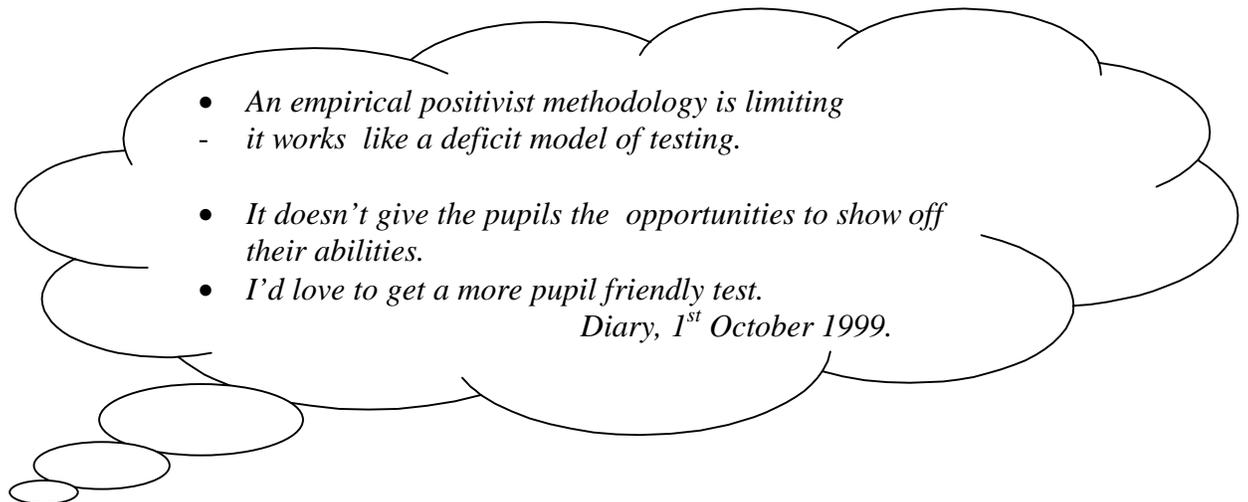
- 
- *How can I research and develop a testing system suitable for teachers to use with pupils who have specific learning disabilities in language?*
 - *Can I find an empirical test for this?*

Diary, 12th September 1999.

sought quantitative data - numerical and statistical analysis - to demonstrate a pupil's improvements.

The scientific / positivist research paradigm.

This concern with objective reality and knowledge expressed in factual statements epitomises the scientific/positivist research paradigm. This research format is easily explained, consistent and non-negotiable. As Bassey (1990) describes it, the researcher uses scientific analysis to examine cause and effect relationships, and draws conclusions from which she produces generalisations.

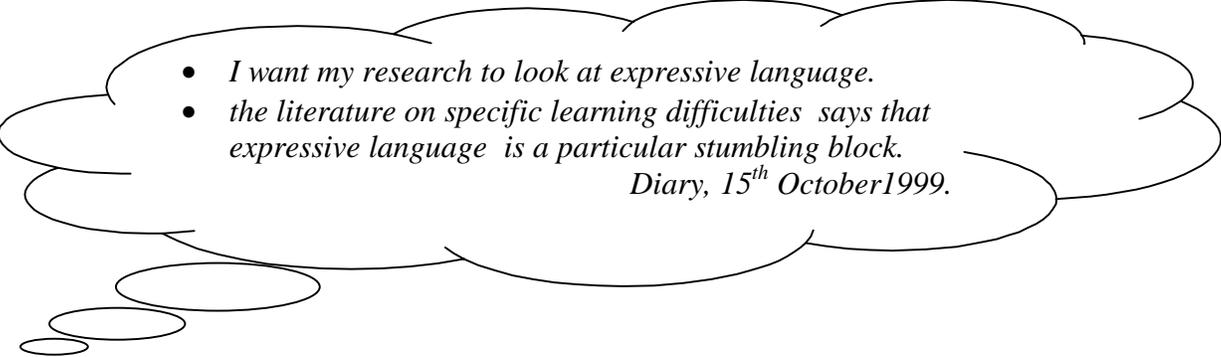


What I mean by a deficit model of testing was seen in the empirical tests of vocabulary and word recognition currently used in my school. For example in the Picture Language Scale (1975, appendix 4a) a pupil was asked to say what each picture depicted and for correct identification he got a score; this continued until the pupil failed to identify ten pictures correctly. Pupils inevitably sensed failure. I believed that this type of test, which measured a deficit in the child's learning, was a denial of how I understand word education – to lead out or upwards. The empirical research paradigm appeared to me to work on systems for measuring credits and debits quite similar to deficit models of testing.

This methodology placed knowledge outside my daily practical classroom world, as an entity, which existed irrespective of my pupils or myself. The empirical research paradigm placed the researcher outside the research and since I intended to be a variable within my research, this methodology was not appropriate to my particular study.

My choice of language testing method was based on a practical solution to the dilemma of how to test expressive language.

Since language performance could be greatly affected by nervousness on the part of the speaker and pressure of time, I believed that a test scenario was not the most appropriate method to gain an accurate measure of the language difficulties a pupil might have. Currently most language tests measured subskills such as vocabulary, receptive understanding or phonological awareness. Yet it was the areas of expressive and receptive ability that identified the skilled communicator.

- 
- *I want my research to look at expressive language.*
 - *the literature on specific learning difficulties says that expressive language is a particular stumbling block.*
- Diary, 15th October 1999.*

Children's imaginations and emotions are among their greatest strengths. So I intended that the assessment procedure I used would include looking at the pupil's communication skills in terms of expressive and receptive language as well as giving the pupil some opportunity for flights of imagination. This aim was reminiscent of Pollard's (1997)

language. An exhaustive search of this work was detailed in Bennet-Kastor (1998). The statistical comparisons made in her book of these various research projects showed some common features in the testing procedures that were used. I decided to base my testing on the most popular methods mentioned. Bennett-Kastor said that language assessments took place mainly in naturalistic settings – which meant free-flowing conversations - rather than in an experimentally controlled way. On occasions a stimulus was chosen to initiate and maintain a conversation so that specific areas could be reported on in the results. Bennett-Kastor stated that most conversational sessions where pupil language skills were observed lasted less than thirty minutes. These sessions focused on different aspects of language such as vocabulary, grammar and usage of language - the technical terms for which are semantics, morphology and syntax semantics with functional semantics/pragmatics.

I chose a method but not a research methodology to assess specific learning difficulties in language.

I planned to assess pupils' language and difficulties by –

1. Establishing a teacher assessment where the pupil engaged in what appeared to be an ordinary conversation on a topic of his choice.
2. The teacher guiding this conversation so that it became a tool for assessing the pupil's communication and language skills.
3. The teacher ensuring that this conversation lasted about twenty minutes.

I had designed a practical test grounded in previous theories and methods in order to research my theory that teachers could diagnose a learning difficulty in language. Next I found a way to show issues of data, measurement and interpretation of results.

classroom teachers. They were identified in item 17 of my data archive appendix 3. Inviting these critical friends to be part of my research brought up feelings of fear and possible ridicule – ‘was my work of sufficient value to warrant their valuable time?’ (Diary, see item 16 in appendix 3). These fears proved unfounded. The ethical issues which arose, such as making school property available to outsiders, anonymity for my pupils, how colleagues’ comments on my work be would used, are addressed on p38. Critical colleagues analysed my transcript and later we engaged in discussion - and I am glad to say it was non-threatening –and they supplied a written evaluation of my analysis. The pupils’ comments, on both the standardised and conversational forms of testing, were recorded and transcribed.

To add a further measurement validity to the data, these analysed transcripts were viewed in conjunction with evidence from psychological and school reports on these pupils. Later I found that these comparisons were an added bonus in explaining my methodology to other colleagues stuck, as I once was, in the empirical mode.

As a suitable research methodology evolved I realised that this formed a critical learning moment for me – the empirical thinker.

A critical learning moment for me – the empirical thinker.

I had previously considered that, as Burke (1998) comments, the best quality empirical research involved statistically verifiable facts, objective realities and absolute truths and where experiments and conclusions could be replicated. I had considered using an empirical/positivist methodology for this project but found it would not be satisfactory because:

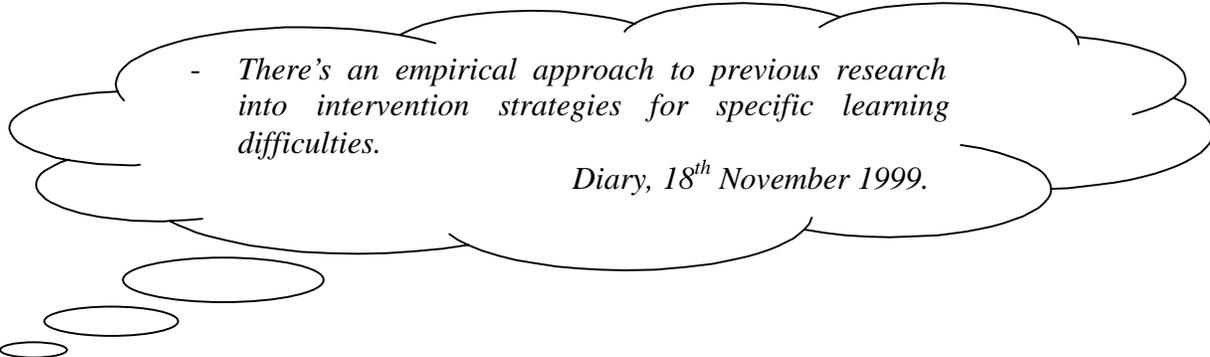
- I suggested a practical assessment process which answered my research needs in terms of assessing the relevant expressive and receptive language skills;
- This process was in line with recent language research (Bennett- Kastor 1998);
- Working from the practicalities of this assessment I developed a method of recording, analysing and validating data using an interpretive methodology.

The change in my thinking and practice, which was apparent in this first section of this chapter, developed further as I considered an appropriate educational research paradigm. In Section 2, I sought to improve my teaching of my pupils with specific learning difficulties in the area of language.

SECTION 2

A suitable methodology to research teaching practice

As I stated in Chapter One, how I taught language could affect the learning of pupils. My initial thoughts on changing or improving my practice were;



- *There's an empirical approach to previous research into intervention strategies for specific learning difficulties.*

Diary, 18th November 1999.

suitable times to access colleagues for the validation purposes and the unpredictability and demands of school life. I tried to show this in the following research timetable diagram of plaited strands. The colours depict the three main research areas, which developed during this project.

In September I arranged access to pupils through negotiations with the School principal, Board of Management and pupils' parents. The support of colleagues and class teachers was organised within the ethical arrangements discussed on p38 of this chapter.

In October I conducted oral language testing on 12 pupils according to school policy. I considered the strengths of this form of testing.

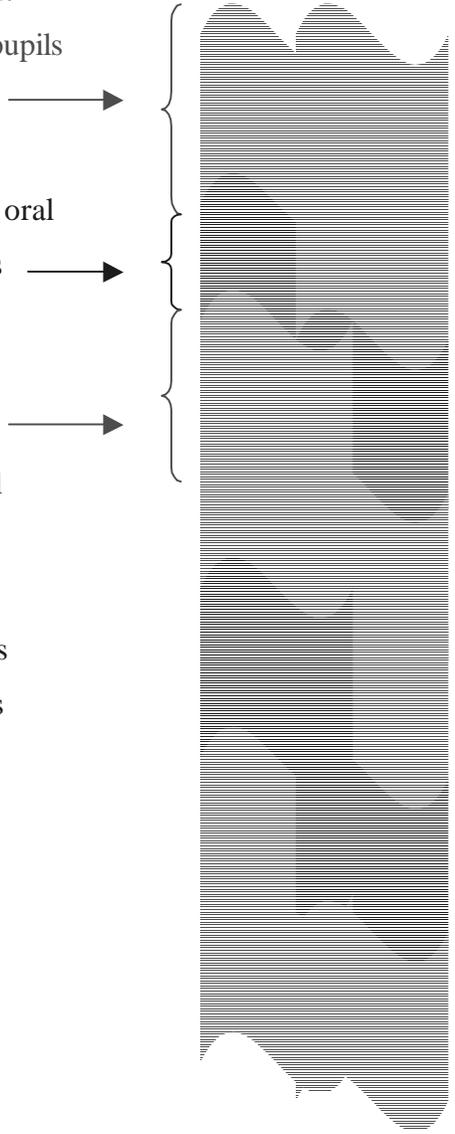
In November I observed another teacher teaching an oral language lesson to a group of pupils. I compared this lesson with my current class practice.

Because I had found from the testing in October that language difficulties are so individual, I taught an oral language lesson to junior pupil P. This provided me with the opportunity to try out some of my developing theories.

In December, based on my reflections on November's work, I taught a group -lesson to a junior class. This class was observed and then analysed.

In January I tested junior pupil P using the conversational analysis method I proposed on p25-7. I reflected on this testing procedure.

In February I taught an individual lesson in oral

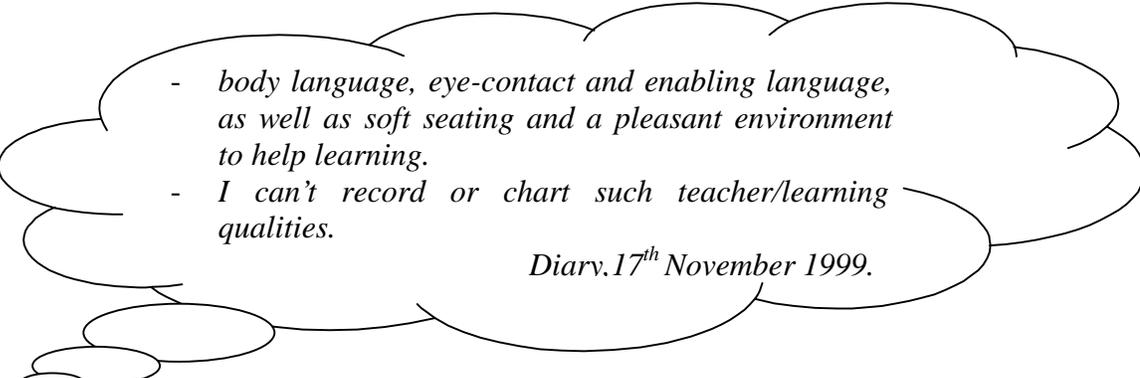


group working on testing.

In May I taught and analysed a second oral language lesson to a group of junior and reflected on changes in my practice.

In June I compared data from my research with class teachers' end of year reports. Final validation meetings on individual teaching, group teaching and testing were held.

In the pilot study to monitor the teaching of language to groups of pupils (17th November 1999), I observed a colleague teach a language lesson to a group of remedial pupils and then we reviewed it. This competent and confident colleague/teacher viewed her success in the light of pupil participation and the learning she felt that the pupils had gained. As an observer, I noted that the teacher used;

- 
- *body language, eye-contact and enabling language, as well as soft seating and a pleasant environment to help learning.*
 - *I can't record or chart such teacher/learning qualities.*

Diary.17th November 1999.

It would have been possible to devise empirical measurement for such criteria as

(a) timing inputs by the teacher and individual pupils or

(b) checking if pupil responses were picture, teacher or pupil initiated.

Such quantitative data could not give a full evaluation of the lesson. But the qualitative data gleaned through my observations and also through discussion and interpretation yielded far greater knowledge and insights.

This was in line with the thinking of Bell on classroom practice

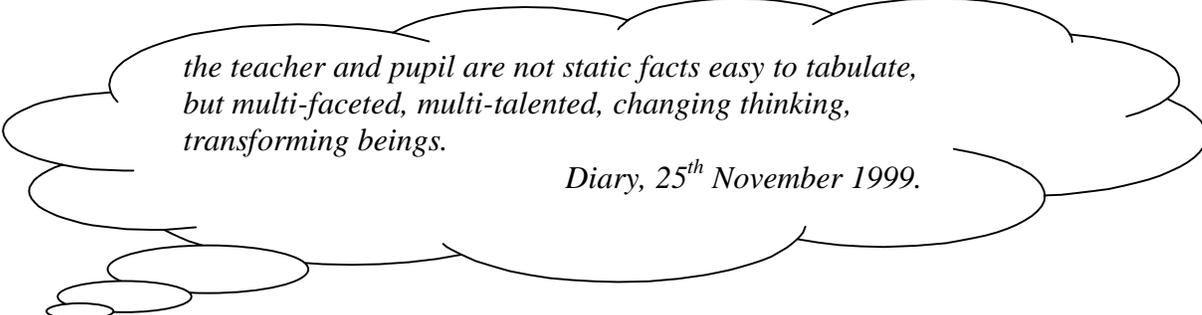
Useful though grids, forms, checklists are they cannot take account of emotions, tensions and hidden agendas.

Bell, 1993, p118

Based on what I learned during this pilot study, I decided that my research must include some form of observation such as a colleague in the room or an audiotape and transcript for validation purposes. I also included qualitative data, and discussion with colleagues to interpret developing theories on the findings. These decisions inched my thinking towards an interpretive methodology.

A Change in my thinking - the interpretive paradigm.

In addition to witnessing the benefits of observation and peer validation, the pilot research helped me realise that



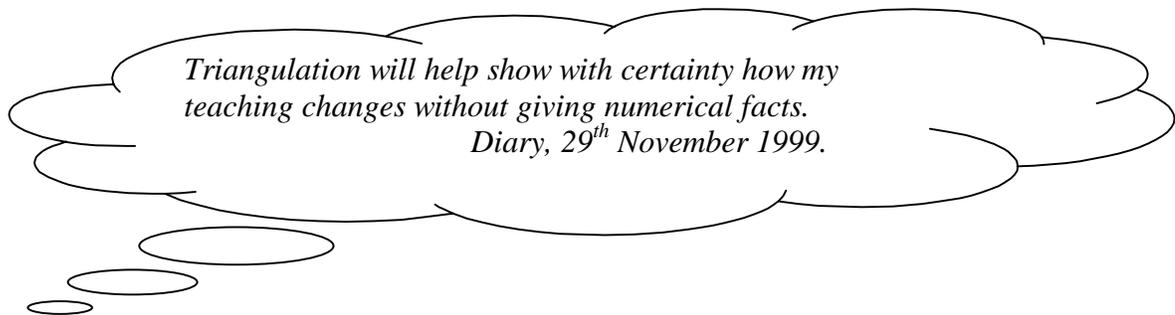
*the teacher and pupil are not static facts easy to tabulate,
but multi-faceted, multi-talented, changing thinking,
transforming beings.*

Diary, 25th November 1999.

An interpretive research methodology supported the view that people construct their own knowledge (Bassey, 1990). In discussions on the pilot lesson, my colleague and I added to our knowledge on effective strategies in teaching language to groups.

exploring a unique situation and from this be able to illustrate something more general (Ernest, 1994).

Those who used interpretive forms of research, such as ethnographers, claimed the objectivity of the results of systematic observation. I suggest that other teachers could, through my descriptions, empathise and identify with 'the lived reality of my case' (Ernest, 1994). To counteract Bassey's (1990) claim that 'insider research' could possibly be discounted as subjective, I decided to use the qualitative method of triangulation. This meant describing and interpreting observations to reach a consensus and provide a means of validation. In each triangulation session pupils, myself and one of the following research partners were included – class teachers, parents, a speech and language therapist and other educationalists such as lecturers in a Special Education Department of a College of Education. These parties – who were named in item 17 appendix 3 - brought an understanding of teaching practice and craft, or knowledge of the subject of specific learning difficulties and special needs, or, as in the case of parents, an in-depth knowledge of their children.



My chosen research method.

Because my concern was with early intervention (p11), I decided to teach a group of 5 junior pupils (under the age of 6 years). This lesson was observed, monitored and reflected upon. During this I focused on how my practice addressed the needs of pupils

This method I planned to investigate my practice for pupils with specific learning difficulties added two new issues to my search for an appropriate research methodology.

(a) I was not really an observer in my own classroom during this research. I was as Gomm and Woods (1993) suggested 'a conductor of an orchestra - pulling all the elements of effective intervention programmes together - the central developer and effector of change'. Change not only in terms of intervention programmes but also in my thinking and pedagogy. An interpretive methodology would interpret my practice but my research aims were to improve it. This required engaging with critical reflective actions as well as discussions.

(b) Prior to this research I employed a pupil-centred approach in my teaching, so, as action research values all the participants as research partners choosing a critical theoretical methodology was in keeping with my personal epistemology.

Shifting the focus to action research.

I suggest that the above showed a further shift in my thinking - from initially favouring an interpretive methodology to now preferring an action research methodology. I realised that the interpretive paradigm was concerned with 'human understanding, intersubjectivity, interpretation and lived truth' (Ernest, 1994) but not with effecting change.

SECTION THREE

Critical theoretical action research.

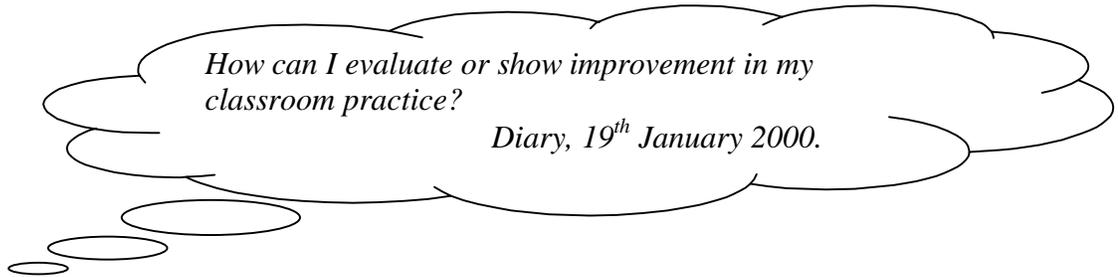
Action Research

To counteract the above sense of inadequacy, some seminal changes occurred in my life as a teacher recently. During the initial module Researching Education of this MA in Education, I first became acquainted with a new empowering research methodology (McDonagh 1999a). This critical theoretical action research methodology allowed me, as a teacher, to 'be reflective of my own practice in order to enhance the quality of education for my pupils and myself' (McNiff, 1988, p1). It was appropriate because the goal of my research project was to improve my knowledge and my practice.

The collegial, co-operative learning that occurred in the learning community of fellow students and tutor during studies for this MA in Education provoked the second major influence on my thinking. Through this I came to appreciate that 'the appropriate research technique should be determined by the particular problem being studied' (Croll 1986).

Critical theoretical action research has changed and developed its emphasis over time and because of its adaptability to research problems will probably continue to evolve. First, action researchers struggled – as I have - to be free from the positivist paradigm as they attempted to solve curriculum problems through a scientific work ethic. Kurt Lewin (1946) presented an approach to action research with cycles of analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, planning, implementation and evaluation of actions. Professional development next became the focus of much action research. Researchers often challenged themselves, the situation and others in the belief that one needed to understand the situation in order to change it as did Carr and Kemmis (1986). McNiff,

My plan of action to evaluate or improve practice.



I planned *action* in the form of a teaching exercise. I planned, taught, audiotaped, transcribed and analysed a lesson for an individual pupil. The lesson was based on the needs identified during my assessment and used the pupil's identified learning strengths to aid her learning. These needs were addressed in the context of developing the pupil's knowledge and understanding of language form, content and particularly her language use. The lesson specifically included expressive and receptive input from the pupil.

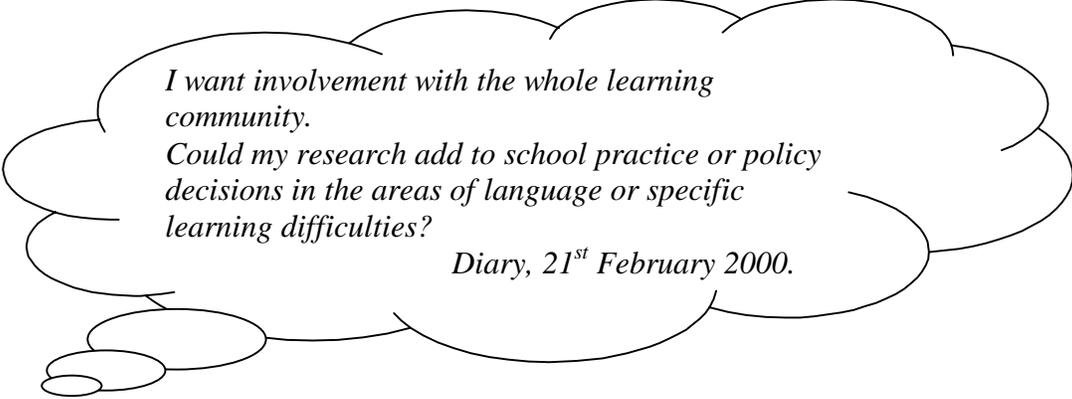
This approach also provided me with an opportunity to analyse and reflect on my interactive teaching style in an attempt to improve it (Whitehead, 1993). The contributions of all my research partners – pupil, parent, classteacher, a speech therapist, my critical friend and other educational critical colleagues - were invaluable for triangulation and validation purposes (Hitchcock and Hughes 1997). The data gathering methods I use included interviews, observations, audio recording, transcripts of recordings, lesson plans, photographs, pupils' work, pupil and teacher evaluations, field notes and a critical reflective diary. As I have demonstrated in the thought bubbles in

The circles of change widen.

Action research, which is my preferred methodology, is thoroughly defined in 10 characteristic elements by McKernan (1991). These include

- examining solvable practical problems deemed problematic by practitioners,
- exploratory research undertaken initially and with its goal dependent on the researcher's understanding of the problem,
- reporting in a case study methodology using the perceptions and beliefs of the participants expressed in everyday language,
- validation in unconstrained dialogue of participants,
- the free flow of information between the actors in the research.

These elements were very thorough but they omitted a major value I held around knowledge. My developing educational theories must be shared not only to be validated but also to exist. Therefore a methodology like critical theoretical action research, which included propagation of its findings, was needed to fulfil my personal epistemology as well as to achieve the aims of this research. If I succeeded in achieving the goal of sharing my theories, Chapter 6 of this dissertation will answer the following question.



I want involvement with the whole learning community.

Could my research add to school practice or policy decisions in the areas of language or specific learning difficulties?

Diary, 21st February 2000.

SECTION 4

Issues of access

I considered that my pupils were my research partners. I needed to acquire ethical access to their work. Initially I informed my school principal about my research aims, hopes and possible implications for the school, I gave him a signed ethical statement and he gave his written consent (copies in appendix 2b). I sensed a slight hint of grievance on the part of the principal at my suggestion that the school Board of Management should also be given a similar statement. He considered that this was not necessary. The Board of Management guidelines of the Department of Education and Science (Government of Ireland 1997) stated that when the Board was not in session that the principal assumed day-to-day responsibility in all school matters. As I was a teachers' representative on the board of my school, and out of respect for the Chairman of the Board, the principal and I agreed that I would also inform the Chairman of my research. The Chairman received my signed ethical statement and consented in writing to my research project (see copy in appendix 2a).

In keeping with Bassey' s (1990) recommendations I included systematic and careful records in my project archive list which is in appendix 3. As I stated in the ethical statement to my school Principal and Chairman of the Board of Management, a colleague - who is the school's Assistant Principal - would inspect these records and vouch for my accurate representations of them in appendices. Validation meetings and discussions with colleagues were valuable checks against distortion or self-delusion in my chosen

In my attempt to ensure this, I

- Negotiated access with all involved in the research orally and then in writing;
- Found ways to keep all those involved informed, orally, by e-mail and in writing;
- Promised confidentiality both orally and in writing (see ethical statements in appendix 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e);
- Ensured that all participants could withdraw at any time.
- I also retained my right to report my findings in good faith.
- All participants in the project – including pupils - gave a signed statement of their consent to my using their contributions (see appendix 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e).

I intended that these procedures would show that all contributions were dealt with in “dignity and privacy” (Bassey, 1990).

Mindful of

the degree to which research is or is not ethical depends on the researcher’s continual communication and interaction with research participants. Researchers alone must be the arbiters of this critical research issue

Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p 125.

the testing and lessons that I planned for my pupils as part of this research were presented to them as part of their normal school work. I informed the pupils that our discussions would help me to see how useful these new class-ideas could be to them and to other children. The parents were asked to agree that their child’s work could be used as part of my research (appendix 2e). Colleagues were cautious. When I required a written comment by them, they feared that they were being researched and very much appreciated the written letter confirming their anonymity. The decision to withdraw

I made a definite decision to withhold the name of my school from the published document because I believed as those in other educational establishments could identify some pupils by its publication.

My approach to this ethical statement follows the guidelines that were discussed in McNiff et al. (1996). I believe that they fulfilled all the requirements of good educational research.

FINAL METHODOLOGY DECISION

My personal experiences of pupils with specific learning difficulties in the area of language (detailed in chapter 1) led me to question the assumptions in the literature on specific learning difficulties in language. These uncertainties caused me to probe previous assumptions in my own thinking. I believe that the progression in my own thinking matched the progression in my practice.

My choice of a critical theoretical/reflective action research methodology to address my research aims provided a way to theorise my practice. I believed that specific learning difficulty in language was not identified, nor allowance made for it, nor appropriate teaching generally provided for pupils within primary schools. This research methodology gave me an opportunity

to examine the gap between my theory and my practice;

to challenge my current practice;

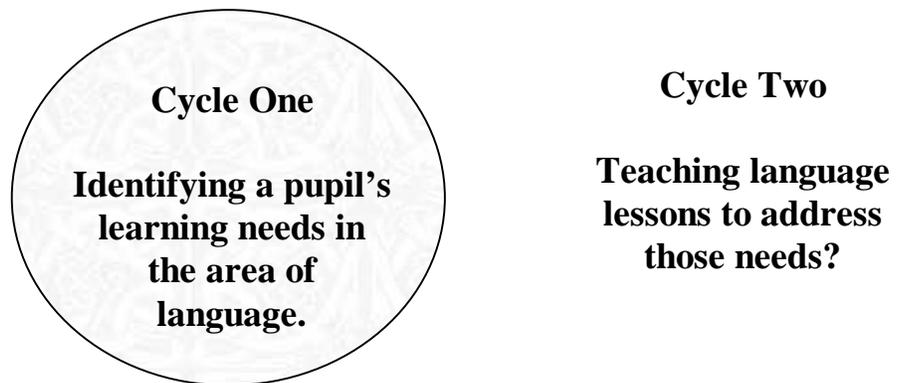
to construct knowledge;

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH STORY

I chose this ancient Celtic pattern of three interlinked circles to represent the three phases of this research. It was taken from the entrance stone to a passage grave at Newgrange Co. Meath, which predates the Egyptian pyramids, and Stonehenge in England. Its original meaning might represent the never-ending circles of life. This visual metaphor of my research project illustrated the three never-ending intertwined and interdependent cycles of my work. The implications of my pupils' learning and my own learning during these cycles are etched on the large stone, which represents all those in the larger learning community.

Figure 4.1: Stone at Newgrange This stone shows three inter-linked circles in a shamrock shape representing three research cycles.



Reflections

During these cycles, my reflections actively contributed to my developing theories on identifying and teaching pupils with specific learning difficulties. This was done through daily entries in a reflective diary. Initially I embraced this practice, which was a new one for me, with enthusiasm – writing volumes and even colour-coding entries by topic! Gradually my entries became more erratic. But when, on the advice of a critical friend, I timetabled diary writing into my teaching day, it became much less cumbersome. My critical friend was a teaching colleague who taught in a 2nd level school. She was a ‘study buddy’ on our two-year journey towards a further degree. She was both helpful and critical and through our regular meetings became a personal friend and confidante.

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

Identifying a pupil’s learning needs in the area of language

SECTION 1

Identifying a pupil’s learning needs in the area of language using standardised tests.

reference test for pupils aged 3-11 years. It indicated ability to retain a list of separate facts. In this test Pupil P recalled specific numbers that I called out at one-minute intervals. The test took six minutes and was quickly and easily scored. Pupil P managed to remember four digits correctly giving her a score similar to a five-year-old although she was in fact six years and three months old at the time of testing. I noted, when I reported on this test to my validation colleague X, that this testing did not indicate that Pupil P had a significant difficulty in the area of auditory memory. But my colleague wrote that pupil P had some problems as in the series of five digits the pupil remembered the final three digits only. So the implications of the results were not conclusive.

(2) The Westwood Sentence Repetition Test (1975) was another individual test that could indicate difficulties with receptive language – meaning short-term memory and conventional sentence structures. With a reliability coefficient of .81 it was an accurate, valuable, quick and simple diagnostic tool. In this test I said a sentence once and the pupil repeated it in exactly the same form. Pupil P succeeded in repeating only three sentences correctly. I noted, in my interpretation of this test, that such a difficulty in remembering sentences had implications for class teaching. It could mean that Pupil P might require help with the receptive aspects of language when teacher was explaining something or giving instructions. My validation colleague X suggested that an audiogram might be needed to check the pupil's hearing, as well as sound discrimination and blending tests. Again this test did not provide me with a definite diagnosis but more questions and the need for further testing.

(3) The Picture Language Scale for Younger Children (1976) claimed to be a norm referenced, individual test to find out which children were below normal in language

things that float, flowers and measurement and she used shoulder shrugs, head shaking and facial expressions to show that she could not supply a word for the picture. I believe that this test was simply a vocabulary test despite its claims to be a language development test, which might, but did not necessarily, indicate a general learning disability.

Learning Outcomes

Initially discussions with my validation colleague X focused on the administration, marking and accurate scoring of these tests. Then we considered their interpretation and how to best summarise the child's performance. These three norm referenced tests provided empirical data on weaknesses in auditory short-term memory, ability to recall sentences or instructions and vocabulary. But the qualitative data we noted - such as physical behaviours or movements when Pupil P could not retrieve words - was invaluable in drawing coherent, concise and comprehensive conclusions from these tests. Yet even when both qualitative and quantitative data was included these tests did not represent a comprehensive view of Pupil P's full language ability. In the next section, I take the critical step of using another assessment format.

SECTION 2

Identifying a pupil's learning needs in the area of language using my own teacher assessment format.

hundred consecutive utterances of the pupil and all my utterances were transcribed, analysed and summarised in appendix 6a (original data is in my archive see appendix 3 item 3.2). The transcription sample below (figure 4.2) shows the format I used.

Colleague X's comments	Direct account of session	My comments
<p>Useful observations on pupil's physical reactions to her difficulties.</p> <p>Good correction technique.</p>	<p><u>Me</u>; Good. Tell me all the things you see on it?</p> <p><u>Pupil P</u>; I see a scarf.</p> <p><u>Me</u>; Thank you.</p> <p><u>Pupil P</u>; I see a ...(gives a look of I can't remember)</p> <p><u>Me</u>; What would that be? ...What could you use it for?</p> <p><u>Pupil P</u>; Strewdriver.</p> <p><u>Me</u>; Screwdriver. Very good.</p>	<p><i>Pupil 6 initially appeared well able for the task of naming (despite the mispronunciation in 6 and her delays in retrieving words she knows as in line 4. She uses quite a lot a physical movement to convey meaning.</i></p>

Figure 4.2: Transcript of lesson with pupil P on 7TH February 2000.

This approach also provided me with an opportunity to analyse and reflect on my own interactive teaching style.

Initially the sound of my own voice on the tape recording and the slow pace at which I spoke surprised me. Time proved to be problematic because the twenty-minute conversation took me approximately three hours to transcribe and a further hour to analyse. So although standardised tests were carried out on 12 pupils, I only transcribed and analysed pupil P's and pupil S's conversations. The amount of information I gleaned from the analysis of the conversation with Pupil P amazed me.

Results for the pupil

(appendix 6b).

Results for me.

Validation colleague X wrote that I

‘could now structure a context of mutual interest and enjoyment in which a fruitful language assessment was possible. You (me) also showed an awareness of the need to elicit a range of language uses from the child, including complex language uses’.

Appendix 6b and archive item 7 in appendix 3.

Pupil P’s class teacher E (see appendix 6c) noted my awareness of the need to employ a variety of conversational strategies and interactive styles. I noted in my diary on 7th February that the assessment was enjoyable for the pupil who asked ‘Can I come ‘gain ‘morrow?’

Further validation.

I wanted to demonstrate that this assessment, as well as being pupil and teacher friendly, was accurate. The validation by colleague X and class teacher E provided conclusive qualitative evidence of its accuracy and validity through the triangulation process. But I took the validation process a step further by using the tape recording to fill in a norm-referenced checklist of language - the N.A.R.E. Language Observation Sheet (1979) - see appendix 6d. From it I itemised the pupil’s strengths and weaknesses. On viewing the checklist results, validation colleague X wrote that she believed it showed that the pupil has a pervasive and significant difficulty with language. I had already recorded this fact in the analysis of my conversation with Pupil P (44). I believe that the completion of the N.A.R.E Language Observation Sheet showed empirically the accuracy of my analysis of a pupil’s conversation.

SECTION 3

Applying this language assessment procedure to an older pupil.

Pupil S was the 11-year-old pupil who wrote the first line of this dissertation. I repeated the same conversational assessment technique with him as I used for Pupil P. On this occasion the pupil's hobbies were used to begin the conversation. Colleague W and pupil S's teacher - class teacher C - helped with the triangulation process. Data was stored as before see transcript sample in appendix 7a (original tape recording and transcript are in my data archive, appendix 3 items 2.3 and 3.4).

Results

I noted in appendix 7b that Pupil S's oral language was effective in terms of content, listener/speaker relationship and use. He could benefit from correcting a few mispronunciations and improving his usage of superlatives. Engagement with the emotional or imaginative situations could stretch his language usage even more.

My learning

Teacher C wrote 'You supported Pupil S's language in a very interesting and warm manner and got great results' (see appendix 7c). When I specifically asked Colleague W for comments on my tactics for eliciting language, she wrote that I used 'good questioning techniques, led the pupil into opportunities to speculate, and re-focused the pupil effectively' (see appendix 7c).

linguistic fields. (For ethical reasons as discussed on pp38-39, a summary of this psychological report is available only in archive item 19). Class teacher comments on previous end of year reports suggested that Pupil S had a language difficulty as they spoke of him as a quiet pupil in class who avoided all tasks and situations involving language. He also made errors when reading aloud (appendix 7c).

Initially I felt that my research had failed. Momentarily, I considered omitting Pupil S's data from my research project. But my ethics statements prevented it. Fortunately the critical reflective element of my chosen methodology came into its own now. I wondered how could class teachers have been so mistaken? I resolved this dilemma through a discussion with Pupil S himself (appendix 7d). Slowly despair gave way to reason, as I realised that my test procedure had diagnosed accurately. This was confirmed when I conducted a full diagnostic evaluation of this pupil (data archive see appendix 3 item 6). He definitely had a specific learning difficulty, but it was a visual memory weakness and not linguistic. When I presented this diagnostic assessment to validation colleague Y she commented on my 'good detective job in winking out exactly where his difficulties lay' (archive item 6 in appendix 3).

From the mouths of babes!

In a taped discussion about the testing procedure, Pupil S defined his own problem and identified some remedies (see appendix 7d). He recalled his various teachers over the years and his feelings about school. He remembered that 'Mrs M was kind. She didn't give out much. I couldn't talk cause I didn't know that much.' In this first year in school, he had already begun to isolate himself deliberately from the oral work in class to masquerade his feelings of lack of achievement. From this point until 3rd class (age 9) he identified Olympic handball, football and history as the things he enjoyed most and

Conversational indicators of language attainments in order of difficulty.

A major benefit of spending so much time analysing pupil/teacher conversations was that I began to note patterns. I would ask what was the child actually doing in this sentence or what was she really trying to say. For example when pupil P said, 'Me broder fell off of a tree' she was actually reporting or describing an incident or when Pupil S said, 'if sand got on the lid it could get in the tank an' you wouldn't know. The engine mightn't start ' he was predicting. I grouped these conversational activities under the headings (in figure 4.3 below) 'reporting', 'reasoning', 'predicting', 'imagining' and 'projecting'. In the chart below I have placed them in order of difficulty.

Labelling and categorising components of a scene Describing – colour, size, location, Describing incidents and sequencing events Relating aspects Extracting the central meaning.	Reporting activities
Explain a process. Solve problems; Give judgements; Draw conclusions	Reasoning.
Anticipate events Anticipate event sequences Predict problems and solutions Suggest alternative courses Predict consequences	Predicting.
Extending real life into an imaginary scene. Extending fantasy into an imaginary scene.	Imagination
Project into others experiences	

CONCLUSIONS TO RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

During this first research cycle I had found that the standardised testing I used did not give information on expressive language skills or indications of specific learning difficulties. The teacher-based conversational testing format allowed me to identify when a specific learning difficulty in language was or was not present in pupils of different ages. Colleague W and teacher C noted in our final triangulation and validation meeting the accessibility to teachers of the information gleaned during my comparisons of formal and informal language testing (appendix 7f).

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE TWO

Teaching lessons to address needs which were identified in action cycle one.

LESSON I

I taught lesson 1 to pupil P to address her needs which were identified in action cycle one. Reflection on the first lesson gave rise to many changes in my research methods and teaching style.

Pupil P's needs were in the auditory areas of remembering sequences and receptive language. Phonological awareness was the new early intervention strategy recommended

sounds-in-words part of the lesson. I had previously found this series effective when I taught it to small groups aged five to eight-year-olds.

I audiotaped this lesson (see archive item 2 in appendix 3). I have not transcribed it because the lesson content was not completed. When I asked pupil P did she enjoy the lesson, she answered, 'I no good. I can't member' meaning 'I am no good. I can't remember things well.' I was surprised and shocked by her comment because I went out of my way to praise her efforts during the lesson. Later in cycle three I learned that there is a difference between praise and encouragement. Overall I was shattered and disappointed by this lesson.

From reflections, which I noted in my diary, in the week following the lesson (in appendix 3 item 16), I realised that

1. The lesson contents were too elaborate and too long for this particular pupil.
2. A multi-sensory teaching approach, which is recommended in most psychological diagnoses of those with specific learning difficulties, would have been less stressful for such a pupil.
3. I had identified the pupil's needs as mainly auditory but I had not used her learning strengths to help her learn. These strengths were in the visual areas of my teaching.

I had used a behaviourist style of teaching and learning, which was inappropriate in this individual lesson for pupil P. In this teaching style, I had chosen the lesson content, instructed the child in the skills that I decided were important; when the pupil responded I praised or corrected her and continued with the next incremental phase of instruction. My teaching reflected Skinner's (1954) definition of the *laws of effect and exercise* that explained how stimulus, response and reinforcement brought about learning. Yet the lesson had failed to achieve its objectives.

LESSON 2

I planned this lesson for pupil P (see appendix 9a) under the headings; specific objectives; teaching strategies/style, materials; outline plan including introduction, development, conclusion; evaluation and follow-up. These plans, the lesson tape and transcript and written comments by colleague X are in my data archive (see appendix 3 item 11) and a summary is in appendix 9b. Although I had a plan for the lesson it actually changed course as Pupil P showed success in some of the activities.

Strategies / Teaching Style:

Pupil P's learning strengths seemed to be in the visual rather than the auditory area so a visual and multisensory approach was used. To utilise these strengths, real objects, pointing, modelling sentence structures, orally using visual stimuli such as worksheets, were part of the lesson. In an interactive style, using simple games, Pupil P got plenty of practice in questioning and turntaking. We worked on vocabulary extension of the number of nouns she knew and the classification of them - for example a herd of cows. To maintain a positive approach during the lesson Pupil P's comments were affirmed and where necessarily restated by me correctly as a means of learning the corrections.

How I practiced new strategies during this lesson.

The following sections were accompanied by photographs showing how I structured the lesson.

Introduction

I aimed to get pupil P to list nouns that she knew,
I could have asked,
'What's that?'



Step 1.

I encouraged Pupil P to name the classification of each group while putting the objects

in appropriate containers.

To reinforce this, Pupil P

identified these

classifications

in picture format.

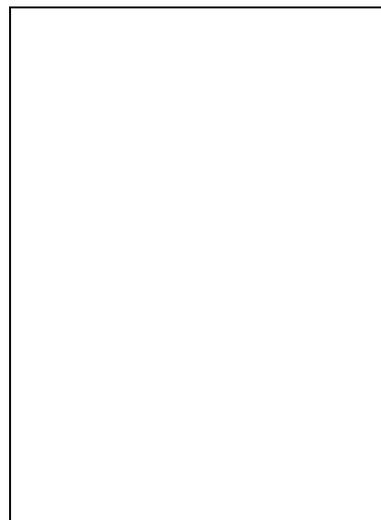
Next, in a game which involved

turn taking, she used these

classification terms herself.



Figure 4.5:Pupil P named the objects on the table.



classification terminology.

these classifications in picture format.

Step 2.

To consolidate this learning Pupil P used a worksheet and a bingo-type game to form sentences. For this, she used 2 objects and their classification; for example 'Hammers and screwdrivers are tools'.

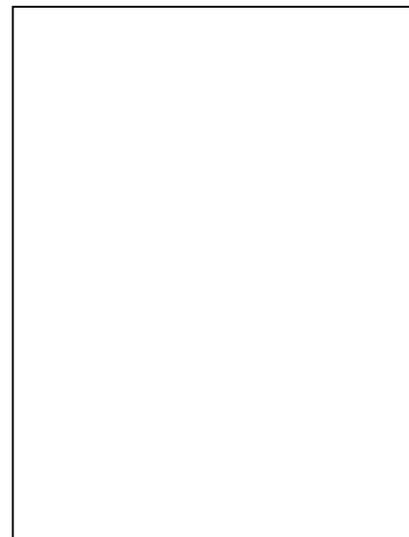


Pupil P covered each one with a counter as I confirmed it was correct.

Figure4.8:Pupil P's learning is consolidated.

Step 3.

To increase Pupil P's auditory sequential memory, I modelled a visualisation technique. It involved closing the eyes while listening to a list. Then Pupil P. named and traced the list items with one's finger onto blank cards



A second worksheet was used to extend Pupil P's vocabulary usage.

This was done during a turn-taking game using the sentence format

'The girl is eating -----and -----!'

Step 5. **Pupil P practices auditory meaning.**

To practice auditory meaning some funny pictures, based on the lesson's vocabulary, were used. For example Pupil P looked at a picture of a girl eating with a bone, and explained the incongruity.

Conclusion:

Pupil P recalled the learning activities as I drew them. These pictures were jumbled and she arranged them in the correct sequence. In presentational mode she retold how she had tidied teacher's table.

Learning outcomes

Analysis of this lesson investigated both the pupil and teacher learning to identify any benefits for the pupil and any changes or improvements in my practice.

Pupil P's learning was in terms of

1. listener/speaker relationship which involved fluency and a capability to maintain and extend a topic;
2. meaning content including an understanding, clarity and detail;

learning games. She had an ability to communicate and maintain my attention through gesture and eye contact. I became familiar with the head and facial movements she used when she had difficulty retrieving a word from her memory. Pupil P enjoyed the lesson, even to the extent of laughing at her own mistakes. With this positive attitude, she worked steadily throughout the lesson with no need to be encouraged to concentrate on the task in hand.

2. Meaning content

I focused on Pupil P's ability to communicate meaning during the Funny Card game. She showed clarity of speech and meaning although she rarely used a complete sentence. She provided information of a factual type only. The sentence formats I modelled for Pupil P were invaluable but she would require more practice to make this categorisation process her own. It was apparent that even when she had grasped a concept, her limited vocabulary prevented her from using/expressing it successfully.

3. Language and cognition.

This was the main area of focus for the lesson. She succeeded in naming objects as well as recalling and using the classification names I requested. She even mastered the word "clothes", which escaped her for much of the lesson. The very structured approach I used seemed to be an enabling method for Pupil P. The enormous improvement in auditory sequential memory she displayed - from recalling three objects to five objects - is worth consolidating and building upon.

My learning was in terms of

1. Teaching style
2. Teaching skills

Teaching skills

During her comments on the transcript of lesson 2, colleague X commented on my improvements in questioning skills which she said encouraged extension of topics and fluency from Pupil P. In figure 4.10 below I have documented some of these changes in my questioning skills. I have related them to the conversational positive indicators of language attainments mentioned in action cycle one.

Original Question	Aim	New Question
What's that? (pointing to an object in a picture)	Naming	Can you tell me all the things you see in the picture?
What kind of ball does the boy have?	Description	Tell me about the ball?
What comes next?	Sequencing	I wonder what will happen now?
What will happen to the...?	Predicting	What might happen if ...?
What does the girl think?	Projecting	You are the little girl in the story, how do you feel?

Figure 4.10: Changes in my questioning skills

Colleague X complimented me on more precise word usage and my affirming techniques. Both she and I considered the sequencing worksheet for recapping the lesson a good idea. The presentational mode it permitted could have been expanded upon in further lessons.

Theorising my practice.

and practice of teaching individuals, to teaching in a class setting.

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE THREE
Teaching language in the classroom

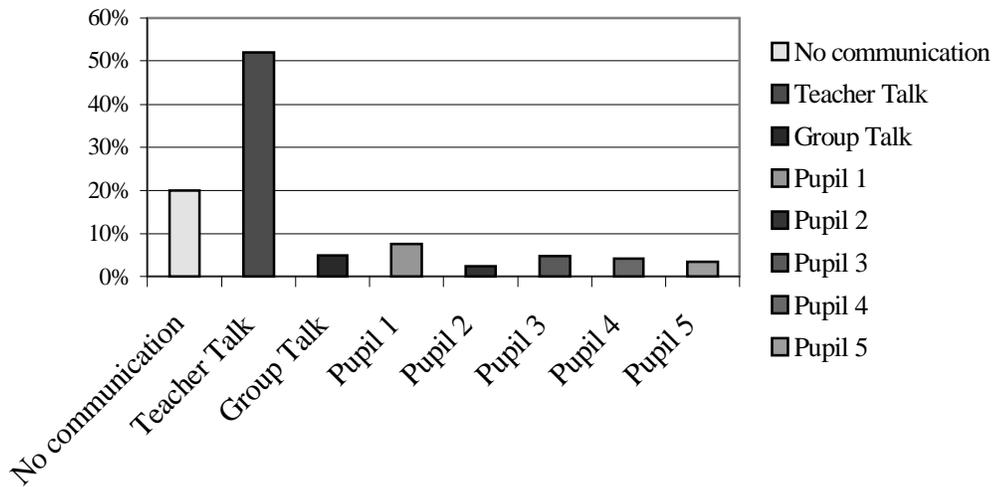
SECTION 1

A pilot lesson

To commence a reflective cycle on how language is taught in a group or class teaching session, I observed a colleague teaching a language lesson to a group of remedial pupils aged six years. It was an enjoyable experience being a fly on the wall in another's classroom. The contents of this particular lesson (Appendix 10a) included vocabulary extension and remembering two to three structured sentences. On reviewing the lesson with a critical friend (appendix 10b), we noted that empirical measurements - in figures 1 and 2 below – showed that of the 7 topic areas covered only one related solely to oral language development, and it received 8% of the total 40 minute lesson time. Teacher speaking time was a surprising 52% of the total lesson time. I believe that these figures were in keeping with my own practice because the weekly programmes I was using at that time contained similar headings (see appendix 1c).



Figure 4.12: Time spent in oral communication by participants in a 40 minute observed lesson



Changing perspective

Through reflection on this lesson, I came to understand that such empirical data had little relevance to language teaching in the classroom. It gave no information on what the pupils had learned or how they had learned it. As I stated on p30 of this text, my observations gave me an in-depth understanding of the value of qualitative data.

I moved to the next phase of my project - to investigate the teaching of oral language in my classroom.

participate on an equal basis in exchanging information. The adult kept the conversation going by compensating for the child's difficulties. As a parent I recalled the amount of celebration and elated conversation which my own child's first 'Da Da' caused. In adult - child speaking, communication the motivation factor and minimal accomplishments are acknowledged. In class lessons I tried to keep these ideas to the fore and used a format as close to this theory as I could.

SECTION 2

1st lesson

I investigated my practice in oral language teaching by examining a language lesson. The group of 5 pupils I engaged with for this part of the project had spent two years in school and were significantly behind their peers in terms of reading and writing. They were also observed by class teachers (appendix 11a) to be inattentive or have difficulties responding in a group teaching situation. I considered that their oral needs were to develop an ability to respond appropriately to questions and to develop some phonological awareness skills to help them attack new words in print. The specific aims I had selected for this oral lesson were that -

- (a) in the context of the pupils exploring a picture, each pupil would compose a question which the others in the group would answer;
- (b) in the context of words in sentences the pupils would develop an understanding of the concepts of beginning, middle and end.

Next, facing my fears, I opened the door of my classroom and invited in an observer (colleague R). She was a lecturer in special education from a teacher training college and had been former teacher in a school for pupils with specific learning difficulties. She was to observe and comment on the lesson. In trepidation of working under the eyes of a 'superior' – as I considered the observer was – I over-prepared the lesson. I sat with my

Reflections

I had structured this lesson in the belief that if pupils could form questions this would give them an understanding of what answer was required and so their in-class engagement with oral questioning would improve. In assessing this theory, I had to reflect not only on what the pupils had learned but also on what I, the teacher had learned. Pupil comments on the effectiveness of the lesson and their personal learning experiences were also evidenced (appendix 11c). My critical friend's contributions and discussions with the rest of the validation group were invaluable too.

The pupils learned

to mimic what the teacher required. I considered that this was reminiscent of the behaviourist style of learning. Their achievements reflected Skinner's (1954) definition of the *laws of effect and exercise*, which explains how stimulus, response and reinforcement can bring about learning. I had devised clear, logical, linear and developmental steps for the lesson – as spoken of by Gagné (1965) - by breaking the learning tasks into small, simplified chunks and reinforcing these with practice. The pupils learned an isolated language subskill. They could now form questions when given an initial interrogatory word. Unfortunately, as pupil 1 succinctly put it (appendix 11c), “teacher don't ask me dem question”, they were offered no opportunity to apply this knowledge. By listening to my pupils I realised that the important principle that ‘learning is connecting’, as shown in the writing of Pavlov, Hull, Thorndike and Skinner (as in Stones 1966), had not been achieved.

I, the teacher, learned

the isolated subskills were reminiscent of the stages of development in the behaviourist approach to language (Skinner1954) and we questioned their effectiveness.

Learning outcomes

On a metacognitive level I began considering my developing theories on language teaching. But niggling questions were developing and until I could answer them to my own satisfaction these theories could not be tested. The questions that developed were

- Could I change my current language practice and move from a behaviourist mode of teaching language to a more holistic approach, which was what my pupils had demonstrated was required? Even more crucial was the question of how could this be evidenced?
- Would good class teaching be sufficient for pupils with specific language difficulties as suggested in the work of Westwood (1997). Despite the fact that much of the current literature pointed to the contrary and that, as the USA National Research Council (1998) claims, when teaching dyslexic students, teachers may need to change the academic environment to enable students to demonstrate what they know.

SECTION 3

2nd lesson: Applying strategies, which were useful when teaching an individual, to class teaching.

Figure 4.13: Visual representing a triangulated language approach.

The significance of this tripartite approach was that without the adult input whole layers of meaning are lost as Wells (1986) wrote. Picture books, real books, various literary genres and literary criticism could be made available to even the weakest of pupils with this approach. This eventually led me to the understanding that language and literacy development was a formal cultural development. So rather than taking the teaching of language as a task analysis activity and working from a skills-deficit based model, it became a highly complex intellectual process requiring an understanding of the nature of both written and oral language.

To evidence my change in practice and developing language theory, I set up a similar teaching experience to step 1 in which I planned, taught and reflected on a second lesson. A different lecturer in language and early education from a Teacher Training College (colleague T) observed this lesson. The lesson went according to the plans in appendix 12a and I employed differentiated language tasks for the pupils. On this occasion in the context of the teacher reading the Big Book “Once Upon A Time” to them, the pupils discovered and used rhyming words in an auditory sequential memory activity. They described houses using one adjective of their choice and composed a sentence beginning with an adverbial phrase from the book. They also answered questions orally showing their understanding of locating, possession, and identifying animals. Two pupils showed that they could anticipate actions, predict events using their own experiences and express judgements. The lesson concluded with the pupils saying what they did best at or enjoyed most (appendix 12b).

Evidenced learning from this lesson.

1. Preparation for success;
Focus attention on the required information before the activity. For example ‘When I turn the page, look for houses. Think what you could say about them.’ When the page has been read ask ‘Tell me about the houses?’
2. Self praise;
Help pupils value their own success with phrases like ‘ Did you have a lot to say about the houses?’
3. Praise versus encouragement;
Pupils easily recognise the subtle difference. If I say ‘Good girl.’ It is far less enabling than if they are asked ‘How do you feel you did?’
4. Peer evaluation;
Encourage the pupils to tell each other how well they have done. For example ask the group ‘If I hadn’t seen the picture, did X tell me all about the houses?’

Figure 4.14: Encouragement strategies.

This time I could show that the pupils learned, using their own words (appendix 12b) -

1. ‘Fun sounds for making words.’ These were their own words to explain the link that they had discovered phonological spelling and word attack techniques.
2. ‘Ders loads of stories in de picture.’ Again this was a pupil’s description of the wealth of language that can be found in real and picture books.
3. ‘X (named pupil see ethics section page 00) is a good guesser’. The pupil who said this discovered the idea of cloze – filling in a missing word -and prediction from listening to a peer using it.

And I learned and demonstrated that –

Some mispronunciations	Over and above normal speech delay patterns. They appear to stem from a mishearing of a word. Pupil 8 used 'snap' for 'track' and 'aside' for 'beside'.
Ungrammatical utterances	Singular/plural, verb tenses, superlatives errors. As pupil 5 said 'Me look the more bigger ball bounce big' meaning 'I saw the biggest ball bounce high.'

Figure 4.15a: Behaviours that signal specific difficulties.

Beveridge and Conti-Ramsden (1987) suggested that these are indicators of difficulties in the language sequencing section of the brain, which is called Broca's area. Those who study the brain say that the Wernicke's area and the Angular Gyrus are linked to this Broca area to form the three main language areas of the brain. The literature indicates that difficulty in any one of these areas will affect language development and abilities.

The next areas of weakness I noted in pupils during group lessons were an apparent lack of understanding of the spoken word, difficulties repeating what the teacher had said and a deficit in content words.

difficulties repeating what the teacher said	fill in the gaps; use 'eh' when searching for words.
deficit in content words	A vocabulary and word linkage loss. If asked 'What is a book made of?' they couldn't supply any words such as paper, pages, print, stories or poems.

Figure 4.15b: Behaviours that signal specific difficulties.

The pupils, whom I believed had specific language difficulties exhibited one, two or more definite areas of weakness named above. I contend that this was not the profile of pupils with general learning difficulties or general remediable difficulties as defined in the SERC report (1993).

SECTION 4

My theory on teaching pupils with specific language difficulties and how it developed from my practice

I believe that I found five strategies which successful teaching will require. I titled them with the acronym **NARRATE**

- **N**atural Conversations - as a teaching focus.
- **R**el Relationships – forging these to aid repetition, reinforcement and motivation.
- **A**ppropriate – learning only the language necessary for the pupils current life needs and building in appropriate progressions

sentence to be repeated and used by the pupil. For example in my lesson transcript I recorded that I showed a banana and asked pupil P, 'What is that?' When the pupil answered 'a banana', I said 'No. Don't say a banana. Say it's a banana.' Through this type of instruction the pupils eventually learned how to supply the answer I required. But what was the advantage of this? The pupil's own initial answer was perfectly correct and adequate. The more natural and effective way to get this answer would be to reverse roles and allow the pupil to be the questioner. When the teacher guessed incorrectly that it is a pear, the pupil could supply the correction 'It's a banana.'

Building natural communication into a remedial programme would encourage pupil motivation and the opportunity to practise what been taught. During this research, I learned how ridiculous it was to set up a new and separate language context for language lessons. The more natural the teaching experience I could provide for pupils the more likely it was that they would have their learning reinforced in their everyday activities. Through this method I believed pupils would articulate ways to get what they want, express their opinions and feelings, and develop relationships.

- **Real Relationships**

I listened as pupils in my classes experimented with language and I learned the importance of contrasts in their learning process. Observing children play with language was like watching them piece a jigsaw together. Just as they can compare a protrusion on one jigsaw piece with the hole needing to be filled, I believe they must engage with comparing, contrasting and linking language. Establishing relationships was what consolidated the knowledge they were acquiring. Pupil P could not pronounce the 'k' and 't' sounds. By first asking her to point to a picture of a 'cat' and then a 'teddy' while I supplied the words for them sometimes correctly and sometimes incorrectly, she began to hear, concentrate on and process the different initial sounds. Then we reversed the game

was necessary to ensure that they could achieve their basic communication needs in life as they were currently experiencing it. For example one pupil had a very limited food vocabulary –‘chips, sweets, soup, sangies (sandwiches)’ - and no phrases for asking for food.

- **Time together**

I discovered that the most valuable effects of ‘time spent together’ were confidence building and a self-appreciation of success. During the time I spent together with pupils it was necessary for them to value for themselves what was correct and acceptable so that they themselves could transfer this appreciation to all the other language situations in which they found themselves. This ethic of consistency meant that they would not say ‘Daddy sleeping’ at home when they knew and used ‘Daddy is sleeping’ correctly at school. ‘I talk like a mammy was’ (Diary 19.03.00 in appendix 3 item 16) one of the phrases a pupil used to show that she had achieved this self-validation. At parent teacher meetings I stressed that I had an open door policy. The pupils needed our joint efforts; I shared the contents of the curriculum I was using; I offered follow-up games for home when a unit of work was completed and encouraged the parents to acknowledge more mature speech forms from their children.

The value of this time consuming strategy was brought home to me very forcibly when the parent of a five-year-old sent this note. ‘Teacher, Y (pupil’s name) is to learn *accept* today.’ In this instance the pupil was attending language therapy and the therapist, mother, class teacher, and I had agreed to follow the same content. I pondered on the necessity for Y to learn such a difficult word this time. When I next met the mother she explained that Y was to practise putting all her toys in the box *except* the red ones. Had I not spoken to the mother the best efforts of the adults would have totally confused the pupil. Similarly messages from me to parents need clarification.

revolutionary. But its significance is that it grew from my personal experience, which led me to opt for a whole language approach, and through it I had theorised my practice.

AN END? A BEGINNING?

Just as a school year ended and became the foundation of the next year, so this research stopped with as many questions awaiting further investigation as it had addressed.

I began with the concern that my pupils with specific learning difficulties could not learn language in the way in which I taught it. I tried to show that I could teach in the way that they could learn. First I identified the needs of these pupils through testing. Standardized tests didn't give a full picture of language ability so I researched a conversational form of test which focused on language usage. Through this test I identified a specific learning difficulty in language and pupils' language needs. I addressed these needs in an individual language lesson and learned that using learning strengths is essential for such pupils. Finally I investigated if the adaptation of my class teaching to facilitate the needs of such pupils. I had developed and researched personal theories on how to teach such pupils. The significance of these achievements and the further questions they uncovered will be teased out in the next chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH



The significance of this research might be understood as a developmental inter-laced process which can be represented as a set of embedded circles. Each circle represented a unit, which had been effected during the research process such as

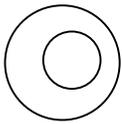
- the pupil with a learning difficulty
- language as it was taught and tested in school
- the wider community engaged in the education of these pupils
- ethics
- research methodology
- and my personal growth

For me the visual image of the circle recalled the complete yet never-ending qualities of each of those entities. Like the growth rings within a tree trunk, each circle is embraced, surrounded and totally embedded in the next larger circle whose existence in this project was dependent on its predecessor. The visual metaphor of the concentric circles is reminiscent of my belief of the embedded nature of research and practice.

1. The Pupil.



The research began in the tiny centre circle representing pupils who had a learning difficulty. I aimed to raise awareness of their difficulty and so improve their learning experiences. In the last week of my research, I asked Pupil S if there was anything he would say to a younger pupil who had the same difficulties as him. He wrote 'UR it' and explained 'its finding what you're good at – you are it - and not worryin' about being the best in school'. It was a joy to realise that he could now confidently communicate his understanding of the giftedness of those with specific learning difficulties in the language of his own real world.



2. **Developing theories on some language issues.**

The next, larger circle depicts language and its affects on the learning of pupils with specific learning difficulties. Within this area, my research had major influences in terms of the implementation of an appropriate curriculum in addition to methods of assessment.

Language Curriculum

In developing the **Narrate** strategies for pupils with specific language learning difficulties I changed the focus of language teaching. The use of a communicative approach departed from the traditional subskill approach where pupils answered only when spoken to and preferably in premodelled sentence structures. My new approach placed the learning of language firmly within real living and natural contexts as is recommended in the revised Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland 1999). I engaged pupils in conversations which were collaborative in nature and which occurred in contexts of mutual interest and attention.

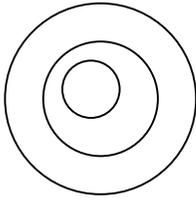
This approach had implications for class teaching as ‘one must teach in different ways in order to teach the whole class’ (Pollock and Waller, 1994). The observed class lessons in this project showed that effective class language teaching could be achieved using this ‘narrate’ method and presentational elements. These teaching theories were also in line with the value I held that learning must be non-threatening and fun (Connor, 1994). I believe that this form of learning contributed to the development of positive attitudes,

Language Testing

I challenged the current Department of Education and Science (Government of Ireland 1999) practice of the diagnoses of a specific learning difficulty by non-teaching psychologists. The assessment procedure I used was accurate when I placed individuals' results in relation to IQ tests and other tests detailed in appendix 7f. In addition, with this an easy to administer test, I pinpointed strengths, weaknesses as well as remedial needs. Crombie (1994 p14) quoting Siegal stated that 'Over the last few years there had been considerable debate about whether or not an IQ test is essential in determining if a child is dyslexic'. I believe my research added to this debate in that I provided a valid alternative-testing tool.

I developed positive guidelines for language achievements (p48 of this text) that have been adopted by my school colleagues. Tough (1981 p40) presents a framework for analysis of language use, which she claims, is helpful in pointing up the relationship between language as a resource for interpretation and communication of meaning. There was a striking similarity between my checklist guide and her framework. The Dyslexia Early Screening Test (1995) contained 11 subtests, which are proposed as positive indicators of dyslexia. These were developed from consensus in the field and empirically based data analysis techniques. I believe that the indicators / guidelines that I developed in this research were similarly achieved using different, but equally valid, data analysis methods;

1. through consensus of colleagues during interpretation of their observations of my classes;
2. in triangulation which validated my research,
3. and in adoption of the guidelines as school policy.



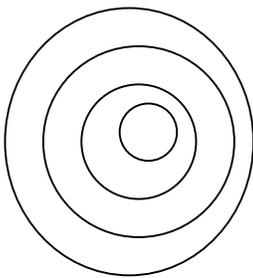
Encompassing the two circles of pupils and language is the circle representing school and the larger educational community who create the learning experience as well as deliver the curriculum. These groups provided an initial public for this research and were a source of its validation.

I believe that class teachers involved in this project benefited from a greater awareness and understanding of dyslexia. This could be evidenced in the addition of expressive and receptive language tutorials to the curriculum in a local voluntary workshop for children with dyslexia. This change occurred on the advice of a tutor who was also a colleague closely connected with my research.

This outward flow of new information was achieved through a spirit of co-operative learning, which I believe developed among colleagues during this research. A huge new dimension was added to my classroom based research project. It placed demands on me in terms of time, tact and perhaps a talent I never before considered that I possessed. I felt like the facilitator described by Carr and Kemmis (1986)

The facilitator's role is Socratic; to provide a sounding board against which practitioners may try out ideas and learn more about the reasons for their own actions, as well as learning more about the process of self reflection.

Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p 203.

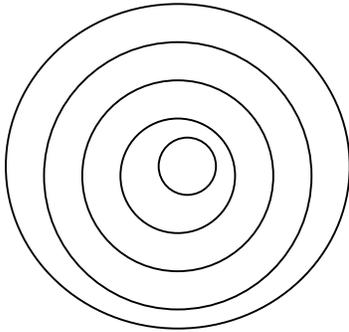


4. Issues of ethics fill the next circle.

It was claimed that ethical issues (Connor 1994) had limited previous research into intervention strategies suitable for

readily related my descriptions to their own experiences. I believed that when a variety of data sources pointed to the same conclusions it made these conclusions credible. I therefore concluded that my findings were generalisable and relatable (Basse 1990) to other pupils, classrooms and schools and so could be used to advance my theoretical understanding.

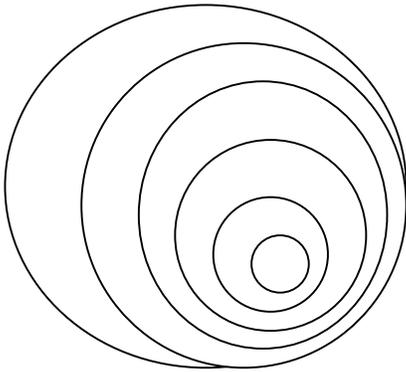
5. Methodological implications



The next larger circle represented research methodology. After wrestling with traditional methodologies, literature and previous research, I came to settle on an appropriate one. This search led me to an in-depth understanding of educational and practitioner research as well as grounding my theories in practice. There were 3 major areas of learning for me which I considered were significant for others using the same research methodology.

- Because of the participatory nature of the research methodology I had chosen, I experienced the social aspect of action research as the project extended far beyond an individual, in-class process. Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggested that this research methodology should be democratic and that all participants should be ‘equally involved in all phases of its planning, acting and reflecting’. This was not a valid description of my process. As seen in Chapter 4, pupils could play an equal role in planning. Yet on reflection their actions have dictated each successive step of the process. So their part although essential and pivotal was not designed to be equal but became so.

practice during this research I found that there was an intimate interrelationship between my theories on knowledge, educational values and my practice through action research



6. A personal significance

And finally the outer circle encompassed my personal development and me. Changes in my understanding of knowledge and practice occurred through reflection, engagement with colleagues and pupils.

Through reflection

I saw patterns in the reflective cycles in my practice. Initially my lesson planning was teacher driven and content focused. I realised, especially in the lesson 2 on p51, that the pupil dictated the success of my lessons more than by me.

Gradually I became more aware of the pupil rather than the content. The expansion of the self-esteem of all the pupils involved in the research was obvious and especially in the case of 11-year-old pupil S – he is the pupil who wants to be a racing driver. He said

‘I can be anything I want when I grow up because when I stick at something I can figure it out and learn it. And I have a talent to see things through. My uncle x said that when I worked and worked on building the go-cart I never gave up.’

Data archive, item 8 in appendix 3

This concentration on pupil rather than lesson content when teaching language led to a parallel growth in my understanding of the meaning of knowledge and education. I came to see myself as a guide and not a gatekeeper of knowledge (Burke 1998). I had hoped through this research to create a reality that didn't exist. To be the power, which provided

less concerned about making mistakes (Elliott 1991). I believe this experience has implications for providers of in-service training and adult learning.

A shift in my thinking

In my search for an appropriate methodology and in the descriptions of my cycles of research, a definite paradigm shift in both my thinking and practice was evidenced. By engaging in this research, to ground theories in practice, I realised that action research involved teaching, teacher development, curriculum development, and evaluation. I believe, like Elliott (1991) that, in this methodology, research and philosophical reflection are unified into 'the conception of a reflective educational practice'.

Creating and no longer fearing educational theory

The awesome respect in which I had held educational research and theories prior to my engagement with this project has given way to a new critical understanding of dilemmas of practice and theory. Living through the contradictions that arose has led me to appreciate the words of Elliott

Theoretical abstraction plays a subordinate role in the development of practical wisdom grounded in reflective experiences of concrete cases.

Elliott, 1991, p 53.

Where next?

often used to represent movements within action research (McNiff 1993 and 1988), with my image of gyroscoping circles. Like ripples on a pond these circles were in a process of constant movement and expansion.

I believe that the full significance of my work is not the published end paper but the living interdependent growing initiatives it began in each of the circled areas.

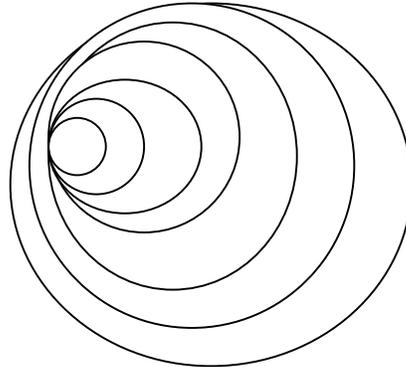


Figure 5.1 A visual metaphor to show the dialectical nature of my practice.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter revisited the original concerns and aims of the research project.

Did I show

- How I taught language to pupils with specific learning difficulties?
- Was early intervention possible?
- Were language skills assessed by me, the teacher?
- Did this testing identify a specific learning difficulty?
- Did I improve practice?
- Did I add to school policy decisions in the areas of both language and specific learning difficulties?

In answering each question I could make a claim of knowledge.

- **My research added to knowledge about successful teacher practices for pupils with specific learning difficulties.**

- **I believe that early intervention is now possible.**

I have provided a valid simple accurate school-based testing procedure. I applied it successfully to the youngest of school pupils (Pupil P was in her first year at school). The testing tool I have developed was diagnostic and also provided material on which to base a learning programme making early intervention possible.

My research reduced the delay in psychological testing, currently required to access State services for pupils with specific learning difficulties. Class teachers, using the criteria agreed by our staff (48), could screen pupils in the first term at school. Following this, those at risk could be identified by the behaviours I detailed in this research (p63-64 of this text). This meant that at the earliest possible age, parents and school authorities would be encouraged to avail of the required Department of Education and Science services. Such an improvement actually occurred in the course of my research for Pupil P. The acceptance and use of the screening and identification criteria by teaching colleagues showed that they believed that we, as teachers, could assess language skills. This answers my third research question ‘Were language skills assessed by me, the teacher?’

- **I identified a specific learning difficulty in language.**

I definitely identified a specific learning difficulty in language. This certainty was based on comparisons with IQ testing professionally carried out and on two language therapists

I suggest that I improved practice in teaching language to individual pupils, to pupils with specific learning difficulties within a group or mainstream class. Although the 'narrate' strategy was an effective language learning tool for all, I hesitate to advise its use in a full class. The reasons for this are class size (some classes in my school currently have 39 pupils) and some teachers may not be comfortable with a system which requires an open teaching approach informed by pupil learning. Through triangulation, I came to identify appropriate strategies suitable for mainstream such as language and literature including real books, picture books and triangulated language and encouragement strategies p62 of this text.

- **My research brought about changes in current language teaching practice.**

This occurred outside the proposed actions of the research project:

- (a) In my school changes occurred - from the use of real and picture books (p62 of this text) to co-operative learning among pupils (see appendix 5c).
- (b) In a local workshop for dyslexic pupils, expressive and receptive language were added to the curriculum (see appendix 12d).
- (c) Improvements in my own practice were noted in validation sessions. These included good explaining techniques, a caring enabling involving style, improved questioning skills, and affirming techniques.

I encountered some teachers who still considered themselves gatekeepers of knowledge and were not open to change. They did not benefit much the changes this research project caused in my school. I believe that all those who participated in this project

language and specific learning difficulties?' I showed that for optimum success a whole school and home approach is best shown as in the case of Pupil P whose learning was supported by her parent, a speech therapist, her class and me, her learning support teacher. We needed to communicate to achieve a uniformity of instruction in order to consolidate her learning (p67 of this text).

In the area of 'the language and literature' a whole school approach, which was initiated by my research, developed over the past year. It focused on paired and shared reading and is evidenced in appendix 5. It employed the skills of classroom assistants and pupils engaging in co-operative learning techniques. But it was time-consuming and it demanded diplomacy to transfer new ideas to a whole learning community. Paired and shared reading – a spin-off from my project - were in the process of being included in our school policy as a strategy for prevention of learning difficulties. This is in accordance with the Department of Education and Science's Guidelines on Learning Support (Government of Ireland 2000).

- **I added to school policy decisions in the area of both language and specific learning difficulty.**

The pupil-screening list I proposed has been adopted and implemented by school staff and management. The 'narrate' teaching strategy has been included in the school's new language policy which was required by the changes in the Primary School Curriculum (1999). In the structuring and restructuring of this policy, the ripples of influence of this research became evident. Fifty per cent of our school staff have attended extra courses on dyslexia in the past year. Reflection on practice by many of my school colleagues had given this project a life of its own.

began with the intention of improving my pupils' lot but found myself trying to improve me. I became open and ready for change

The peer support I experienced during the course of this research gave rise to a new confidence in me. In the past I had viewed colleagues in terms of their positions in schools and colleges. I naively considered a class teacher inferior to a college lecturer. During this project, I came to value them as people. This encouraged me to propose changes in a spirit of community and support. My long held practices were destabilised following reflection. I found a methodology, which created a context of discovery and ways to move forward.

Prior to this project I would not have considered my educational values or epistemology of practice worth sharing within the institution of the school. Living through the process of this research I have found a voice in the educational world. This teacher voice was seldom heard. The practising teacher tended to bow to academic educational theorists, to psychologists, to departmental inspectors, to parent bodies, yet where is the teacher's voice heard? Teacher craft was not valued by institutions of educational professionals. This form of research has given colleagues and me a voice and method to articulate our theories.

This research intended to improve the learning experience of pupils but it was in fact an account of my own learning. I have discovered that educational theory can best be understood by developing my own theory. And the form of action research I chose facilitated this. It renewed in me – weary from a quarter of a century of teaching – the enthusiasm which drew me into teaching originally.

I came into teaching to change the world and I changed me.

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APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1a: Written sample of Pupil S's work 17.02.00.

My name is (name given). My havert sport formlor 1 racing my favert driver is showmazer and erafyn I have lots of other sports like rugbe I plaid bugbe for about 2 monts I allso hoq to there in flow fetstups ervin and shoemaker ...

The original work is in data archive see item 8 appendix 3.

Appendix 1b: Oral sample audiotaped in a conversation with Pupil S on 17.02.00.

Pupil S: Well its kind of metal and a frame. You put your brakes on and you have an engine on the back. There's a square bit on the back and then you screw your engine onto it. And you have your seat. The steering wheel has a bar going down. It's connected to the wheels.

Me: Would you be able to unscrew the go-cart?

Pupil S: Yea. Cause sometimes if it has to be cleaned out you have to unscrew it yourself. If there's dirt in the tank you have to screw off the petrol tank. You have to empty out all the petrol and wash it out with water. But you have to make sure that no water gets in the engine.

Me: How would dirt get in the petrol?

**Appendix 1c: Sample of weekly schemes showing the change I made
to using subskills for language learning.**

Class 1st Group 3 for the week beginning 06/09/98

DAY	Word recognition	Reading	Written comprehension	Spellings	Writing
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					

Some completed originals are my data archive see item 4 appendix 3

Class 1st Group 3 for the week beginning 22/05/99

DAY	Visual Skills	Auditory Skills	Sight words	Visual/ Motor	Listening work	Talking work	Comments
Monday							
Tuesday							
Wednesday							

APPENDIX 2 Ethical statements and letters of consent.

The following are my ethical statements to my school's Board of Management, school Principal, parents, pupils and colleagues who helped in the research and validation process and their responding letters of consent.

Appendix 2a: Letter to the Chairman of the school Board of Management

<i>Chairman, Board of Management, Dear Mr. B,</i>	<i>Home address Phone Number</i>
<i>As a student of the University of the West of England, Bristol, I hope to write a dissertation during the year 1999-2000. In it I intend to reflect on my teaching and learning theories. In particular, I am focusing on how I teach and assess oral language.</i>	
<i>I would be very grateful if you and Mr. S [principal] would give me permission to use the following items as evidence to show some of the changes in my practice; some of my pupils' test results, tapes and transcripts of my class lessons, comments by students on these activities. These items will form part of and be collected during my normal classwork.</i>	
<i>As a safeguard none of the pupils will be identified. Any original data I gather provide will be handled in confidence and retained in my data archive. If requested, Mr. L (Assistant Principal) has agreed to validate its contents.</i>	
<i>Your name or the identity of the school will not appear in any published document. You may withdraw this permission at any time.</i>	
<i>I would be happy to share any new information I develop with you, our staff or the larger learning community.</i>	
<i>Thank you <u>Caitriona</u></i>	

Appendix 2b: Statement to my School Principal

Home address

Phone Number

September 1999

Dear Mr. S,

I am writing to ask for your help with some further study I am doing. As a student of the University of the West of England, Bristol, I hope to write a dissertation during the year 1999-2000. In it I intend to reflect on my teaching and learning theories. In particular, I am focusing on how I teach and assess oral language. Specifically I hope to examine how effective my teaching is for pupils with specific learning difficulties.

I would be very grateful if you would give me permission to use the following items as evidence to show some of the changes in my practice; some of my pupils' test results, tapes and transcripts of my class lessons, comments by students on these activities. These items will form part of and be collected during my normal classwork

As a safeguard none of the pupils will be identified. Any original data I gather provide will be handled in confidence and retained in my data archive. If requested, Mr. L has agreed to validate its contents. Your name or the identity of the school will not appear in any published documents without your consent and prior viewing of the context. You may withdraw this permission at any time.

I have read and agreed to your statement.

Signature of school principal

Date 4th Sept.

Dear Caitriona

I'm glad to hear about your studies. Extra qualifications are always useful in the promotion stakes. You know you can use anything that is necessary. You always show dedication to the school and you deserve all the help you need. I know your record on confidentiality.

Good luck with your work

Mr. S.

The original is in data archive see item 2 appendix 3.

Appendix 2c:

Letter to pupils who took part in this research.

Thank you

FROM Pupil's signature
September 1999

Mrs. Mc Donagh

The original is in data archive see item 2 appendix 3.

Appendix 2d: Letter to class teachers, classroom assistants and other colleagues who helped with validation through triangulation or written comments.

Home address,

Phone,

Date.

Dear A,

I am writing to ask for your help with some further study I am doing.

As a student of the University of the West of England, Bristol, I hope to write a dissertation during the coming year. In it I intend to reflect on my teaching and learning theories.

I would be very grateful if you would give me permission to use your feedback on my efforts to improve in the field of oral language and teaching. Any information you

Each validation colleague listed in appendix 3 item 17 signed the statement of consent below

I have read and agreed to this statement

Validator' s signature

Date

The original is in data archive see item 3 appendix 3.

Appendix 2e: Letter to parents whose children took part in this research.

School Address

Date

Dear Parent,

I am writing to ask for your help with some further study I am doing.

As a student of the University of the West of England, Bristol, I hope to write a dissertation during the coming year. In it I intend to reflect on my teaching.

I would be very grateful if you would give me permission to use some of your child's classwork – writing, taped conversations and comments.

As we discussed, any information I use will be handled in confidence Your child's name will not appear in any published documents. You may withdraw this permission at any time.

Dear Mrs. McDonagh,

I am happy to have my child's work included as part of your studies

Signed

----Parent----

----Date----

The originals are in data archive see item 2 appendix 3.

APPENDIX 3 LIST OF ITEMS IN DATA ARCHIVE

1. Ethical statements and letters of consent

To and from School Principal.

To and from Chairman of Board of Management.

To and from colleague who validated this data archive.

To and from critical friend and MA Education colleague
M.

To and from 12 parents

To and from 12 pupils

To and from class teacher B who taught pupil P.

To and from class teacher C who taught pupil S.

To and from class teacher D of group of 10 pupils.

To and from my school's classroom assistant.

College of Education specialising in oral language and early childhood education).

To and from colleague W (lecturer in Special Education, College of Education and formerly an educational psychologist).

To and from local health board speech therapist.

2. Audio Tape Recordings

1. **Side A Standardised test LARR on junior pupil P and her comments. (October 1999).**

Side B formal language assessment of junior pupil P.

Westwood (1975,1987) and Picture Language (1976) tests.

2. Side A oral language assessment – Conversational with junior pupil P (24.11.99)

3. Side A Standardised tests on 11 pupils and their comments.

Side B Oral Language Assessment – Conversational; with senior pupil S (February 2000).

4. Side A. Language lesson with junior pupil P (07.02.00).

5. Full Diagnostic assessment of pupil P (2000)

3. Transcripts

1. Guidelines for transcribing oral language sample – agreed with validation colleague.

4. Weekly work schemes 06.09.99 and 22.05.00.

5. Formal, standardised, language testing;

Test papers results and my comments on them.

Colleague W's evaluation of my standardised testing.

5. My full diagnostic assessment of pupil S;

Colleague W's and class teacher C's evaluations
--

of my full diagnostic assessment of pupil S.

7. Oral language assessment of pupil P;

My analysis and report,

Speech and language therapist's report,

Critical colleague X's report,

Pupil P's comments,

Pupil P's parent's comments,

Class teacher B's comments.

8. Oral language assessment of pupil S;

My analysis and report,

Critical review of it by me, critical friend M and class teacher.

10. The 1st individual language lesson which I taught to pupil P;
Lesson plan,
Pupils' comments,
My fieldnotes and my reflections on lesson,
11. The 2nd individual language lesson which I taught to pupil P;
Lesson plan and my field note comments,
Pupils' comments,
Photograph negatives of lesson
Colleague X's evaluation of lesson.
Class teacher B's evaluation of lesson.
- Action
Cycle
Two

12. The language 1st language lesson which I taught to a group of 5 pupils
on 27/11/99;
Lesson plan, objectives, and materials
and teaching strategies used;
Pupils' comments;
Parent's comments;
Colleague Y's evaluation of lesson.
13. The language 2nd language lesson which I taught to a group of 5 pupils
on 22/05/00;
Lesson plan, - objectives, materials,
- Action
Cycle
Three

15. Some E-mails from critical friend M.
16. Reflective/ learning diaries; 1999 and 2000.
17. List identifying critical colleagues and friend and stating their relevance to the research.
18. Letter of validation of archive.
19. Validator' s summary of psychological report on pupil S.

DATA ARCHIVE: VALIDATION

School address

To whom it may concern,

I am aware of and have viewed all the items listed above.
Their representation in appendices is accurate

Signed Validation colleague
Assistant Principal of my school.

Dated 24.10.00

APPENDIX 4 TESTS

Appendix 4a: List of standardised tests used for full diagnostic assessment as well as oral language assessments.

Standardised Tests.

- Picture Language Scale for Younger Children (1976) Wolverhampton: The Remedial Supply Company.
- D. Young Cloze reading Tests(1992) Hodder and Stoughton.
- L.A.R.R. (1995) Test of emergent literacy. Dublin: ETC Consult.
- Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (1997) NFER Nelson.
- Schonell Graded Oral Spelling Test (1955) Schonell, F.J. Oliver and Boyd.
- Westwood Sentence Repetition Test (1985) Remedial Teacher's Handbook pp 32 -33. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd.

The Psychological Corporation.

- Jackson Phonic Skills Tests (1971) Gibson Glasgow.
- N.A.R.E. Language Observation Sheet (1997) Bryans, T. and Wolfendale, S. Handbook For Teachers: Language Development Activities: Stappord NARE.
- Sound Linkage (1994) An Integrated Programme for Overcoming Reading Difficulties by P. J. Hatcher. London : Whurr Publications.

Appendix 4b: Validation group comments on standardised testing on 22.11.99.

Questionnaire showing comments from validator on the formal testing I conducted. The group was composed of colleagues M and Y, class teacher and me.

Standardised and diagnostic testing
the formal tests that I used, in accordance with the manual and test instructions?
<i>Yes.</i> _____
2. Can I analyse, interpret and comment on the child's performance appropriately?
<i>Yes. Very well done.</i> _____

APPENDIX 5 PAIRED / SHARED READING

Appendix 5a: Paired reading

‘Since Christmas the two 5th classes have spent a half-hour every week reading with a partner from the 2nd classes. Caitriona showed them a paired reading video and explained what they were to do. There is always a busy noise in the class in paired reading time. Great idea ’

From class teacher K – the original is in data archive item 14.

Appendix 5b: Classroom assistant help with paired reading.

‘Caitriona regularly got ‘Classroom Assistants’ to read a big picture book to groups of about 5 children from my class. This gave them an extra opportunity for useful chat.’

better like that. She tells me some hard words but I nearly know them all now.'

Comments by parents on paired reading sessions.

Parent of pupil 1 He is doing fine and enjoying books

Parent of pupil 2 She is beginning to recognise words and really beginning to read.

Parent of pupil 3 He *wants* to read now. Sounds are making sense to him.

Parent of pupil 4 He has improved so much. He just doesn't want to stop.

Parent of pupil 5 The paired reading is good. Thanks.

Originals in data archive item 14.

APPENDIX 6 ASSESSMENT OF PUPIL P.

The originals of all the following appendices – 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d and 6e are in my data archive see appendix 3.

Appendix 6a: Language assessment of junior pupil P that I measured during our conversation.

General observations during testing:

P co-operated fully during the two sessions of this oral language assessment. She approached the tasks with enthusiasm and concentrated well. I believe that this oral language assessment is a true representation of her abilities.

P was able to secure and maintain my attention as a listener by using eye contact, head movement and posture. She was an attentive listener (to the best of her ability). She gave and took turns in contributing to the discussion and could sustain the topic. She offered extra information she thought would interest a teacher and she made relevant responses to my questions. Although she was generally audible, her articulation would need to be clearer to ensure confident participation in conversational groups. A nasal tone, shortening of words, confusions in plosive or stop consonants - e.g. 'c', 't' - and a possible delay in phonological processing of fronting sounds were noted.

Meaning content:

P could relate items and events in our conversation to her personal and social experiences. In answers to my questions, she showed an ability to sequence events and to understand the concepts of position, colour, time, quantity, opposites, comparisons and cause / effect. During many interchanges she kept to the conversational topic, identified salient points and maintained a train of thought.

Structure:

Form, morphology and syntax may be an areas in which she will need help. She had difficulty using plurals, tenses and asking more complex questions. Rarely in our conversation did she use 3 consecutive fully formed sentences. Her grammatical control was adversely effected by stress such as when expressing very personal experiences. But negatives, prepositions and possessives were handled confidently by P.

Use:

Reporting, reasoning, predicting and projecting were all within P's range during our sessions. Although they appeared at a very basic level they indicate a sound foundation

area of language. She may benefit from some specific speech therapy possible in the representational and output phases. A language programme for P should focus on form, morphology and syntax. But her delight in communicating should be encouraged despite her current articulation difficulties. P spoke with confidence, correcting me when necessary, and extending her vocabulary would greatly increase her oral language skills.

P was a very pleasant pupil to work with and I wish her every success in her future language and general development.

Appendix 6b Colleagues X's evaluation of my assessment

Jan 2000

'You showed that you could now structure a context of mutual interest and enjoyment in which a fruitful language assessment was possible. You also showed an awareness of the need to elicit a range of language uses from the child, including complex language uses. Has she attended speech and language therapy? You have succeeded in pinpointing her obvious difficulties. You showed good insight when you commented that her vocabulary and syntax have not kept pace with meaning. She was a difficult child and you succeeded in drawing the best from her under the circumstances. You suggested a speech delay as well as a specific language disorder, I suggest she has a speech disorder. There is evidence of rooting reflexes – residual primitive reflexes. We will discuss this again'

Signed X

Appendix 6d NARE checklist of pupil's language ability

Bryans, T. & Wolfendale, S. (1979) Handbook for Teachers: Language Development Activities. Stafford: N.A.R.E.

Language Observation Sheet

Column 1 contains the NARE criteria, which I listened for on the taped conversation. The next 2 columns contain my agreement or disagreement that pupil P achieved the targeted statement and the line in the transcript on which her achievement could be seen. The final column contains validation colleague X' s comments on my analysis.

Receptive and listening skills				
	I agree	I disagree	In Lines	Colleague X's Comments
Cannot follow simple instructions	/		198-200	I agree with you
Restless and inattentive in story time	/			I agree
Unable to answer questions about a story she has just heard.	/			I agree
Cannot interpret the content of pictures	/			I agree

Still has infantile words		/	121, 188	I disagree too
Cannot enact simple stories		/	150-168	I disagree too
Elements of grammar				
Confuses tenses		/	39,42,44	I agree too.
Limited ability in using negative		/	18,98	I agree
Confuses plurals		/	6, 146	I agree
Cannot use interrogative form		/	23	I agree
Incorrectly uses possessives		/	18	I agree
Substitutes nouns by using generic		/	27, 157	I agree
Arranges words in wrong order		/	6. 52, 139	I agree
Concepts and information processing				
Cannot categorise		/	54, 56	I disagree too
Cannot associate objects that go together		/	51-56, 132	I disagree too
Cannot remember nursery rhymes		/	1-5	I agree
Unable to recall details of his immediate past		/	56	I disagree too.
Has limited concept of (1) comparison (2) comparatives		/	94,18,19 27,28.	I disagree
Has no concept of opposite		/	101-108	I disagree
Cannot sustain train of thought		/	177-178	I disagree Limited.
Has little curiosity about cause and effect		/	67, 153	I disagree. She only responded. She didn't initiate.
Has no understanding of time		/	100-108	I disagree
Cannot understand the salient concept		/	60	I disagree

Pupil P has strengths in concepts and information processing, except in remembering nursery rhymes, and in receptive and listening skills.

She has weaknesses in the grammar areas of tense, verb plurals, asking questions and in the expressive areas of conveying her thoughts. She is reticent in verbalising and she uses the shortest sentence structures possible.

Colleague X added that her strengths were relative. That she was still weak. Overall she has a pervasive and significant difficulty with language.

The original of this observation sheet is in my data archive appendix 3, item 5.

Appendix 6e Speech and Language Therapist's on pupil P's ability

January 2000

Dear Caitriona,

Thank you for making contact. I appreciate your co-operation.

Pupil P has attended erratically. Pupil P has attended 2 out of 7 scheduled sessions in the past year. I agree that her parents need encouragement to continue helping her.

Her receptive and expressive vocabulary skills fall within the at risk range and she is functioning well below the expected range for her age. In light of her performance, I

I will be leaving the Health Board this month. A replacement will be appointed as soon as possible.

I enclose a programme for building vocabulary – if you are in a position to work with Pupil P. I feel she would benefit from this. As we discussed last time I feel a psychological assessment would be useful at this time. I would appreciate if the school could follow this up.

Thank you for your co-operation and best wishes for the future

C

APPENDIX 7 ASSESSMENT OF PUPIL S.

The originals of all the following appendices – 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, 7e and 7f are in my data archive see appendix 3.

Appendix 7a: A section of transcript showing its diagnostic value

Pupils S was speaking about meeting foreigners on holidays

Lecturer's Comments	Exact account of conversation	My comments and observations
	123. Me: Have you ever tried to talk to people who don't have a lot of English?	123 – 136

<p><i>Good reasoning</i></p>	<p>say Hello. And they tried to be nice. But they weren't very good at it 'cause they didn't meet a lot of English people so they didn't pick it up.</p> <p>129. Me: Do you notice anything else about the way they speak.</p> <p>130. S: Their accent's totally different.</p> <p>131. Me: That's right</p> <p>132. S: They talk your English, but they don't have your accent. (He laughs)</p> <p>133. Me: Right. Are there other accents as well as a (named local area) accent.</p> <p>134. S: Yea. There's Dublin and lots of udders. And some people say 'Aye' when they mean 'yes'.</p> <p>135. Me: Oh who would say that, Dublin people?</p> <p>136. S: No Donegal.</p>	<p>the amount of exposure to the language necessary, accent and the joy of communication.</p>
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Appendix 7b: My analysis of pupil S's oral language abilities in March 2000.

In an oral language sample, pupil S displayed an easy willingness to communicate. He showed an awareness of the listener's needs, checking with eye contact and gestures that his descriptions and explanations were being followed. He also engaged well with his chosen topic –sports- and introduced new topics of conversation effectively.

The factual content of pupil S's conversation was clear at all times. His vocabulary was wide ranging. Pupil S has some difficulty retrieving words at speed and he used the term "eh" or repeated a phrase while he attempted to retrieve them. It was difficult to encourage S to express emotions or use imaginary content.

well-constructed sentences, conjunctions, adjectives and comparatives.

Pupil S's oral language was effective in terms of content, listener/speaker relationship and use. He could benefit from correcting a few mispronunciations and his usage of superlatives. An awareness of complex sentences in speech and forms of questioning could add a further maturity to his oral language ability. Engagement with the emotional or imaginative situations could stretch him even more.

I concluded that he did not have a specific learning difficulty in the area of language. Further diagnostic testing was done and I discovered that the nature of his disability was visual.

Appendix 7c: Colleague W and teacher C's reports.

Written comment by Colleague W on my transcript

'Caitriona you supported pupil S's language in a very interested and warm manner and got great results! I've written in a few comments on the good tactics being used by you as a teacher here.'

Class teacher C commented about Pupil S on his previous end-of-year reports

As we chatted after the testing session on , I left the tape running. Pupil S made the following statements when asked if schoolwork was always difficult for him. He recalled his various teachers over the years.

‘Mrs M was kind. She didn’t give out much. I couldn’t talk cause I didn’t know that much.’

When I asked him what school subjects he was good at or liked. He replied.

‘Olympic handball, football and history.’

Talking about his current class, he said,

‘Listening’s boring. I learn by watching others and pretending to be working. I could write a good essay if someone would write it out for me.’

Appendix 7e: Parents try to define dyslexia.

I noted the following comments in field notes (originals in my data archive appendix 3 items 7,8and 12) which I made while talking to parents of pupils in my project,

‘He’s just like his Uncle X, didn’t do well in school, but X is a millionaire now.’

‘Teacher said he’s inattentive and car eless.’

‘I know he spent ages learning his spellings and he knew them last night, he just can’t remember them in the weekly test.’

well as pupils P and S your report is very good. You made excellent use of the information gathered. It is coherent, concise and comprehensive, giving all the valuable information gained during the assessments.

You use appropriate language, enabling the readers (class teachers) to understand your comparisons without access to the test items used.

APPENDIX 8 LANGUAGE LESSON ONE FOR PUPIL P.

The originals of all the following appendices – 8a and 8b are in my data archive see appendix 3.

Appendix 8a Lesson plan for an individual language lesson for a junior pupil.

The specific objectives of the lesson were that Pupil P would remember five items in sequence and identify the beginning middle and final sounds in ten words. The methods I choose were to ask pupil P to play the ‘minister’s cat’ game where she and I would take

three names. Let's see which one comes at the end.' Which one was it.

2. I tried to expand the application with I'll say three things, tell me which one is at the beginning, end and middle.
3. I changed to vocabulary extension and memory with 'Lets say some things about your cat. It's a --- cat.

Appendix 8b: Reflection on initial individual lesson with pupil P.

The original is in my data archive see item 10.

Not successful. The lesson contents were too elaborate and too long for this particular pupil. In addition a multi-sensory teaching approach which is recommended in most psychological diagnoses of those with specific learning difficulties would have been less stressful for such a pupil.

APPENDIX 9 LANGUAGE LESSON TWO FOR PUPIL P.

The originals of all the following appendices – 9a, 9b and 9c are in my data archive see appendix 3.

Appendix 9a: Plan of individual language lesson 2 for junior pupil P.

Objectives:

In the context of grouping objects and playing games, Pupil P will increase her vocabulary for classifying objects and practise its usage by:

Materials to be used:

1. Real objects as listed above and a picture containing all of them
2. 10 blank cards.
3. 3 worksheets covering the basic concepts of labelling, classification and sequencing.
4. Plastic counters for a bingo game and a little blotch.
5. A set of 'silly cards' depicting a ridiculous situation.

Outline of lesson:

Introduction. "I have a messy table. Can you help me tidy it up?" Teacher invites Pupil 6 to name and group real objects.

Step 1. Teacher encourages Pupil 6 to name the classification of each group while putting the objects in appropriate containers. To reinforce this Pupil 6 will identify these classifications in picture format. Then, in a game, which involves turn taking, she will use these terms herself.

Step 2. To consolidate this learning Pupil 6 will use worksheet 1 (see page 4) and a bingo-type game to form sentences using 2 objects and their classification; for example "Hammers and screwdrivers are tools". Pupil will cover each one as teacher confirms it is correct.

Step 3. To increase Pupil 6's auditory sequential memory, teacher will model a visualisation technique and Pupil 6 will practice it.

Step 4. Worksheet 2 (see page 5) will be used to extend Pupil 6's vocabulary usage in a turn-taking game using the sentence format "The girl is eating --".

Step 5. To practice auditory meaning some silly pictures based on the lesson's vocabulary will be used.

You noticed that pupil P's had pervasive and significant difficulties with language. I was pleased that you managed to engage her in a listener /speaker mode to this best of her ability during the lesson. She gave and took turns appropriately during the learning games. You planned the lesson well. It was full and you adhered rigidly to it.

You adopted an interested and interesting tone of voice, which seemed warm and engaged and stimulated to Pupil P. The style of your teaching was participative and your interventions were of a scaffolding nature. Your approach was affirming and questioning.

I compliment you on your questioning skills, more precise word usage, your affirming techniques and especially your methods to encourage extension of topics and fluency.

It appears from the tape and transcript that she enjoyed the lesson, even to the extent of laughing at her own mistakes. Your use of games and a play approach enhanced the learning experience for pupil P. Children learn through play and pupil 6 certainly did during this lesson.

Appendix 9c: Comments by critical friend M on individual lesson for pupil P.

The original is in my data archive (see appendix 3 item 11).

Dear Caitriona

This is a very good lesson. You planned it well and based it on the specific areas of need, which you have identified during the assessment process.

There is great involvement of the pupil in his own learning.

Very good work

Well done!

M

APPENDIX 10 CLASS LANGUAGE LESSON ONE

The originals of all the following appendices – 10a and 10b are in my data archive see appendix 3.

Appendix 10a: A lesson I observed.

The originals are in my data archive see appendix 3 item 9.

Sight words:

New word 'dog' revision of words done – board game.

Visual Motor skills:

Trace the letters in the new word, copy, join the dots to write letters in new word. Writing in copy story constructed from picture card. Sing and do 'head shoulders knees and toes'.

Listening work:

To the story 'Kipper'.

Speaking work:

Language in story – comfortable, uncomfortable, cosy. Structured sentences about picture – modelling. Remember 2-3 sentences in order.

Reading:

Sentences with 'dog' in them and read story written in copy.

Appendix 10b:

Comments on observed lesson 20.11.99

These comments were noted after a discussion with a critical friend and the class teacher. 'I felt that it was an enjoyable experience being as a fly on the wall in another's class room and indeed a privilege. I wish I could do it more often. but I'm loath to invite others into my classroom kingdom. I am going to have to for the effectiveness of this research project. We divided the lesson plan into skills and noted the amount of communication that each person engaged in. These empirical measurements - in figures 1 and 2 below –

Signed and dated by critical friend

Signed and dated by critical friend

Signed and dated by self.

APPENDIX 11 CLASS LANGUAGE LESSON TWO

The originals of all the following appendices – 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d and 11e are in my data archive see appendix 3

Appendix 11a

Pupil selection for group language lesson two which I taught on 27/11/00.

Pupil 4 doesn't follow a story being read to him. Can't tell own news.

Pupil 5 seems not to understand phrases I use. He watches others for cues.'

**Appendix 11b: The lesson plan and materials for group lesson two
27/11/99.**

Specific objectives of this lesson:

1. to develop an ability to respond appropriately to questions
2. to develop some phonological awareness skills to help them attack new words in print.

Materials and teaching style

(c) in the context of the pupils exploring a picture, each pupil would compose a question that the others in the group would answer. The picture was a Christmas Day scene;

(d) in the context of words in sentences the pupils would develop an understanding of the concepts of beginning, middle and end. Pictures of people queuing for a bus, a street of houses, and a lines of vehicles at a traffic light were used.

The teaching strategies I employed involved –

1. teacher modelling of question sentences which pupils copied and responded to;
2. pupil activities to demonstrate and develop their understanding of the terms beginning, middle and end using visual and oral prompts.

Appendix 11c Comments by pupils on group language lesson two.

The day after the lesson Pupil 3 said "teacher don't ask me de m question".

I noted this in my diary (30.11.99) that is in my data archive (see appendix 3 item 16)

style of teaching. Used simple language and have good explaining techniques.’

Diary 27/11/99.

On the negative side we considered that allowances were not made for the pupils’ prior knowledge. In terms of content we also noted that the isolated subskills were reminiscent of the stages of development in the behaviourist approach to language (Skinner1957) and we questioned their effectiveness.

APPENDIX 12 CLASS LANGUAGE LESSON THREE

The originals of all the following appendices – 12a, 12b, 12c and 12d are in my data archive see appendix 3

**Appendix 12a: Plan of third language group lesson for junior pupils
22/05/00.**

describe houses using one adjective and compose a sentence beginning with a given adverbial phrase. They will also answer questions orally showing an understanding of locating, possession, identifying animals and pupil H and pupil C will show they can anticipate actions, express judgements and project.

Materials to be used:

Wellington Square Level 1 a book 'Into The Water' Text composed and written by pupils. Wordwall containing word that they needed help to spell as they wrote it. Letter chart, sand, and blackboard. Big Book ' Once Upon A Time'.

Techniques/methods to be used

Group teaching; multisensory approach to spellings; differentiation of language tasks.

Outline plan of lesson

Listening work; listen to teacher read 'once Upon a Time' story –7 pages during this the following areas will be covered.

Auditory skills; identify rhyming words in story. Pupils add own rhyming words and play a memory game.

Speaking work; Pupils will be asked to do the following -' Name animals?' answer 'where?' 'What did she do next?' 'what is – saying?' 'What if?' 'Explain how to'.
–. This will be based on pupils' interpretation of the pictures. Finally will present a sentence beginning with the initial adverbial phrase on the last page read.

Conclusion; Give pupils a chance to say what they did best or enjoyed most.

Appendix 12b: Pupil comments on lesson.

peer using it.

Appendix 12 c

Teacher end-of-year reports on pupils P and S

Teacher end-of-year reports on pupils P and S, had previously described them in phrases such as ‘lazy’, ‘could be better’ and ‘lacks motivation’. At the end of the research those phrases had been replaced with ‘tries his best’, ‘has made great strides’ and ‘works to the best of her ability’

This is copied from my data archive where my validation colleague signed it. The originals are school property, which must be retained in school for the pupil’s time in school and for 6 years after.

Appendix 12d

Activities at local workshop for dyslexic children.

Address

Date

To whom it may concern,

I am a director in a workshop, which is run under the umbrella of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland. The workshop takes place in Caitriona’s school. Currently, 12 tutors provide tuition for 45 dyslexic pupils once a week in a two-hour session. In the course of the session each pupils attends 4 classes, each covering a different way of learning which we believe help dyslexics.

600	Receptive Language	Computer	Expressive language	Computer	Expressive language	Expressive language
730	Tutorial	Tutorial	Receptive Language	Visual	Visual Rdg.	Visual Rdg
7.00	Tutorial	Tutorial	Tutorial	Tutorial	Visual Rdg.	Visual Rdg

Tutor	M	T	P	AM	MM
Room	2	3	4	16	15
5.30	StudySkills	Tutorial	Tutorial	Receptive language	Visual skills
6.00	Expressive language / Computers	Receptive Language	Expressive Language	Expressive Language	Expressive language
6.30	Tutorial	Visual skills + Computer	Tutorial	Tutorial	Tutorial
7.00	Tutorial	Receptive Language	Expressive language.	Tutorial	Receptive Language