SPEAKING OF ANGELS: INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY, IDENTITY AND FURTHER EDUCATION IN MALTA

by

Sonja Casha

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Education
University of Birmingham
September 2015

ABSTRACT

The number of students with intellectual disabilities who continue studying past compulsory education in Malta is abysmal. This has spurred the choice of my research which aims to identify the factors that affect this phenomenon. This study uses first-hand accounts by individuals with intellectual disabilities on their experience of further education (FE) in Malta and attempts to highlight the associated benefits and barriers experienced.

The results of this study have shown that although factors affecting FE inclusion in Malta are varied, the participants of the study focused primarily on the negative barriers arising from past school experience. The level of bullying and isolation experienced in mainstream school environments is considered a predominant factor in the choice of not pursuing FE. Another emerging factor is the lack of choice for students with intellectual disabilities to stand by their own wishes including the choice of whether or not to enter FE. This is considered to be due to an entrenched paternalistic attitude inherent in Maltese society which may originate from the island's Catholic roots. These socio-cultural attitudes relegate people with intellectual disabilities to passive receivers of charity. It is perhaps these same attitudes that limit the accessibility also within FE in Malta as reported by the study participants. These factors are seen as playing a significant part in the reasons for such low participation of students with intellectual disabilities in FE locally. These barriers limit the opportunities for this student cohort to enjoy the benefits of FE which were identified primarily to be social integration, employment and independence.

DEDICATION

To my partner Elaine for supporting me tirelessly throughout these last years with understanding, patience and unconditional love. I am so fortunate to have you in my life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Gary Thomas for his invaluable advice and constructive criticism as well as to Dr Anne Marie Callus and Dr Anne Marie Bathmaker for their feedback.

My deepest thanks to my family and friends for supporting me, through the transitions and barriers that I went through, during the length of my studies.

I would also like to mention the Malta College for Arts, Science and technology who provided me with the venue and access to participants, as well as the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities for putting me in contact with other research participants. I cannot but mention the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme which allowed me to pursue my studies through the provision of a study grant.

Finally, I am forever grateful to the study participants for having shown me the true depths of human strength and resilience encompassed within the beauty of human diversity.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1 Search terms used
Table 2 Three models of post-secondary inclusive education – Hart *et al.* (2006)
Table 3 Main themes emerging from the literature
Table 4 Information on research questions
Table 5 Maltese population statistics related to disability
Table 6 Focus group one – held with members of a local self-advocacy group made up of individuals with intellectual disabilities
Table 7 Focus group two – made up of current FE college students with intellectual disabilities
Table 8 Interview group one – students in mainstream FE
Table 9 Interview group two – students in specialised courses in FE
Table 10 Interview group three – students in entering FE
Table 11 Participants who have never been in FE
Table 12 Factors affecting FE identified in the literature

Figure 1 Network analysis of benefits of FE
Figure 2 Network analysis of the factors affecting successful FE experiences for students with intellectual disabilities
Figure 3 Network analysis of the barriers to FE for students with intellectual disabilities
Figure 4 Emerging theme one
Figure 5 Emerging theme two
Figure 6 Emerging theme three
Figure 7 Network analysis of participants' dreams for life

Table 13 Network analysis of theme one
Table 14 Network analysis of theme two
Table 15 Network analysis of theme three
Table 16 Diagram of the main areas identified for successful FE

ABBREVIATIONS

AAC Assistive Augmentative Communication
AAIDD American Association of Intellectual Disability
ADD Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ANED Academic Network of European Disability Experts
APA American Pschological Association
NCLB No Child Left Behind
CEDEFOP European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DES Department of Educational Servives (Malta)
DSM Diagnostic and Statistical Manual
EADSNE European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
EAN European Anti-bullying Network
EC European Commission
EDR Emancipatory Disability Research
EEA European Economic Area
EFTA European Free Trade Association
EHEA European Higher Education Area
ESL Early School Leavers
ETC Employment and Training Corporation (Malta)
EU European Union
FE Further Education
FEHE Further and Higher Education
IDEA Individuals with Disability Education Act
IEP Individual Educational Plan
ILDR Inclusive Learning Disability Research
IQ Intelligence Quotient
KNPD *Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni B'Dizabilita'* (National Commission Persons with Disabilities- Malta)

LDPRIDE Learning Disability Pride

LGBTIQ lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer

LSA Learning Support Assistant

MCAST Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology

MGSS Malta Government Scholarship Scheme

MNC Minimum National Curriculum

MUSEUM Malta Society of Christian Doctrine

NCFHE National Commission for Further and Higher Education

NGO Non Government Organisation

NHS National Health Service (UK)

NSO National Statistics Office (Malta)

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operationand Development

PL *Partit Laburista* (Malta Labour Party)

PN *Partit Nazzjonalista* (Malta Nationalist Party)

PQ Parliamentary Question

SEN Special Educational Needs

SLD Specific Learning Difficulties

SMG Student Maintenance Grant

SSS Student Support Services (MCAST)

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VET Vocational Education and Training

WHO World Health Organisation

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE 1

INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Introduction 1

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives 2

1.3 Rationale for the Study 3

1.4 Background to the Study 5

1.4.1 Malta and inclusion 7

1.5 Terminology and Language 8

1.6 Context of the Study 9

1.7 The Place of the Researcher 11

1.8 Summary 13

1.9 Organisation of the Thesis 14

CHAPTER TWO 17

LITERATURE REVIEW 17

2.1 Introduction 17

2.1.1 Research aims and rationale 18

2.1.2 Clarifying terminology 19

2.1.3 The research questions 22

2.1.4 Literature themes 23

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria 24

2.2.1 Inclusive literature 24

2.2.2 Reliability 25

2.2.3 Relevance of time 25

2.2.4 Databases 26

2.2.5 Search terms 26

2.2.6 Limitations to the literature review 27

2.3 Defining intellectual disability for further education 28

2.3.1 Definitions inform practice 32

2.4 The Political and Social Context 35

2.4.1 The history of inclusive education (in Europe) 35

2.4.2 Malta and inclusive education 40

2.5 Inclusion versus Exclusion 49

2.5.1 Mainstream or separate educational systems 51

2.5.2 Life skills or an academic curriculum 56

2.6 Factors Affecting Inclusion in Further Education 62

2.6.1 Institutional factors 63

2.6.2 Socio-cultural factors 85

2.6.3 Psychological factors 98

2.7 Benefits of Inclusive Further Education 108

2.7.1 Institutional benefits 108

2.7.2 Socio-cultural benefits 111

2.7.3 Psycho-emotional benefits 112

2.8 Conclusion 114

CHAPTER THREE 118

RESEARCH DESIGN 118

3.1 Introduction 118

3.2 The Research Paradigm 121

3.3 Researcher and Research Participants 124

  3.3.1 Positionality 124

  3.3.2 Recruitment 126

  3.3.3 Inclusion criteria / demography 128

3.4 Ethics of Conducting Research 128

  3.4.1 Emancipatory disability research and inclusive learning disability research 129

3.5 Methods 132

  3.5.1 Participant observation 133

  3.5.2 Interviews 135

  3.5.3 Focus groups 136

  3.5.5 Chosen methods 138

3.6 Planning for Inclusive Research 139

  3.6.1 Ethical approvals 139

  3.6.2 Disability etiquette checklist 141

  3.6.3 Setting 142

  3.6.5 An accessible process 145

  3.6.6 Confidentiality and informed consent 146

  3.6.7 Dissemination of the study 146

3.7 Tools for Research 147

  3.7.1 The research questions 148

  3.7.2 Document interrogation 150

3.8 The Empirical Study 153

  3.8.1 Focus groups 154

  3.8.2 Interviews 155

3.8.3 Participant observation and documenting the process ... 155

3.9 Conclusion ... 156

CHAPTER FOUR ... 158

CULTURAL CONTEXT – SPEAKING OF ANGELS ... 158

4.1 Introduction ... 158

4.2 About Malta ... 159

4.3 The Socio-cultural Environment ... 161

4.3.2 The charity model ... 165

4.3.3 Local society and the media ... 168

4.7 The Socio-economic Status ... 171

4.7.1 The family ... 171

4.7.2 Education and inclusion ... 172

4.7.3 Employment ... 176

4.5 Secularism and Politics ... 179

4.6 Conclusion ... 181

CHAPTER FIVE ... 183

A FIRST LOOK AT THE FINDINGS ... 183

5.1 Introduction ... 183

5.2 Participant Profile ... 184

5.2.1 Focus group participants ... 187

5.2.2 Interview participants ... 188

5.3 Research Questions ... 191

5.3.1 Research question 1 ... 193

5.3.2 Research question 2 ... 195

5.3.3 Research question 3 ... 199

5.3.4 Research question 4 ... 201

5.3.5 Research question 5 ... 204

5.4 Barriers as Main Emerging Themes ... 208

5.4.1 Theme one – previous school experiences ... 209

5.4.2 Theme two – internalised beliefs and attitudes ... 210

5.4.3 Theme three – inadequate educational systems ... 213

5.5 Self-reflection ... 216

5.6 Connecting the Findings ... 222

5.6 1 Research questions and findings ... 223

5.6.2 FE attendance motivators ... 224

5.6.3 Negative school experiences ... 225

5.6.4 Internalised attitudes and beliefs ... 227

5.6.5 Educational exclusion ... 228

5.7 Conclusion ... 232

CHAPTER SIX ... 235

PREVIOUS SCHOOL EXPERIENCE (SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS) ... 235

6.1 Introduction ... 235

6.2 Bullying ... 237

6.2.1 Factors affecting bullying ... 239

6.2.2 Types of bullying ... 244

6.2.3 Cyber-bullying ... 245

6.2.4 Culture, religion and bullying ... 248

6.2.5 Impact of bullying ... 250

6.2.6 Tackling bullying ... 251

6.3 Isolation ... 254

6.3.1 Friendship 255

6.3.2 Natural and artificial peer socialisation 257

6.3.3 Sexuality 262

6.3.4 Legal provisions 264

6.4 Inclusion versus Integration 266

6.4.1 Classroom participation and the LSA 268

6.4.2 Institutionalised abuse 270

6.6 Conclusion 273

CHAPTER SEVEN 276

INTERNALISED ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS (PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS) 276

7.1 Introduction 276

7.2 Biża' – Fear 278

7.2.1 Fear of disclosure 282

7.2.2 Fear of failure 290

7.2.3 Ridicule and rejection 292

7.2.4 Mental health 294

7.3 *Mhux Xorta*! – indifference 295

7.3.2 Jien min Jien? – disability identities 298

7.3.3 Culture and religion 300

7.4 *Ma nafx!* Inadequacy 303

7.4.1 Inaccessible disability discourse 304

7.4.2 Leisure 309

7.4.3 Intimacy 313

7.4.4 Finances and employment 315

7.5 Conclusion 319

CHAPTER EIGHT..322

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS – INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS...322

8.1 Introduction..322

8.2 Transition..324

  8.2.1 Absence from the transition process..325

  8.2.2 Lack of knowledge of FE options..325

  8.2.3 Mandatory transition documentation..326

8.3 Support..327

  8.3.1 Inflexible curricula..328

  8.3.2 Unreachable academic goals..329

  8.3.3 Interest of educators..331

  8.3.4 Lack of support personnel..332

8.4 Accessible Options..333

  8.4.1 Choice..333

  8.4.2 Mainstream versus specialised education..335

8.5 The ideal campus..340

  8.5.1 Adequate support and safety measures..341

  8.5.2 Better transition planning..341

  8.5.3 More educational options..342

  8.5.4 Empowering pedagogy and learning material..343

  8.5.6 The pace of change..346

8.6 Conclusion..347

CHAPTER NINE..350

CONCLUSION..350

9.1 Introduction..350

9.2 What changes? Charting the Progress of the RQs 351
9.3 Summary of Findings and Research Questions 353
9.4 A Question of Identity 354
9.5 Limitations to the Study 355
9.6 Recommendations for Further Research 357
9.7 Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice 359
ANTI-BULLYING STRATEGY 359
INCLUSION NOT INTEGRATION 360
MORE FEHE OPTIONS 361
CURRICULUM 361
THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS 361
FE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS 361
BASELINE SUPPORT 362
EVALUATION 362
TRANSITION 362
9.8 Concluding Remarks 363

REFERENCE LIST 366

APPENDIX ONE - RISK ASSESSMENT 401

APPENDIX TWO – RESEARCH EXPLANATION SHEETS 403

APPENDIX THREE - INTERVIEW GUIDE 406

APPENDIX FOUR - FOCUS GROUP GUIDE 407

APPENDIX FIVE - CONSENT FORMS 408

APPENDIX SIX - IEP BREAKDOWN INFO / PARTICIPANT BIOS....................................412

APPENDIX SEVEN - SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS...416

APPENDIX EIGHT – SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRIES...428

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

> Inclusive education is an unabashed announcement, a public and political declaration and celebration of difference … [However,] it would appear that the development of education systems has been predicated by the denial of the existence and value of difference … Turning this around is not a project for osmosis. It requires continual proactive responsiveness to foster an inclusive educational culture. Further, it means that we become cultural vigilantes. Exclusion must be exposed in all its forms; the language we use, the teaching methods we adopt, the curriculum we transmit, the relations we establish within our schools. (Corbett and Slee, 2000, p. 134)

1.1 Introduction

This is a study of barriers to inclusion. It is an investigation of the factors that hinder full participation of students with disabilities in further education (FE). FE is taken to refer to post-compulsory education. Inclusive education has been garnering increased international attention and is being described as a social movement to combat exclusion in schools (Slee and Allan, 2005). The central aim of inclusive education is the restructuring of mainstream schools to remove barriers to participation and learning that may be experienced by student cohorts who have been excluded (Mittler, 2000). Although inclusive education is concerned with the experiences of all students, reports by

UNESCO (2005) show that the level of school exclusion experienced by students with disabilities is by far the most prevalent. Furthermore, students with intellectual disabilities are faced with more barriers to mainstream school access than others who have specific learning difficulties, or those with physical or sensory impairments (Corby *et al.,* 2012).

There is an extensive and ever-growing body of literature on inclusive education. However, there needs to be a consideration of the complexities and diversity of ideologies and socio-cultural as well as political perspectives of different countries. Little is known of the specific nature of the barriers to inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities, so widening the scope of research to include experiences of inclusion and exclusion in different social settings is indeed justified.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

When young people with disabilities are faced with barriers to their participation in post-secondary school, they experience exclusion. This study explores the factors that prevent students with intellectual disabilities from actively participating in FE in Malta. The research aims to uncover these factors and provide some answers to questions of why this may be occurring. Recommendations will be presented for reducing these barriers to inclusion, both due to the desire to provide actionable good practice models and also to fulfil the requirement set out by the local body funding my research (Malta Government Scholarship Scheme).

1.3 Rationale for the Study

The rationale behind this research is to provide some insight into the reasons why so few students with disabilities participate in further and higher education (FEHE) in Malta (Census, 2011). Despite the small size of the country, Malta has a very distinct socio-cultural identity and so research into what factors contribute to the high rate of early school leavers (ESL) is essential to identify possible trends inherent in Malta as a country.

This dissertation will focus on a specific segment of ESL, namely students with intellectual disabilities. The reason for this is mostly due to personal interest but also because this area has received much less attention than others within inclusive disability research, as well as in the discourse on ESL both in Malta and on an international level. From the European Union (EU) monitor statistics (ESL Final Report, European Commission, 2013), it is very apparent that students with intellectual disabilities and mental health concerns are the most likely to drop out of school before attaining any formal qualification (ANED, 2010). This dissertation seeks to explore the reasons behind these statistics and results from the empirical study might subsequently offer some valid explanations that may possibly be generalisable to other ESL cohorts.

My personal interest on this subject has been fuelled over the years as I have been involved directly in the enrolment of students with disabilities into the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), which is Malta's largest vocational college. It was always very apparent that many of the students who were on the registration lists as having had a 'statement of needs' for extra support in secondary school did not enrol at college. I always wondered at the reasons why and I decided to look into this in my research. The prima facie question I posed was related to an exploration of the barriers faced by students with intellectual disabilities when moving from secondary education to further education in Malta.

The aim of this research study is, therefore, to shed more light on the various aspects that affect the successful transition to and participation of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta. This research will also seek to discuss the whole concept of inclusion through the eyes of students themselves.

This project will seek answers and new questions mainly from the analysis of literature and narratives coming from people with disabilities themselves. I will use focus groups and face-to-face interviews with students who are currently in the educational system or have been through it.

The justification for this research is that it is a newly emerging area of education and, therefore, tangible research is still somewhat sparse and fragmented. The provision of real access to continuing education for people with intellectual disabilities is key to ensuring their social inclusion and enabling them to live and work in the community as equal citizens, so I believe any research that can shed more light on the factors affecting access is wholly justified.

1.4 Background to the Study

The importance of FE is frequently on international agendas as ESL is directly linked to unemployment and social exclusion (EU2020, EC Report on ESL, 2013) with European strategic frameworks working to reduce the number of ESL to 10% by 2020. The economic burden of unemployment on countries has seen more investment in plans to retain young people in education until a formal qualification can be attained. The general statistics on ESL show that it is more prevalent when students have personal or family problems, learning difficulties or a fragile socio-economic situation. The way the educational system is set up and the environment in individual schools are also important factors (ESL Final Report , EC, 2013).

It is a well-documented fact that many people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Malta, and also internationally, struggle with poverty (KNPD Report, 2013; Barnes *et al*., 2012). This possibly links to the limited presence of students in FE and in employment.

Educational inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities has been fraught with a multitude of barriers since its inception a few decades ago. The speed and smoothness of this transition, from the segregation of pupils with disability to full integration within school systems, has varied from country to country and between educational levels. Students with intellectual disabilities who would like to pursue their studies beyond compulsory education have found it increasingly difficult to access mainstream courses (EADSNE Report, 2002). This is despite all the enacted legislation to protect their rights to access education in a mainstream environment without discrimination. The persistent problem with lack of participation of students with disabilities in the face of such strong forces pushing the agenda for inclusion indicates that there are equally strong forces working effectively against this movement.

In relation to the phenomenon of the forces of exclusion, research has recently started to delve into the inter-relatability of inclusion and exclusion in various contexts (Kearney, 2009) and it is within this research context that this study is based.

Another important aspect of this study is the focus on the subjective experience of students with intellectual disabilities themselves. This aims to address another concern that literature and research rarely portrays: the direct experience of people with intellectual disabilities. Working on the principles of emancipatory research practice (Barnes and Mercer, 1997), this thesis collects perceptions of students with intellectual disabilities about the benefits and barriers to further education in Malta.

1.4.1 Malta and inclusion

Armstrong *et al*. (2000) point out that

> a historical perspective in relation to the inclusion and exclusion of disabled students will be a timely reminder that current practices are neither natural, inevitable or unchangeable. (p. 3)

Little is currently known about inclusion and exclusion practices in Malta, especially at the FE level. The move towards opening the doors of mainstream schools to students with intellectual disabilities has reaped some benefits in terms of providing an alternative to special schools. Nowadays most children with disabilities are taught in mainstream schools, albeit with limited success in terms of outcomes (Cefai, 2013). Despite the substantial investment in including students with disabilities in mainstream Maltese schools in the last two decades, statistics show that 88% of those students do not pursue FE (NSO, 2011). The reasons for this will be explored empirically in this study;

however, a suggested reason garnered through my personal experience as an educator for students with disabilities, is that the problem might lie with the strong cultural and religious notions of disability entrenched in Maltese society.

1.5 Terminology and Language

Since ideologies are carried through language, words have the power to both include and exclude (Ballard, 2004b). Mittler (2010) suggests that the ideology of exclusion in education has a well-established glossary of terms, so to overcome forces of exclusion within society and socialisation agencies such as schools, 'individuals need to resist and reject the language that carries the ideology of exclusion' (Ballard, 2004b, p. 103).

For the purpose of this project I will use person-first language: 'a person with disabilities' rather than 'a disabled person'. The exception to this will be when quoting or discussing the work of other authors, who may use different terminology. The term intellectual disabilities will refer to all forms of impairments that in one way or another hinder the cognitive learning process of students. These may include various types of disabilities. However, diagnostic labels serve no purpose in this study and will therefore be avoided. Reference is made to the visibility of disability as a factor that affects social views on impairments.

It is worth noting that all the narrative collected as data was in Maltese and was then translated to English. It is for this reason and to avoid losing the gist of what was being said that translations were not done literally or exactly but to the closest meaning to capture the essence of what is being said. The interpretative nature of the research methodology allowed for this process to be possible.

1.6 Context of the Study

When inclusion was first put on the political agenda in the early to mid-90s in Malta, the level of loyalty to this cause was significant and this led to the more recent move to transfer students with disabilities to mainstream education. The students with intellectual disabilities who were the first to access mainstream schooling have recently finished compulsory education and a demand for the FE institutions to also embrace inclusive practices began. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education and the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme, through various studies on access to education for students with disabilities in Europe, established that there are still factors that seem to act as significant barriers to accessing and functioning within mainstream schooling, especially at post-secondary level. These range from socio-cultural to economic and political factors. Some barriers may stem from people with disabilities themselves and internalised defeatist notions. Recent research with people with intellectual disabilities attending Maltese day centres indicates that they tend to be accepting of their situation and adapt quite happily to the opportunities that are available to them (Attard and Callus, 2003) due in part to an overprotective culture of charity stemming from strongly embedded religious and cultural traditions:

> Many individuals from every level of our society can live comfortably with minorities that are passive, weak and silent, but feel overtly threatened by minorities which are active, assertive, strong and ready to speak out. (Camilleri, 2000, p. 2 – Chairperson of the Malta Commission for Persons with Disabilities)

Camilleri (1998) refers to religious attitudes in Malta as one of the key elements that have greatly contributed to the devaluing of people with disability. As a person with disability, he maintains that religious instruction contributed to his low self-esteem and belief in his ability to succeed.

Camilleri also asserts that in Maltese society, where religion has long been the nucleus of daily life, literal interpretations of the scriptures have tended to equate disability with the presence of sin (Camilleri, 1998; Swinton, 1997). Yet it is not uncommon to hear people with disability being referred to as angels, especially during certain charity events. Such references specifically aimed to play on people's emotions are usually accompanied by images of people with physical disability.

> Nonetheless, being presented as objects of charity effectively robbed disabled people of the claim to individuality and full human status. Consequently, they became the perfect vehicle of the overt sentimentality and benevolence of others – usually the priesthood, the great and the good. (Camilleri, 2009)

1.7 The Place of the Researcher

This study is interpretative by nature and for this reason the impact of myself as the researcher on the study needs to be put forward as part of its subjective quality:

> The researcher has an undeniable position and this position affects the nature of the observations and interpretations they make. There is an acceptance in this of the importance of the person. (Thomas, 2009)

One of my first childhood friends outside of school was a boy called Ralph, who was a neighbour in the seaside village where my family spends the summer. I knew that Ralph was different because he needed help to eat and walk but my sister and I just spent time with him. Over the years I witnessed many of his experiences of exclusion but also some great triumphs such as learning how to sail a small dinghy on his own, taught by my father. It was because of Ralph that I decided to work with people with disabilities at a local charity. It was my first job and I was very young and fresh out of university. Now, nearly two decades later, I still work with people with disabilities, albeit in a different setting.

I have been teaching students with intellectual disabilities and mental health concerns at the largest Maltese vocational college for the past eight years. Although my current role as programme coordinator has, unfortunately, removed me from the classroom, it has also given me the opportunity to be involved in the transition process between secondary schools and FE settings such as the college where I work. This has in many ways led to my choice of research topic since I can see that this is where some of the exclusion factors come into play.

Another relevant personal aspect that has definitely influenced my desire to improve the prospects of inclusion for students who have disabilities is the fact that I have first-hand experience of being part of a minority in my country. I have often wondered whether involving myself in work and activism for the disabled community in Malta when I was very young allowed me to vent my frustration at the conservative dominant culture that was still very palpable in the 90s. A short time later I became involved in direct activism for the gay community and in collaboration with a very small group of young people founded the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM). MGRM is still going strong today and through its unwavering lobbying has seen the enactment of two very important laws: the Civil Union and Gender Identity bills. It is due to the former that my partner and I will be getting married next year. We live in a very old village on the rural west coast of Malta. Despite the legislative achievements, many LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer) people in Malta remain ‘closeted’ and live their lives in fear of being found out and shamed or shunned by their families.

Social exclusion or the fear of it stems from the religious aspect of Maltese culture, where the church in its daily teachings and Sunday sermons is still vociferously against the fulfilment of same-sex relationships. Due to Malta's strong Catholic roots, the Church's message permeates the homes of all Maltese families, resulting in many people living unfulfilled lives.

Bullying targeting LGBTIQ students is also very common with recent surveys by the MGRM reporting that 71% of students within this cohort report being harassed or victimised at least once a week (MGRM Report on LGBTI experiences in Malta, 2009).

1.8 Summary

This chapter has provided the background information to this research including the rationale, background to the study and a discussion of the issues and factors that may be adding to the exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese post-secondary educational institutions.

The lack of local research in itself suggests that this is an area that is seldom placed under scrutiny, and despite national and international political forces pushing the agenda for inclusion, there seems to be a counter-force that acts just as effectively. One hypothesis put forward is that the embedded socio-cultural attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities, most notably, are still rooted in traditional, ableist mentalities.

If progress is to be made towards achieving more inclusive FE institutions, more needs to be known about exclusion, or the factors that are working against inclusive education.

1.9 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into nine chapters with the first chapter stating the aims and rationale for the study. Chapter One also provides the background information needed to place and interpret the result. The literature review is presented in Chapter Two and gives an account of recent studies on FE, inclusive education and students with intellectual disabilities. The literature review looks at the definitions of inclusion including a review of historical and socio-cultural changes that affected the development of inclusion as a political and human rights concept. Another section of the literature review examines the research available on specific factors affecting the transition and participation of students with intellectual disability in FE. The literature review also collates main themes arising on perceived benefits of FE and what constitutes good practice in educational inclusion, with various studies offering direct opinions of people with disabilities themselves in forming these models. Despite some positive experiences of FE identified in the studies reviewed, many barriers still exist to equal access to FE opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities. These identified barriers are categorised into three separate but interlinked areas in Chapter Two: socio-cultural, psychological and institutional barriers.

Although the literature on this subject in Malta is very limited, an attempt is made at comparing and analysing studies on other countries to the local situation, both through some statistical information and through personal experience. The literature review includes an examination of the FE options available locally for students with intellectual disabilities. The literature review ends with a section on the nature and ethics of FE educational inclusion in itself, its recent beginnings, its progress and its latest developments in Europe together with a discussion of some main schools of thought on the subject.

Chapter Three explores the methodological framework underpinning the study including the epistemology, theoretical perspective and methods adopted. Chapter Four gives an in-depth look at the cultural context of the study with particular emphasis on the national identity and how it is transposed into attitudes that may be disabling in themselves. The results of the empirical research are collated in Chapter Five through the provisions of diagrams that illustrate the main identified themes and factors affecting FE inclusion. Chapter Six begins the analysis and discussion of the themes which are identified as falling into three separate but connected areas. These are also presented as emerging themes in the literature review and for that reason and for ease of reading, they will retain the same titles. The exclusion factors most commonly identified by the participants of this study are as follows and a chapter is dedicated to each:

- School experiences (Socio-cultural factors)
- Internalised notions and beliefs (Psychological factors)
- Educational systems (Institutional factors)

The final chapter will conclude the study, by drawing together the discussions, focusing on the themes identified and limitations of the study. This research was funded by the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme (MGSS) and, therefore, the results will be presented to all relevant national educational bodies, disability rights advocates and other relevant organisations in my study for consideration. These entities may take special interest in recommendations and for this reason this final chapter will also include proposals for best practice. The evaluation of the current FE opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta may definitely be useful for the improvement of quality standards.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Many would assert that inclusive FE for students with intellectual disabilities is still an illusion. Despite some advancement in legislation and examples of good practice around the world, there is a lack of unified action that establishes and enforces standards of access to FE for students with intellectual disabilities (Ebersold, 2011). There seems to be a recurrent theme in the European country reports on inclusion that there is a pronounced gap between policy and provision (EADSNE, 2015) and significant variance of success between countries that are answerable to the same legislative pressures. This begs a closer look at the experiences of students with intellectual disabilities in specific countries to establish any relationships between variables such as culture and economy on the success or otherwise of inclusion in FE. A clearer picture of the situation may be aided through the provision of more empirical work by independent researchers who focus their work on the experiences of people with disabilities themselves in their own environment.

This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the literature available on further education (FE) and students with intellectual disabilities with a focus on inclusion and exclusion discourses. The first section of this chapter will include an outline of the process and product of a literature review as an integral part of the research study.

2.1.1 Research aims and rationale

The number of students with disabilities that successfully enter FE institutions in Malta is very low, despite the significant investment the Maltese government made to improve inclusion in the mainstream educational systems at the compulsory level. The empirical study in this thesis explores the factors that deter students with intellectual disabilities from actively participating in FE in Malta. When young people with disabilities are faced with barriers to their participation in education they experience exclusion. This study, therefore, is an examination of the nature of educational exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in Malta with a focus on FE/ post-secondary settings. The research aims to use direct testimonials from students with intellectual disabilities to attempt to provide some answers to questions of why this may be occurring. Recommendations will be presented for reducing these barriers to inclusion according to the desire to provide actionable good practice models and to fulfil the requirement set out by the local body funding my research (Malta Government Scholarship Scheme).

The preliminary literature search identified a very limited number of studies done in Malta and those available made minimal reference to FE. It is this lack of local data that fuelled my conviction to base my empirical study in Malta. Most of the studies identified for the literature review were from the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, the United States (US) and Canada; however, this may be a consequence of restricting the search to articles written in English. An important document cited often in this thesis due to its direct relevance to the topic is the Academic Network of European Disability (ANED) country reports (Ebersold, 2011). This is a collection of reports on FEHE accessibility for students with disabilities. The review of studies focusing on inclusion and exclusion from post-secondary educational settings gave rise to some main themes including accessibility problems in FE and also the quality and types of options for post-secondary education available to students with intellectual disabilities.

2.1.2 Clarifying terminology

This section provides clarification on the use of terms such as FE that may differ in meaning in different contexts. I also give my reasons for preferring the use of person-first language and the term intellectual disability despite the plethora of discourse on the subject.

Further education in Malta refers to all non-compulsory formal, non-formal and informal learning that works towards a national qualification classified up to and including level four of the Malta Qualifications Framework, or a foreign qualification at a comparable level (National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE).

In this thesis I acknowledge the importance of language in framing the understanding of physical and cognitive differences, understood by most to be a disability. For some, the use of traditional language such as 'disabled person' is seen to be inappropriate as it places importance on the disability first while some disability pride movements see this as a celebration of their diversity (French and Swain, 2002). Terminology surrounding disability has always been fraught with webs of discord and disagreement as to what constitutes the best and most correct term in reference to disability. It is my understanding that definitions are prone to be different for different people and will keep on changing along with developments in social realities.

It is because of this and to follow the leading international trends of discourse that this thesis uses person-first language: 'student with an intellectual disability'. This choice was also guided by the social model of disability (Oliver, 1995) which advocates moving the focus from the impairment to emphasising how society and the environment can be made more accessible. One such way is to use person-first language (Jensen *et al.,* 2013):

> Person-first language' is a form of linguistic expression relying on words that reflect awareness, a sense of dignity, and positive attitudes about people with disabilities. (Jensen *et al*., 2013, p. 146)

In view of the current research and to clarity the arguments presented in this thesis, the term intellectual disabilities in this thesis will be used to include all forms and level of disabilities, disorders and conditions that in one way or another provide an obvious challenge to the learning experiences of a person.

The terms used for these impairments are exposed to what is called the euphemism treadmill (Pinker, 2003). This means that any term chosen will eventually be considered as an insult. The term *mental retardation* was invented in the middle of the 20th century to replace the previous set of terms, which were deemed to have become offensive. By the end of the century, these terms were already being widely seen as derogatory, politically incorrect and in need of replacement (Cummings *et al*., 2005). The term *intellectual disability* is now preferred by most disability advocates and researchers (Ansberry, 2010). The term *mental retardation* is still currently in use by the World Health Organization, although it is expected to be replaced with either intellectual disability or intellectual developmental disorder in the next revision (ICD-10 codes). These terms are already being used in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013; Salvador-Carulla *et al.*, 2011).

2.1.3 The research questions

The research questions identified for the scope of this literature review are as follows:

1. How many students with intellectual disabilities successfully enter and succeed in FE in Malta?
2. What are the types of FE options for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta?
3. What are the benefits of FE for students with intellectual disabilities?
4. What are the cultural and other barriers students with intellectual disabilities face when accessing FE in Malta?
5. What are the factors that influence successful FE experiences?

To answer the first and second research questions I contacted various local authorities such as the National Statistics Office (NSO), the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (KNPD), the Ministry of Education and all the post-secondary institutions to obtain statistics and information since no local research has collected and collated such data to date.

The other questions will be answered through the empirical research done with individuals with disabilities directly. This is discussed in Chapter Three on research design.

2.1.4 Literature themes

This chapter is divided into three main sections according to the main themes emerging from the literature review. The first section includes the criteria used to select the literature for this chapter followed by a section on the main perspectives on the definition of intellectual disability and how the lack of a universal understanding of this type of impairment has practical implications. The third section provides an overview of the history of inclusive education internationally and more specifically in Malta. This is followed by an overview of the social and political nature of inclusion and its particular relevance in the cultural context of Malta.

The next section relates to some of the main arguments regarding FE and students with intellectual disabilities. This leads to a critical analysis of literature about inclusion in practice and some current arguments on whether students with intellectual disabilities should be taught in separate or mainstream learning environments. Models of inclusive education are identified and these include converging ideas and debates on whether FE curricula for students with intellectual disabilities should focus on life skills or academic skills training.

The final two sections relate to literature on the benefits and barriers of inclusive FE for students with intellectual disabilities. Both these sections are divided into three areas namely institutional benefits/ barriers, socio-cultural benefits/ barriers and psycho-emotional benefits/ barriers.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This section outlines the criteria used for choosing literature for this study. These criteria include issues like using research that upholds elements of inclusivity such as emancipatory disability research (EDR) and inclusive learning disability research (ILDR). This section also provides an overview of the literature search criteria used including search terms and databases.

2.2.1 Inclusive literature

I chose studies with a strong focus on direct testimonials from people with intellectual disabilities, to uphold an emancipatory/ participatory principle and for better comparability with the empirical study later on in the thesis. This thesis is being carried out using the basic principles of emancipatory disability research (EDR) and inclusive learning disability research (ILDR) as ethical guidelines.

As first identified by Oliver (1995), EDR is based on changing the social relations of research production by shifting the balance of power within the research process to a more equal relationship between the researcher and the people with disabilities who are being researched. A practical example is for disability research to be done in partnership *with* people with disabilities rather than *on* them, as is the case with traditional approaches. This will be explained further in the methodology chapter. ILDR is an offshoot of EDR and also places greater emphasis on research being controlled by people with disabilities themselves. Inclusive research stems from the social model of disability (Barnes, 2003). Moore *et al,* (1998) explain that both EDR and ILDR agendas acknowledge that social research is as much a political process as all social activity. They describe that EDR means upholding certain research criteria such as being an accountable and rigorous researcher and choosing qualitative methods that give control and empower participants regardless of their disability or impairment (Moore *et al.*, 1998).

2.2.2 Reliability

The inclusion criteria for the choice of literature were that studies had to ideally be primary research from peer-reviewed journals to ensure good quality and reliability material. Although primary research is used for the main scope of this chapter, some systematic reviews will also be included to gather data on the wider aspects of this subject such as transition and programme evaluations.

2.2.3 Relevance of time

The literature review was limited to studies published in peer-reviewed journals and, for the most part, studies were published after 2000. The reason for these exclusion criteria was mainly to keep to a relevant and updated collection of information and data. The subject matter is a constantly-changing and evolving area, and international legislative changes in the last years on inclusion and education mean that studies prior to 2000 may not reflect present situations. This thesis does make reference to literature published prior to 2000 but this is solely to cite theories that still hold relevance in offering explanations for current issues. Reference is also made to online sources for legislation and policy, both at local and international levels.

2.2.4 Databases

The search strategy chosen was to identify the literature using selected databases such as ERIC and CinAHL available on the University library catalogues and internet databases including Google scholar. The local studies were obtained from the libraries of the University of Malta, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (KNPD).

2.2.5 Search terms

During preliminary online searches it became clear that when search terms included studies about particular geographical locations, the results were very limited regarding the subject. I therefore decided to focus on the two main variables that were considered more relevant for this study and this was inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities at the post-secondary education level. The search terms used were as follows:

Inclusion **and/ or** Further **and/ or** Post-secondary **and/ or** Education **and/ or** Intellectual **and/ or** Learning **and/ or** Disability **and/ or** Disabilities.

Table 1 Search terms used

2.2.6 Limitations to the literature review

One of the problems encountered during the literature review was that most studies were either about physical impairments or about disability in general. Very few studies gathered data on students with intellectual disabilities. From the limitations identified in these articles, one can conclude that this is because of the complexity of obtaining informed consent from people with intellectual disabilities (Corby *et al.,* 2012; O'Brien *et al*., 2009; Lacono, 2014).

The literature search was largely limited to the period after 2000 because, over time, socio-cultural realities have changed considerably and earlier literature might be obsolete. The exclusion of literature from outside the chosen time frame, however, may be limiting due to the lack of historical comparability which would have been an interesting attribute to research. Attitudes have changed, and the international shift to viewing education and employment as a human rights issue has led to an increase in accessibility in inclusion, at least on paper. Styles of upbringing and notions of what disability means are probably different from those of more than ten years ago in most countries; however, in Malta these may still hold true. Whether there are similar and parallel developments in inclusive disability practices between Malta and other larger countries would have made an interesting exploration.

Another limitation to the literature review is that the results may not be applicable to other societies/ cultures because the literature originated mainly from the UK, US and Australia. Other smaller countries may have different ethnic, religious, economic or cultural variables. The scope of this thesis is essentially to explore whether people with intellectual disabilities in Malta face the same challenges as their counterparts in larger countries when it comes to accessing FE, through a consideration of these same variables.

2.3 Defining intellectual disability for further education

Mittler (2010) states that the recent use of the term intellectual disability rather than learning disability in the UK stems from various articles in academic circles, including recent high-profile NHS reports (Mansell, 2009). This indicates a change in the use of language when referring to people with disabilities in many Western countries. This may be due to a concerted effort to have an international definition for this type of disability for ease of recognition and understanding (Schalock *et al.*, 2007).

This section of the literature review will look at the way intellectual disability is defined and how the seeming lack of a common understanding of what constitutes intellectual disabilities may be having an effect on educational provision.

Intellectual disability is a disability characterised by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18 (AAIDD, 2010). Despite recent references to the term intellectual disability in the UK (Mansell, 2010), learning disability is still widely used to describe the same type of impairment. In a policy document in 2001, the UK Department of Health described learning disability as

- Significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills.
- Reduced ability to cope independently which starts before adulthood with lasting effects on development.

  (Department of Health, Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century, 2001)

The fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM5) defines intellectual disability as a collection of 'impairments of general mental abilities that impact adaptive functioning in three areas' (DSM5, 2013), namely the conceptual, social and practical domains. These areas affect the coping skills of an individual during daily tasks.

Intellectual functioning refers to general mental ability including reasoning and problem-solving skills. Colmar *et al.* (2006) explain how these are generally assessed using psychometric tests and include determining the intelligence quotient (IQ). An IQ test resulting in a score of below 70-75 would indicate intellectual disability.

Other standardised tests, usually used as guidelines for educational support provision, measure adaptive behaviours. These are generally divided into three skill categories:

1. Conceptual skills including numeracy and literacy.
2. Social skills which include interpersonal skills, self-esteem and social problem-solving, naivety, ability to follow regulations.
3. Practical skills such as activities of daily living and vocational skills.

(Luckasson *et al*., 2013)

Harrison *et al.* (2008) affirm that the variations in attributed meaning and definition of intellectual disability in policy and discourse might be affecting service delivery which is constructed upon such policies, in particular on who services are delivered to. One such example in practice is evident from the literature on college accessibility for students with intellectual disability (Sitlington and Payne, 2006; Sparks and Lovett, 2014).

Fletcher *et al.* (2007) and Gregg (2012) agree that the lack of a universal operational definition of intellectual disability is resulting in an inadequate support provision mechanism at post-secondary level, which may hinder students from being successful. Furthermore, guidelines used for the assessment of children oftentimes do not apply at the college level (IDEA, 2004; UK No Child Left Behind (2001), Education for All, 2013). The argument on labelling people with one type of disability or other tends to become even more embittered when it comes to minors. Mittler (2002), referring to the term intellectual disability, argued for the futility of labelling children and adolescents with one disability or another since most have additional disabilities. He believes knowing that students having a named condition or a measured level of cognitive functioning may be useful as background information but may not necessarily provide the foundation for a teaching programme (Mittler, 2000). Gerber (2011) on the other hand, believes that research and practice should be inclined towards making clear distinctions between types of disabilities. He recommends a clearer divide of what constitutes intellectual disabilities and what issues are specific to them and not to other high-incidence disabilities such as ADD, ADHD and behavioural disorders.

A large-scale European study on inclusion (ANED, 2010) recommends the need for 'an inclusion framework anchored in a common educational understanding of disability'. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2007) provides the basis for a common framework in understanding disability. Although most countries have retained a 'special needs' approach within national policy development, this approach varies considerably from one country to another. This, in turn, makes it difficult to compare categories of special educational needs with the definitions of disability (including the broad definition in the UN Convention). Some countries (including Malta) tend to define special educational needs (SEN) students as those with varying degrees of functional or structural impairment, hence those with disabilities; other countries (including the UK) include migrant or ethnic minority students, those facing social disadvantages or specially gifted children within SEN. Disability non-discrimination laws do not always apply to educational provision and there is clear legal definition of the concept of SEN in very few countries, such as the UK (ANED, 2010).

2.3.1 Definitions inform practice

When checking the information on entry procedures in the websites of various FE colleges in Europe, it is evident that support for students with disabilities is provided according to presented reports from educational psychologists. In fact, most countries delivering mainstream educational provision depend primarily or solely on psychometric testing reports to provide students with disabilities with even the most basic of support (Sparks and Lovett, 2014). Psychometric testing includes intelligence testing as a marker for intellectual disability (Colmar *et al.*, 2006).

This approach is also used in Malta (DES, 2012) and may be one of the barriers leading to the exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities from post-secondary education. Using psychometric testing as part of college entry procedures is based on the medical definition of intellectual disability as a result below an average intelligence quotient (IQ).

Studies suggest that using psychometric tests as a base for the provision of college support and accommodation is inadequate as these tests do not take into consideration other important variables in the individual's life that must be included when establishing needs (Adams and Proctor, 2010). In defining and assessing intellectual disability, the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities **(**AAIDD: 2010) stresses that professionals must take additional factors into account, such as the community environment typical of the individual's peers and culture. Professionals should also consider linguistic diversity and cultural differences in the way people communicate, move and behave (Cooper *et al.*, 2007). Other factors need to be included when considering support provision for post-secondary students with intellectual disabilities which may be more relevant at this particular age: psychopathology, health issues and socio-economic background (Carroll Chapman and Wu, 2012; Vedi and Bernard, 2012; Joshi *et al.*, 2010).

Proctor and Prevatt (2003) and Sparks and Lovett (2009b) maintain that whether students with disabilities meet accommodation criteria is more reliant on the method of assessment and underlying definition of the disability used by clinician. Controversy still abounds on the effectiveness of psychometric testing in establishing student educational needs and some authors such as Gormley *et al.* (2005) report that these tests may sometimes be used to gain added educational support even when it may not be required.

The history of inclusion for students with disabilities in mainstream schools has been fraught with challenges at every educational level. Now that more demand is being placed on FE institutions to cater for the needs of students with disabilities, an increasing number of measures are being put in place in both political and social spheres (Europe, 2020). Some argue, however, that change is abysmally slow and there is a significant gap between what policy and the law dictate and what is actually being implemented in practice (Ebersold, 2011). This is also seen in Malta where very few students with disabilities access FE (ANED, 2010). The next sections will give an overview of the history of inclusion for students with disabilities in Europe and, more specifically, in Malta.

2.4 The Political and Social Context

This section will look at the background of inclusive education internationally. The literature refers mainly to disability and education in general terms since material that is specific to intellectual disability and FE is very limited.

2.4.1 The history of inclusive education (in Europe)

The principles of inclusive education were first put on the international agenda at the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Equality in Salamanca (UNESCO, 1994) and were reaffirmed in Dakar at the World Education Forum (UNESCO, 2000). The UN standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (Peters, 2003) further supported the UNESCO initiatives and this led to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) on education. Being signatories to the Convention means that countries commit themselves to uphold its specific guidelines on FE and inclusion. Malta and most European countries have now signed the Convention.

For more than 20 years Europe has had a common legal framework on non-discrimination under the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) Article 13; disability is included in the list of grounds on which it is prohibited to discriminate. This has resulted in a series of directives based on the concept of equal opportunities, enacted by equal treatment in all life domains as well as the different EU Action Plans developing Education for All. This has been further enhanced by a European strategy for sustainable growth which focuses on five main objectives for economic restructuring. Among these targets are the reduction of early school leavers, increased employment rates and the cutting down of social exclusion (Europe, 2020). These principles have provided the basis for legislation on equality of opportunities in the member states and their commitment to inclusive education, since it was very clear that people with disabilities would feature strongly as a target group if Europe was to reach the objectives set out for Europe 2020. In fact, a specific strategy on disability was created to make sure that targets set by Europe 2020 would be adhered to nationally (European Disability Strategy, 2010-2020). They are reflected in European national laws and policies, fostering the right to education for all with national action plans and guidance for their implementation.

Across Europe, FE institutions have been working towards a more comparable and compatible standard of education and quality assurance, resulting from action and implementation measures ensuing from the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process is a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries designed to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of further and higher education qualifications (EHEA, 2000). Van der Wende (2000) also refers to a more recent widening of the scope of these standards to include the needs of under-represented students such as those with disabilities.

Further to this, the Copenhagen Declaration was adopted in 2002 to enhance the cooperation between vocational education and training (VET) in EU/ EEA/ EFTA member states and other social partners. Since the signing of the Copenhagen Declaration, a series of follow-up conferences were held which evaluated and revised the objectives in accordance with new legislative developments in Europe, most notably during the Bruges conference in 2010 when the strategic objectives were aligned with the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework of the EU education ministers of May 2009. The Copenhagen Declaration made possible the recognition of vocational skills based on achievement of vocational learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning. This opened up possibilities for students who struggled academically to still get validation of their employability skills. Therefore, despite the fact that the Copenhagen Declaration does not specifically mention students with intellectual disabilities, it had an indirect and significant effect on the FE prospects of this student cohort.

Although 80% of FEHE institutions in Europe have a policy regarding students with disabilities (Sursock and Smidt, 2010), there are very few that refer directly to intellectual disability. Furthermore, having policies in place does not necessarily result in inclusive practices being implemented. Holloway *et al.* (2001) state that inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities is most often the result of individuals or groups having an interest and working towards this, rather than it being driven by policy. Osborne (2003) stresses the importance of actually widening participation of students at post-secondary level, rather than merely increasing numbers, and that work has to be done at government, institutional and organisational levels.

The Academic Network of European Disability (ANED) country reports collated by Ebersold *et al.* (2011) show the efforts made by European countries to accommodate students with disabilities at all levels of education towards equal opportunities in their studies and training. The ANED reports use the term disability to include all forms of impairment so although there is no specific reference to intellectual disability, the conclusions of the country reports are seen as valid and will be useful for comparison with the empirical study of this thesis.

The EU member states are responsible for the provision of education; however, the EU institutions play a supporting role. According to Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Community

> shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States, through actions such as promoting the mobility of citizens, designing joint study programmes, establishing networks, exchanging information or teaching languages of the European

> Union. The Treaty also contains a commitment to promote life-long learning for all citizens of the Union. (Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, 2012, p. 74)

Inclusive education in recent years has been modelled to some extent on the notions of equal access to all which places the onus of equality on sources outside of the person with disabilities. Schools and colleges have in fact become more flexible to allow for the different needs of mixed ability student cohorts, arguably with commitment and investment varying between countries and between individual schools (ANED, 2010). Malta features very poorly in the ANED reports which show that despite all the legislative changes and forces pushing for a more inclusive environment, there are equally powerful forces at play that still exclude people with disabilities from certain settings such as post-secondary education and employment. Further and higher education institutions in Europe have been receiving an increasing amount of applications from students with intellectual and other disabilities but the literature also shows that the barriers faced by these students are still considerable (Corby *et al.,* 2012).

In the UK the Further and Higher Education Act was implemented in 1993. Prior to this there had been negligible legislative initiatives to include students with disabilities in FE initiatives or to make arrangements for them (Warnock, 1978). In 1995 the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995) set out new responsibilities which helped secure more initiatives and resources for students with disabilities who wished to pursue their studies. The Warnock Report had a significant impact on inclusion in Malta since at the time Malta was a British colony and was therefore subject to the same policies and legislative changes as Britain. The next section details the developments in inclusive education in the Maltese islands. Further discussion on the Maltese socio-cultural context will be provided in Chapter Four.

Malta is still struggling with a belief system that takes care of people with disabilities but only in as much as it provides for them; I believe it is still reluctant to ‘allow’ access to independence. This may be a result of the dominant culture and traditional view of disability as a ‘tragedy’ (Swain and French, 2010). It may also show that there are residual internalised beliefs in Maltese society that associate disability with being a ‘punishment from God’ and these result in a marginalisation of the ‘sinner’ or the ‘weakling’ and their family. In FE there could be a belief in the lowering of standards if students with intellectual disabilities are included.

2.4.2 Malta and inclusive education

The history of inclusive education in Malta has generally followed an international trend influenced by rights-based ideologies intrinsic to the United Nations, UNESCO and OECD standards. These standards have also led to the enactment of other important forms of Maltese legislation, most notably the

Equal Opportunities Persons with Disabilities Act (CAP.413, Laws of Malta, 2000).

In October 2012 Malta ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24 of the Convention places emphasis on the quality of education in order to provide ‘effective individualised support measures which are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion’ (UN, 2006, Article 24, Para 2e). With the ratification of the Convention, the Maltese government is held accountable to its articles, which in essence means that students with disabilities have the right to be included in the same schools and classes as their peers, undertake the same courses and activities whilst having the required adaptations as well as support to meet their learning needs.

Principles of inclusion have been in debate in Malta, as in most of the Western world, for the last two decades. However, although legislation and policy documents now make the presumption of society being inclusive, many challenges remain on a practical level (Ebersold *et al.*, 2011). The concern shown in various European reports on inclusion suggests that integration is taking place instead of inclusion (ANED, 2011; EAN, 2013).

A definition by Mason (2002) states that clear understanding of the difference between the meaning of inclusion and integration is important for the raising of standards in inclusive education. Integration refers to a wider understanding that students with disabilities are educated in mainstream settings. Inclusion, on the other hand, is based on fundamental principles that go deeper than merely being enrolled in mainstream classrooms. Inclusion involves the process of

- Increasing the participation of students with disabilities in, and reducing their exclusion from, curricula and communities of local schools;
- restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students' needs;
- accepting diversity as normal and as a rich source for all students;
- responding to the diverse needs of all students;
- accommodating both different styles and rates of learning;
- ensuring the quality of education to all students through appropriate curricula, support and teaching strategies;
- accepting that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society. (ICEVI EUROPE, 2012, p. 2)

One of the most palpable challenges in Malta is that although progress has been made in including students with disabilities in primary and secondary schools (Callus and Bezzina, 2004), there has been little progress at the third level for students with intellectual disabilities. This is a situation that seems to be reflected in many countries (ANED, 2010) where there is simply a scarcity of accessible and inclusive programmes within mainstream higher and further educational settings.

In the Maltese ANED country reports, the Malta Commission for Persons with Disability (KNPD) emphasised the ‘black hole in post-secondary provision for intellectually disabled people’ (ANED, 2010, p.29). Besides the lack of teaching staff specialising in disability, there is also a lack of resources and accommodations at FE level. Besides the material and structural aspects of some of the barriers experienced by students with disabilities when accessing education, there are some barriers that arise from societal attitudes inherent in the Maltese culture. Camilleri (2010) describes some of these in his auto-ethnographical account of battling the Maltese educational system for equal access in his long-standing role of chairperson to the *Kummissjoni Nazzjoni Persuni B'Dizabilita'* (National Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). Camilleri (2010) discusses how many of the Maltese negative attitudes towards disability stem from a morbid fascination with biological difference, and high among these are socio-religious viewpoints, industry’s insistence on normalisation of its workers and a work ethic that values individuals based solely on their level of production. Another very important element mentioned by Camilleri (2010), that to this day directly affects societal attitudes towards people with disabilities in Malta, is the medical model. This model has become strongly intertwined with Maltese religious expressions through the notion that disability is a specialised, medical condition; ‘a tragedy of the human condition’ (Camilleri, 2010, p. 849).

The viewing of people with disabilities as passive recipients of care, charity and pity, was preceded by a previous notion of disability as being a punishment bestowed by God on sinners. Camilleri (2010) asserts that in a society such as the one in Malta where religion is the nucleus of daily life, 'the literal translation of the scriptures has tended to equate disability with the presence of sin within the individual or the family'. This led to the individual and family developing feelings of shame and failure and were treated thus by their community and excluded from institutions such as schools and churches. Although current trends in policy and practice have been moving towards a more emancipatory social model of disability, the underlying attitudes of Maltese society still appear to be based around a traditional paternalistic approach towards people with disabilities, especially those with cognitive impairments.

The church may still be reinforcing these attitudes through its work within charity organisations and through teachings about compassion. What is clear is that there is a divide between how people with intellectual disabilities are viewed in their community and how they are then viewed when accessing schools and industry. On the one hand they are often pitied and assigned the role of charity case, but when it comes to education and employment many find the doors are closed (Deguara *et al.,* 2012). Uditsky and Hughson (2012), like Camilleri (2010) above, state that this may be due to the work ethic standard which values workers in terms of homogeneity and factors such as strength and intelligence.

In 1998, the University of Malta created the Guidelines for Special Educational Arrangements, giving students with disabilities who wanted to pursue FE the opportunity to sit for post-secondary entry exams with extra support. The University of Malta also set up a support service for students with disability and in 2007 issued a publication entitled *The University of Malta and Students with Disability* to describe what support or services are available within the university (Bartolo, 2009).

In the national Maltese census of 2011, however, only 992 (4.4%) students with disabilities were reported to have attended university compared to 31,172 (10%) of students with no reported disabilities. There are no reports of students with intellectual disabilities ever attending university or sixth forms.

Other data from the census show that the presence of students with disabilities in FE remains low (Census, 2011). Indeed only 1,274 (5.6%) students with disabilities attended post-secondary schools compared to 45,097 (14.4%) non-disabled peers. Also worrying is the fact that 9.8% of people with disabilities reported that they had never received any form of education with 79.3% saying that they have no qualification whatsoever. A significant issue in literature about Malta is that it is very limited, especially when it comes to information about specific disabilities; however, a statistic garnered from a European survey shows that in Malta only 0.9% of people with intellectual disabilities enter into FE (ANED, 2010).

Spiteri *et al.* (2005) presented a government-contracted national reform strategy called the Inclusive and Special Education Review which focused on the need for wide reform in special education and called for better training of staff and the phasing out of special schools. Special Schools would be transformed into resource centres which would be used by all students.

Research by Callus and Camilleri (2010) shows that in Malta people with intellectual disabilities are more likely to attend special schools. Of those who attended mainstream schools, there is a tendency for them to have attended up to primary level only. Persons with intellectual disabilities are more likely to have no qualifications upon leaving school and are twice as likely to be illiterate in comparison to people with other types of disabilities (Callus and Camilleri, 2010). Local employment statistics also show that those with intellectual impairments and co-morbid psychopathology have an even lower chance of employment, and those who are employed are in very basic jobs (Employment and Training Corporation, Malta; 2012).

People with mental health problems feature in some government policies, mainly pertaining to supported accommodation and supported employment. There are significant problems in situations of co-morbid psychopathology due to various factors such as fear of stigma, the person not disclosing the mental illness or not asking for help. Problems with services' remits also show that many service providers for people with disabilities are reluctant to offer support to those who also have mental health conditions. Conversely, service providers catering for people with mental health conditions do not offer services to those with disabilities. This situation is further complicated by the fact that there are gaps in service provision for those between the ages of 16 and 18 as children's services end at 16 and adult services start at 18 years of age (Times of Malta, 27 September 2014). This may lead to inadequate or insufficient support systems for adolescents with mental health concerns at their transition from compulsory education to the first years of FE (Singh *et al.,* 2005).

To date, only one study by Bezzina *et al.* (2009) has looked in depth at the way disabled people are being included in Maltese society. The study involved a survey among 599 disabled people registered with the National Commission for Persons with Disability in Malta (KNPD: Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni B'Dizabilita') and was produced with the assistance of the National Statistics Office (NSO). People with disability in Malta identified education, employment and community involvement as some of the main concerns for them (Bezzina *et al.,* 2009). Indeed, most of the problems related to participation are caused by a lack of support services (KNPD Report, 2013), though children who were currently attending compulsory schools were provided with a learning support assistant (LSA).

Malta offers students with intellectual disabilities very few options for FE. The limitation is mainly due to qualification requirement to access most FEHE/ FE colleges. The remaining options are Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School, the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology or the Institute of Tourism Studies. The first option offers remedial courses aimed at resitting ordinary, intermediate and advanced level examinations to gain entry into FEHE while the latter two options are both vocational colleges which lead to employment. Another option for students with disabilities is to either attend a special school or one of the EU-funded training programmes offered by the government or NGOs for disadvantaged youth. The special schools and training programmes are not accredited and offer no formal qualifications. They are also not considered an option at the FE level by the government. All students in FE are given a monthly stipend called a maintenance grant to provide financial support; however, students in post-secondary special schools and independent training programmes are not eligible for this grant (DES, SMG Regulations, 2014).

Various organisations and authors have criticised the lack of empirical studies carried out in Europe to evaluate the effect of newly-amended legislation on inclusive education mentioned at the beginning of this section (Gerber *et al.*, 2012; Camilleri *et al.*, 2009). This legislation was meant to raise the bar on standards and opportunities in inclusion when it comes to disability but there is no significant data to evaluate progress and hence guide practice or nuance the issues. The ANED country reports (2009) show that evaluation of FE inclusive practices is lacking and there seems to be some exact replication of successful models, which may not be as effective or generalisable. Thomas (2012) argues that many countries are adopting 'copycat inclusion' based on a direct transposition of practices from other countries that are considered successful, rather than implementing inclusion according to their own socio-cultural realities. Such copycat inclusion seems to have affected the success of inclusive education in Malta since there may have been insufficient research on the specific social and cultural differences that are distinct to Malta.

2.5 Inclusion versus Exclusion

Recently inclusive education research has taken up the term exclusion and used it in direct relation to the notion of inclusion. While exclusion as it relates to school discipline is a manifest practice, referring to physical absence, the use of the term exclusion in the field of inclusive education is different. The term exclusion is used in relation to forces of exclusion that act to make it difficult for a student to have full and fair access to all the processes and services inherent in a school environment. These include access to the curriculum, access to friendship groups and teacher time, as well as accessible language and communication (Ballard, 2004b; Booth, 1996).

This thesis places great emphasis on the idea that the term exclusion is not just being physically present in FE but having equal access to the curriculum, friendships and other experiences most take for granted (Kearney, 2009). Finally, exclusion can be both overt and covert as a student could be experiencing college exclusion, but the factors acting to exclude students with disabilities may be so entrenched in the culture or construction of the organisation that it goes largely unchallenged or overlooked (Slee and Allan, 2005).

The first part of this chapter highlighted how definitions of intellectual disabilities in themselves may affect access to FE for students with intellectual disabilities. Using psychometric test results to determine intellectual disability and as a baseline for the type of support provided by the school may prove to be an exclusionary factor as the rigidity and subjectivity of such tests may result in inadequate support provision in post-secondary colleges. The European political and social forces acting on the inclusion and exclusion agenda were identified to provide the background to the literature review. The legislative changes have had far-reaching repercussions in the various EU countries; however, the gap between policy and practice is still present as seen in the literature review in the next sections. Some critical arguments arose consistently in the literature and two of the main ones relate to what type of FE provision is considered to be more suitable for students with intellectual disability. This relates both to the curriculum and location of provision.

2.5.1 Mainstream or separate educational systems

Ebersold *et al.* (2011) state that an 'education for all' policy does not necessarily mean mainstream education. Most European countries have shifted, or are committed to shift, to inclusive education by reducing the number of special schools (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007); however, the commitment to education for all is not necessarily linked with obligatory mainstream education for all students with disabilities. In some countries such as Norway all students with disabilities are reported to be enrolled in mainstream schools; however, the ANED reports (2010) show that in most other countries educational provision includes special schools for specific impairments. In countries such as Portugal and Finland there is an increasing investment in special schools, allowing them an additional role as resource centres. While the UK's general legal framework guarantees free access to compulsory schooling for all children, it does not guarantee to provide it in mainstream schools.

According to the country reports, the commitment to Education for All in the German and Swedish reports suggests that access to mainstream education tends to be easier for children with specific learning difficulties (SLD) or speech impairments than for those with other impairments, especially those with cognitive impairments. In addition, most reports, with the exception of Norway and Portugal, indicate that significant investment in special schools remains. These are often targeted at students with a hearing, visual or intellectual impairment. Some reports (Finland and Estonia) also note that significant special school resources are dedicated to children labelled with behavioural problems, while others (e.g. Greece, Ireland, Iceland) show that special schools also exist specifically for those children having mobility problems.

The ANED country reports show that educational opportunities for students with disabilities vary considerably between countries. They may be provided mainly in the same classes as non-disabled pupils (Malta and UK) or in special classes located in regular schools (Sweden) or mainly in special schools (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Latvia, Luxembourg). They may be a combination of these options (Finland, France,).

We may then consider the education of students with SEN as taking place in three broad educational frameworks. One group of countries tend to enrol students with disabilities in mainstream education, within inclusive settings or in special classes, while special schools remain only for the education of particular groups of children (e.g. those with severe impairments). A second group continues to include special schools as an integral part of their educational provision, and students with disabilities may often be enrolled in them. A third group of countries has sought to transform their special schools into resource centres aimed at supporting mainstream schools in implementing inclusive education. This model is described in other studies of models for inclusive education ranging from 'full integration' to 'mixed hybrid' to 'substantially separate' (Hart *et al.* 2006).

There are mixed opinions as to what should constitute FE for students with intellectual disabilities. Some believe that students should be fully included in mainstream courses and provided with adequate support (Shah, 2005), while others suggest the provision of separate study programmes and classrooms (Cook, Swain and French, 2001). Hart *et al. (*2006) identify three models of post-secondary education. These include a mixed hybrid model, where students participate in both classes with students with disabilities and without. The second model is one in which students attend a separate programme within a mainstream environment, and lastly an inclusive individual support model where students receive support in mainstream college/ university courses.

Substantially Separate	**Mixed Hybrid**	**Inclusive Individual Support**
Life skills/ transition programme	On campus	On campus
No interaction with others	Interaction through services and activities	Full interaction with ongoing support
No option to attend mainstream lessons	Have options to attend some mainstream lessons	All lessons are within mainstream courses

Table 2 Three models of post-secondary inclusive education – Hart *et al.* (2006)

Authors such as Warnock (2005) and Kauffman and Hallahan (2005) echo arguments used by generations of inclusion sceptics in favour of separate education for students with intellectual disabilities and against mainstreaming. The arguments include the notions that these students' needs would keep the rest of the class back and that they may be subject to bullying or be ostracised. The statistics for Malta in a report by the European anti-bullying network shows that Maltese students report one of the highest bullying rates: 58% of Maltese children reported bullying at least once a month (36%) or once a week (22%) (EAN, 2013). Although no studies specific to Malta exist as to the correlation between disability and bullying, international studies have shown that students with disabilities are five times more likely to be victims of bullying than their peers (Edwards McNamara, 2013). While bullying is definitely a social reality for many students with disabilities, other authors and academics believe that this should not be a justification for segregated inclusion.

Bolt (2004) suggests that there is a different attitude towards disability within FEHE than for other minorities. He states that one can see this even through the types of courses offered by British colleges and universities. Bolt reveals that of the 78 institutions that advertise an undergraduate English course, 55 refer to gender, 40 refer to ethnicity or race, 13 refer to class and 12 refer to sexuality. There is a complete absence of theoretic approaches that are sensitive to disability, an approach which he believes is critical to ableist representation. Wilson *et al.* (2001) state that lecturers within post-secondary education should be proactive in becoming more theoretically informed about disability so they can attract more students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

Burke and Wolbring (2010) state that disability should not be an incidental aspect of studies but it should be positioned alongside gender, ethnicity and class in the prospectus of each university.

> Universities are likely to become the seed beds of future politicians and policy-makers, the effect of a lack of a critical approach towards ableism should not be underestimated. (Barnes *et al.*, 1992)

What seems to be sorely missing in literature is the actual voice of students with disabilities themselves. Most articles seem to focus mostly on opinions of academics, professionals and parents. This could perhaps be a reflection of paternalistic ideologies or could stem from the difficulties in doing research with people with intellectual disabilities. Various other debates depart from the arguments for and against mainstream education; one that repeated itself in many studies concerned the content of learning materials in FE. The debate on the types of programmes of study offered to students with intellectual disabilities in FE revolves around whether they should be solely academic or based on life skills as discussed in the next section.

2.5.2 Life skills or an academic curriculum

The literature review uncovered a debate as to what type of curriculum is the most beneficial for students with intellectual disabilities in FE. Life skills typically refer to skills or tasks required for the successful and independent functioning of an individual in adulthood (Cronin, 1996). Bouck (2010) and Alwell and Cobb (2009) are among many authors who advocate the teaching of life skills to students with intellectual disabilities. They state that there has been a decrease in life skills training to make way for academically-oriented standards.

Bouck (2010) stresses the importance of life skills in the success of people with intellectual disabilities, especially in terms of post-school outcomes. Various research suggests that students with intellectual disabilities who are trained in life skills fare better in terms of continuing education, employment and general independent living (Brolin and Lloyd, 2004; Benz *et al.*, 2000; Test *et al.*, 2009; Rubin *et al.*, 2003).

Offering life skills training to students with intellectual disabilities was a very popular intervention within schools up until the end of the 90s (Newman *et al.*, 2001); however, research is showing a decrease in this practice and a move to a more academic and literacy-based approach. Bouck (2010) believes that this is a direct result of the reauthorisation of NCLB (No Child Left Behind, 2002) and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2011) in the US. NCLB and IDEA put focus on students with disabilities participating in general education curricula and sitting for large-scale state exams. Delivering a functional life skills curriculum, therefore, is seen to be at odds with these mandates. Ryndak *et al.* (2009) maintain that more research is to be done as to the effect of having a life skills curriculum versus a purely academic one.

Bouck (2010) looked at the extent of the decrease of life skills training in the education of students with intellectual disabilities and the effect of this decrease. This author also asks whether in the absence of life skills training at school, there would be similar provisions available in the community. Bouck (2010) uses the database of the National Longitudinal Transition Study – 2 (NLTS2) which documents the 'characteristics, experiences and outcomes' of young people with disabilities through its assessment of scholastic experiences. The results of this study revealed that there is a marked decrease in life skills training for students with intellectual disabilities and a very low percentage of students reported receiving any such training after school via other community services. Hart *et al.* (2006) suggests that dropout rates have significantly increased since the focus shifted from life skills to academic skills. Mull and Sitlington (2003) state that the skills needed to succeed at FE level are often those very skills with which students with intellectual disabilities have difficulty.

There is also a significant difference between parental perceptions of what is the most important type of instruction depending on whether their son/ daughter has a mild, moderate or severe intellectual disability. Grigal and Neubert (2004) present findings showing that parents of students with mild disabilities placed less importance on life skills than academic skills while parents of students with moderate/ severe disabilities demonstrated more interest in life skills acquisition.

Benz *et al.* (2000) and Neubert *et al.* (2004) have shown that a majority of students with intellectual disabilities prefer their education to be more focused on life after school. Students also believe that life skills education needs to move away from the biological and include areas such as addressing self-esteem issues, dealing with intimacy, emotional intelligence and so forth.

Much of the literature on the subject of education for students with intellectual disabilities advocates the inclusion of skills such as self-determination and self-advocacy in academic programmes, especially at post-secondary level (Greenholtz *et al.,* 2005). These are considered to be important concepts in the lives of all people, but may be more important to students with disabilities for various reasons, perhaps, I believe, most notably the elevated need for asserting themselves in a society where they are placed in a disadvantaged position.

In the US, self-advocacy movements were started in the 1960s by and for people with intellectual disabilities because of a desire to claim back the right to speak up for themselves from others such as professionals, parents and other family members. The national self-advocacy organisation defines self-advocacy as follows:

> [It] is about independent groups of people with disabilities working together for justice by helping each other take charge of our lives and fight discrimination. It teaches us how to make decisions and choices that affect our lives so we can be more independent. It also teaches us about our rights, but along with learning about our rights we learn responsibilities. The way we learn about advocating for ourselves is by supporting each other and helping each other gain confidence in ourselves so we can speak out for what we believe in. (Self-advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), 1991)

Wehmeyer (2007) describes self-determination as having a level of control over the things in life that are most important to a person. Training on self-determination has to consider both the capacities of persons with disabilities to exercise control in life decisions (skills, knowledge, and attitudes and beliefs) and of the environments where they spend time (family, community, residential and employment programmes (Konrad *et al.*, 2007)). More recently, the concept of self-determination in relation to individuals with intellectual disabilities also includes a broader concept as discussed by Finn *et al.* (2008), which emphasises that self-determination also includes the choice to not be self-determined. This resonates with some views expressed by disability pride movements who feel that it is their right to be included but just like every minority it is also their right to choose to have separate provisions (European Disability Forum Conference, 2014).

Some examples of self-determination training include how to make appropriate choices and decisions, assistance in noticing opportunities to make personal choices, exposure to self-determined role models and positive reinforcement for taking control of personal decisions (Getzel and Thoma, 2006). It is believed that the consistent provision of environmental supports at home, at work/ school, and in the community will help people with disabilities develop the skills, knowledge and personal attitudes typically associated with self-determination, and will also compensate for skill deficits in the interim without eliminating opportunities for self-determination (Izzo and Lamb, 2002). Simply put, while self-determination means having the awareness of what is best for oneself, self-advocacy means being able to efficiently share this information with others.

This literature review has suggested that educational programmes for students with intellectual disabilities would not be as effective unless they contained strong elements of self-advocacy and self-determination skills training. Although these skills can be taught in a classroom, the experiential element fundamental to the acquisition of these skills cannot be underestimated; therefore, the role of other support professionals working in FE comes into the picture.

If education is to be truly student-centred and inclusive and if students' preferences, needs and interests are to be catered for through a life skills approach then the educational system needs to provide it (Lea *et al.,* 2003). Bouck (2010) suggests that teachers have to make sure that transition planning places due importance on the need for life skills training and, on a more practical level, they have to find creative ways to incorporate the teaching of functional life skills in the academic curricula.

The evaluation of available life skills education programmes in Europe is severely lacking and without adequate empirical evidence there are few chances to guide practice or to provide true comparisons between courses that offer life skills as opposed to those which are mostly academic.

With the current demand for a knowledge-based workforce, and increasing efforts by governments to push for better academic levels, one may be excused for thinking that students with intellectual disabilities must also be supported to reach their maximum potential both in life skills and academic skills.

This section gave an overview of some current arguments on post-secondary education for students with disabilities while the next section will now look at the factors affecting the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in FE as identified in the literature review. These are divided into three core themes namely institutional, socio-cultural and psychological factors and relate to research questions four and five.

2.6 Factors Affecting Inclusion in Further Education

Even with all the research and policy pushing for equality in FE access, the path to post-secondary inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities is still beset with many barriers. These barriers differ between and within countries and across a multitude of variables; however, according to this literature review people with intellectual disabilities seem to have common experiences regardless of their nationality. Section 2.2 cites literature that identifies barriers due to a lack of universal definition of intellectual disability and the use of psychometric reports and IQ testing for establishing student learning needs.

This section will explore other barriers and areas of concern faced by students with intellectual disabilities when accessing FE. Furthermore, it also shows the possible correlation between institutional barriers, socio-cultural factors and the psychological effects experienced by students with intellectual disabilities. The following table highlights the three main core themes and sub-themes emerging from the literature.

Institutional Factors	**Socio-cultural Factors**	**Psycho-emotional Factors**
Transition Support Pedagogy, curricula and the educator Lack of evaluation Information Financial	Ableism Peer interactions Stigma and identity Paternalism and growing up	Fear Self-defeating Attitudes Psychopathology

Table 3 Main themes emerging from the literature

2.6.1 Institutional factors

Institutional factors that provide barriers to FE inclusion include the lack of financial resources, inadequate transition planning between compulsory education and FE, scant accessible pedagogy and support mechanisms, rigid entry requirements in FE institutions and lack of accessible information on both available FE options and accommodations available. Another institutional barrier is the requirement of disclosure of the disability to gain support provision and the expectation that students have the skills necessary to request and apply for accommodations. A lack of formal evaluation procedures of existing FE options is also seen to be lacking.

TRANSITION

Transition in this context refers to a change of status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming more adult roles. These include entering post-secondary education, employment, maintaining a home, becoming involved in the community at large and developing fulfilling personal relations. The transition process involves various institutions such as schools, adult service agencies and other natural community supports and should start at an early age with the full involvement of students (Stodden and Mruzek, 2010).

A systematic literature review by Cobb and Alwell (2007) explored the relationship between transition interventions and outcomes for students leaving secondary school and concluded that the importance of good student-centred transition planning is becoming even more essential for successful post-school outcomes. Etscheidt (2006) cites various cases that led to more awareness of the required matching between transition plans and Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). IEPs are required to include appropriate, measurable post-school goals based on assessments on education and training, employment and independent living skills (Cobb and Alwell, 2009; Thomas *et al.,* 2012). This results-oriented method highlights the importance of continuation from secondary school transition planning to post-secondary education and employment outcomes for all students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are meant to be provided with opportunities for transition planning in their final year of compulsory education; however, this is often not the case. Corby *et al,*. (2012) proclaim that adequate support for students with disabilities in FE starts from a good transition plan from secondary school. The need to provide transitional supports and collaboration between school and college is important to ensure that student needs are met effectively (Goode, 2007). This allows for preparation and an exploration of the various options for FE.

Ebersold *et al.* (2011), through a survey on European FE, show that transition to post-compulsory education is problematic for young people with disabilities in all European countries. The survey results show that they have much lower opportunities both in transition to post-secondary education and also in progressing and graduating within post-secondary education. Students with disabilities in Europe are less likely to enrol in professionally promising courses or to graduate, and they are more likely to drop out after the first year and to have erratic and longer pathways within higher education (ANED, 2010).

The ANED reports (2010) show that the challenges faced by young people with disabilities may be attributed to policies that pay too little attention to the transition between different education levels. This is perhaps due to the fact that very few European countries require secondary schools to include transition planning in student IEPs. A transition plan in a student's IEP is based on the individual's needs, strengths, skills and interests, and outlines their goals beyond upper secondary education, and the support and services required to meet those goals (OECD, 2011). In most European countries educational institutions fail to provide adequate guidance to students with disabilities during transition periods. There is also a lack of synergy between the various stakeholders involved in the education process due to compartmentalisation of responsibilities between the different education levels (ANED, 2011). Stodden and Mruzek (2010) report similar experiences of inadequate transition processes where students are not involved in decision-making during IEPs and that the information they are given is too difficult to understand or is incomplete. The latter could be due to either lack of knowledge or a filtering of the options to exclude the ones that the parents or educators think are unsuitable (Hetherington *et al.*, 2010).

In Malta, cultural factors may be having a significant effect on how transition is negotiated since the predominantly paternalistic nature of society places sole weighting on the opinions of the schools before those of parents (Camilleri, 2009). It may not be seen as socially-admissible for students to make choices at the age of 15 and 16 when they are finishing compulsory education in Malta and this is even more so when students have an intellectual disability.

Kohler and Field (2003) identified different areas where transition is failing and suggest five constructs that need to be adhered to when planning for transition. These are student-focused planning, interagency and interdisciplinary planning, family-involvement, programme structure and student development.

Student-focused planning refers to extensive research showing the essential participation of the student in planning for transition, for example by taking more active roles in IEPs (DeFur *et al.,* 2003; Martin *et al.,* 2004). Students with intellectual disabilities are often not truly involved in decision-making processes within schools and colleges. Martin *et al.* (2004) state that it is insufficient for students to just be physically present; one needs to make sure that information is accessible to the student and options for choice are presented in a manner that makes it possible for an informed choice to be made.

Interagency and interdisciplinary planning refers to increasing collaboration between vocational, special and general educators but also with post-school agencies, employment agencies, other professionals and service providers (Kohler and Field, 2003). This corroborates the results of the ANED reports

(2010) which identify the lack of communication between schools and colleges as one of the main barriers to accessing FE for students with disabilities. Kohler and Field (2003) believe that family involvement does not have to end at the compulsory school level but in the case of students with intellectual disabilities this needs to be extended to FE. They refer to different types of family involvement that colleges can organise: participation in ascribed roles, empowerment and training.

Providing a standard transition programme structure will make sure that all students are given high quality services which cater for different needs through a school-wide philosophy of inclusion and high expectations. Kohler and Field (2003) also suggest a clear mission statement and investment in high quality resources and highly qualified staff to deliver them.

Transition plans may be providing for the structural and material aspects of moving to FE; however, they lack reference to student development in regards to personal skills (Kohler and Field, 2003). Thomas *et al.* (2002) suggest that the teaching of self-determination and self-advocacy skills is important to help students with intellectual disabilities be more prepared for the transition to FE and these may be incorporated in the area of curriculum. Sitlington and Neubert (2004) also state that a barrier to adequate transition is a lack of guidelines on individual student needs and access arrangements both for assessment and accommodations. Kohler and Field (2003) agree that a clear statement of individual needs has to be included in the transition plan to ensure a successful and smooth transition to FE.

Martin *et al.* (2004) state that an adequate transition process contains elements of empowerment, which prepare students with intellectual disabilities for post-secondary education as a step towards assuming more adult roles. Such experiences are opportunities for self-determination and self-advocacy as students make decisions about education and desired post-school outcomes (Carter and Lunsford, 2005).

Access arrangements featured very widely in the literature as many students with disabilities named these as posing the strongest challenge to their FE experiences (O'Brien *et al.,* 2009; Hampton and Gosden, 2004). Problems with accessing and managing support were cited as being due in part to the lack of ongoing support during transition (Barnard-Brak *et al.*, 2010). In Malta, despite recent advancements in the field of inclusive education, most of the FEHE institutions still insist on a 'one size fits all' mentality where equality is literally transposed in equal provision (Borg, 2013). This may be similar to the provision in other countries where the expected level of academic and intra-personal attainment at post-secondary level takes precedence over the individual student's needs. Studies show that navigating the process of applying for support may be too difficult for some students (Quick *et al.*, 2003).

Unlike primary and secondary schools, where there is a more active role by the school to make sure students get the support needed, at post-secondary level students are expected to take a more affirmative approach and seek out the support themselves (Torkelson- Lynch and Gussel *et al., 2006*). Cert *et al.* (2008) noted that there is a change from an entitlement model at school to an eligibility model when a student enters post-school domains. This means that students with intellectual disabilities have to prove their disability and this may be a major challenge for various reasons. Buggie-Hunt (2007) reports that due to their inexperience, students with disabilities are not seeking out the support services available to them or seeking them out too late with many ending up not having access to any. Janiga and Costenbader (2002) maintain that this has sparked a lot of criticism directed at school staff due to inefficiency in providing information to students of services available.

The transition process involves negotiating support which needs disclosure by the student as well as provision of the required documentation as described in section 2.3. In the UK access arrangements for FE are guided by the Equality Act of 2010. This states that reasonable adjustments have to be made by education and training providers so that students with disabilities are not placed at a substantial disadvantage when compared to non-disabled students. Students are required to provide evidence of support needed in the form of a report from an educational psychologist or from previous school assessments (Corby *et al.,* 2012).

The Maltese educational system in some areas works in parallel with the system in the UK. The provision of psychological reports is mandatory for students requesting extra support when accessing Maltese FE institutions and this may cost anything from Euro 400 to Euro 800. Financial difficulties may therefore deter students from entering FE due to this added cost.

Ghirxi (2013), in a Maltese study on examination access arrangements, stated that some psychological reports were evidently written just for the student to be given extra support:

> Some psychological reports are more and more resembling shopping lists in which psychologists tend to list as much arrangements as possible, as long as the paying parent is happy. (Ghirxi, 2013, p. 9)

The use of psychometric testing for students with disabilities, although controversial, is generally required to inform therapy, pedagogy and support provision (Woods, 2007). Literature points towards the fact that psychological reports are still being used substantially to inform FE colleges' support arrangements for students with disabilities, despite the arguments as to the effectiveness or comprehensiveness of this practice (Sparks and Lovett, 2014).

Rogers (2012) argues that using the social model of disability to provide guidelines for inclusive practices within school is more useful than focusing on the disability attached to each student through psychometric testing. This lends itself more wholly to the adaptation of colleges and classrooms, and how curricula are designed, delivered and adapted to cater for the needs of all students, not just those with disabilities.

SUPPORT

One of the barriers to FE for students with intellectual disabilities identified in the literature is the lack of baseline supports in FE institutions (Shevlin *et al.*, 2004; Hart and Grigal, 2010; Gates, 2003). These may include accessible course material, assistive technology and support staff.

Studies by O'Brien *et al.* (2009) show that the most successful FE institutions catering for students with disabilities are those that offer a strong foundation of anticipated baseline support mechanisms. This is in line with the social model of disability through its investment in accessible environments for all that do not depend on individual criteria for the provision of such supports. Any additional accommodations required for very specific needs can be met on an *ad hoc* basis. Such baseline supports include easy-to-read materials and mentoring services that oversee the transition process with individual students (Gates, 2003).

From my involvement in the transition processes between compulsory and FE in Malta, the local situation of colleges is that the educational system, especially at post-secondary level, offers very limited baseline supports. This may be one of the excluding factors as prospective students see this as a deterrent and may feel that the adequate supports will take a long time to be put in place, which would leave them with inadequate support during the initial and possibly most challenging time of their college experience. Studies by Buggie-Hunt (2007) and Jung (2011) maintain that staff training and support mechanisms are imperative to a successful educational experience. To be truly competitive and employable, students with intellectual disabilities need to be given the opportunity to learn in educational systems that provide the best possible learning environment (Vickerman and Blundell, 2010). This is through various means including having support staff available for mentoring, using assistive technology and the more common examination arrangements such as an amanuensis and extra time.

Assistive technology may be one of the most innovative and versatile ways to help students with intellectual disabilities compensate for the difficulties they face academically. Rao *et al.* (2009) believe that multimedia software provides teaching staff with various creative means by which they can integrate curriculum with technology, especially with students with intellectual disabilities and specific learning difficulties. Technology is also known to appeal to students, which increases motivation and engagement in the learning process thereby improving academic performance. Educational theorists such as Fan and Orey (2011) believe that involving students in the construction of information technology (IT) and multimedia projects has the potential of enhancing problem-solving skills and increasing creativity and knowledge.

Various studies reviewed in this thesis placed emphasis on the importance of having adequate support mechanisms in place to aid students with intellectual disabilities in their transition, access and experience of FE (Johnson, 2006; Brown *et al.,* 2005). There are various professionals who may provide the support and tools needed and these include counsellors, mentors and academic staff. Studies by Hick (2005) and Pereira (2012) show that a lack of support staff for students with extra needs is detrimental to student retention rates. A multi-disciplinary team of professionals could be working within FE with a mentoring role of promoting an inclusive and accessible campus setting especially helping students to access and negotiate required accommodations (Pereira, 2012).

Mentoring is described by Brown and Roberts (2007, p. 2) as ‘a dynamic, reciprocal, long-term formal or informal relationship that focuses on personal and/ or professional development’. A mentor may be seen as a sounding board and guide who provides perspective, and sometimes helps in obtaining services or resources. Although there is a general lack of evidence-based research on the positive effects of mentoring students with intellectual disabilities at post-secondary level, some articles do point to a lowering of student drop-out rates when mentoring services were introduced (Brown *et al.,* 2005).

Johnson (2006) stresses the importance of counsellors in helping students with disabilities identify their unique needs and also in developing the appropriate coping, assertiveness and self–advocacy skills to help them deal effectively with life on campus.

As the needs of students with intellectual disabilities evolve over time and more experience of post-secondary inclusion is gained, various research is being published showing the need of a more multi-disciplinary support service within colleges and universities. It is becoming clearer that the roles of social workers, youth workers, psychologists (Hick, 2005) and occupational therapists (Pereira, 2012) have become a necessity to improve the experiences of students, especially students with disabilities.

PEDAGOGY, CURRICULA AND THE EDUCATOR

Various research studies (UNICEF Report, 1998) have shown that in the early years of inclusive education, teachers were reluctant to adopt differentiated teaching methods, including the adaptation of syllabuses and pedagogy, or to have learning support assistants (LSA) in their classrooms. This is reflected in a Maltese study by Bartolo (2010) on teacher education for inclusion which highlights teachers' reluctance to endorse inclusion. Although in recent years this situation has seen some positive changes, the next hurdle is definitely to have adequate inclusive options for students with disabilities in post-secondary education (ANED, 2010).

The different perspectives on intellectual disability may perhaps be considered as a reason for the limited FE options available to students. A primary concern for students with intellectual disabilities accessing FE is the expected level of academic and cognitive skill pertaining to that level of education (Corby *et al.,* 2012; Wagner *et al.*, 2005; Zafft *et al.,* 2004). This may, therefore, be a significant factor affecting the provision for these students, due to their general lower level of academic functioning and attained qualifications. Despite the overarching principles of inclusion guiding the management of schools, the students' experiences speak of oppressive environments and processes founded upon rigid and exclusionary ideas of academic competency and capabilities (Wilde and Sundaram, 2011; Cooper, 2014).

In section 2.5, I discuss two divergent ideas of what FE courses for students with intellectual disabilities should include. On the one hand, recent legislative changes have put pressure on European countries to tackle the rising level of illiteracy (EC Literacy Report, 2012) by placing emphasis on the teaching of key skills. This has had an effect on vocational programmes for students with intellectual disabilities, which had to reduce the life skills taught to make way for the teaching of formal academic skills (Bouck, 2010). This in turn could have had an effect on the flexibility in pedagogy and content promoted by life skills training. Life skills more naturally fit with a pedagogy that allows for student development, which is particularly important for students with intellectual disabilities in FE, and various researchers are in favour of returning to a stronger life skills content (Alwell and Cobb, 2009).

Thompson (2003) places great emphasis on the need for educators to be also trained in the correct pedagogy to be used with students with intellectual disabilities in FE. He makes reference to a ‘subversive, political praxis’ as a baseline of educational programmes for students with intellectual disabilities (Thompson, 2003, p. 67). This means that the teaching in itself has to cultivate in students the desire and ability to stand up for choice, power and control over their lives. This ‘hidden curriculum’ is a strategic tool that can be used to navigate more flexibly around the actual curriculum (Endow, 2012). Student empowerment can come from the correct pedagogy and learning outcomes adopted by FE institutions which need to include the teaching of soft skills such as self-determination and self-advocacy.

Swain and French (2012) refer to a more affirmative model of disability identity that challenges the assumption held by many that people with disability want to be ‘normal’. Pedagogy and educators are seen to be in a strategic position to promote this disability-affirmative agenda both with non-disabled staff and students, and more importantly with students with disabilities themselves. The assumption that people with disabilities want or should desire to be ‘independent, normal, and adjusted’ is yet another one of the immobilising expectations from society (Mason, 2002). ‘It is these expectations that cause unhappiness, rarely the impairment itself’ (French, 2008, p. 5).

These societal expectations may be transposed to actual barriers including those faced by students with intellectual disabilities as they transition to adolescence and adulthood, life stages that are synonymous with independence and social positionality. Further education is one of the cornerstones to achieve these aims; however, it is where students with intellectual disabilities are most notably absent (ANED, 2010).

The right pedagogy and curriculum is one that takes into consideration the needs of the individual student. It is the right of every student to be given the tools for self-determination and self-advocacy; however, it is perhaps even more crucial for students with intellectual disabilities to be taught these skills (Bouck, 2010; Alwell and Cobb, 2009). Thompson (2003) identifies the importance of having life skills programmes that address issues of self-esteem and assertiveness, knowing how to name and combat discrimination, and how to develop personal strategies to overcome barriers to access. Studies have also shown that even when life skills training is provided, the course content tends to veer away from subjects such as sex education which students with disabilities need perhaps more than their peers (Azzopardi Lane, 2009). Societal attitudes are perhaps one of the underlying factors influencing the reported lack of sex education for students with intellectual disabilities.

According to studies by Neville-Jan (2004) and Grieveo *et al.* (2006) the students with intellectual disabilities who had received some form of sex education, claimed that it was strictly biological. According to Mayers *et al.* (2003), this type of pedagogy led to feelings of confusion and insecurity for many students with intellectual disabilities who came to realise that their disability did not fit in with the biological teachings of human reproduction. Mayers *et al.* (2003) discuss the concept of sexual self-esteem and provide narratives from people with disabilities in their study who felt that growing up, they should have had information targeting their disability and how this would affect their sexual expression.

The ANED reports show that some of the challenges of FE inclusion may be attributed to a legal framework that tends to foster early tracking within compulsory education and this is seen to prematurely place students with intellectual disabilities in specific educational pathways that may hinder their access to mainstream post-secondary education. Alwell and Cobb (2009) state that the challenges faced by young people with disabilities may also be attributed to educational systems that, despite the progress made, fail in providing them with the skills required to progress beyond compulsory education and to become employable. In 80% of the ANED country reports statistics show that young people with disabilities do not access vocational training courses that enable them to meet the requirements of the labour market.

Another prominent finding of the ANED reports is that mainstream FE teachers are not adequately prepared to adapt their teaching practices to the needs of students with disabilities (Hart and Grigal, 2010). They may not be supported appropriately by assistant teachers or appropriate methodological tools. According to the ANED country reports, the supports needed by students with disabilities are not always allocated with sufficient human support time or do not allow for high quality education, especially for those with more severe impairments.

Solutions to overcome institutional barriers have been found for students with disabilities who need more time, special devices or adaptations for learning and examinations, and much good practice has been developed (Corby *et al.,* 2012); however, countries still face difficulties in developing educational systems that combine effectiveness and equity to meet the great diversity of educational needs and to ensure that curricula are relevant to each learner. Education is still provided, more or less, as 'a collective form of training, within a common curriculum at each age level' (Reindal, 2008, p. 43). This approach to education has always been challenged by diversity and only very few measures have been taken, mainly in the form of exceptional cases (ANED, 2010).

> Indeed, the whole parallel system of 'special' education has been developed precisely because diversity could not be accommodated within the regular system, especially at higher levels of education. (Bartolo, 2009, p. 3)

EVALUATION

The ANED survey shows that there is limited existing data that allows for comparison of the numbers of students with disabilities enrolled in FE and HE in Europe. This reflects a general lack of information on available evaluative practices and quality assurance measures on transition to and inclusion in post-secondary schools (Bouck, 2010).

The assessment and evaluation of educational programmes for students with intellectual disabilities both at secondary and post-secondary/ vocational levels is imperative both for public policy and educational practices. Harvey (2012) used a conceptual framework developed by Phelps and Wermuth (2007) to evaluate the effectiveness of educational practices used with students with disabilities. The key components include programme administration, curriculum and pedagogy, support services, communication and articulation, and employment experience placements and follow up.

Existing data provides information on the number of students with disabilities at the compulsory level, on their type of schooling and in some cases by gender or age (Ebersold *et al.*, 2011). This is not the case for FE as, according to the ANED reports (2010), most European countries do not have reliable and internationally comparable data to identify the situation of young people with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers in terms of FE access and learning outcomes. Ebersold *et al.* (2011) state that most countries in Europe are also unable to identify the pathways followed by young people with disabilities or the different factors favouring or hindering transition from one education level to another, and into work. Policy monitoring and evaluation is also impeded by a lack of data on the effectiveness of allocated resources (Ebersold *et al.*, 2011). The challenges faced by young people with disabilities may furthermore result from a lack of tools for planning and monitoring policies (ANED, 2010).

INFORMATION

Griffin *et al.* (2010) revealed that 73% of parent respondents identified lack of information from schools on post-secondary education options as being a primary barrier for FE. This lack of information is also cited by staff in FE and secondary schools. Gaumer *et al.* (2015) and Hart *et al.* (2006) present findings showing that FE option for students with intellectual disabilities have been increasing substantially in the US; however, many transition staff are not aware of what is available and are, therefore, ill-equipped to guide students in the right direction (Hart and Grigal, 2010b).

Hutcheon and Wolbring (2012) state that these barriers to successful FE are problematic, mainly because educational and social experiences shape students' beliefs, self-concept and identity. Kraus (2008) also maintains that they impact health and further opportunities. Kraus (2008) states that FE provides a means for students to be part of a knowledge society and to have the opportunity to inject their own perspectives but international studies have shown that students with intellectual disabilities are, for the most part, absent from these discourses. Kraus (2008) attributes this partly to the difficult language used in such discourse which reflects dominant knowledge.

Although Dwyer *et al.* (2010) show how many parents have insisted that FE education be included in their children's transition plan, studies have shown that there are often disagreements between parents and teachers on whether student should opt for continuing education. Griffin *et al.* (2010) found that parents were generally more inclined to want FE whereas teachers may be more sceptical.

Quick *et al.* (2003) report that although there has been a dramatic increase in students with disabilities entering FE, many of them fail to successfully complete their education. Various reasons have been suggested for this but the main one emerging from studies in the US is that students cite a lack of understanding by FE institutions and staff of their needs (Quick *et al.*, 2003).

FINANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The ANED country reports (Ebersold *et al.,* 2011) show that in Europe many countries still struggle to provide accessible FE options for financial reasons. One of the identified needs for a better inclusive educational system for European students with disabilities is a mobilisation of additional resources for schools (ANED, 2010). According to the ANED reports, added technical, financial and human resources are required in a bid to empower schools and higher education institutions to be accessible for all. Successful measures reported by some countries included using cross-financing between the various ministries involved in education, employment and welfare but also ministries for transport, built environments, and information and communication technologies. These may be mobilised for educational purposes and may be complemented by other supports and resources provided to young people with disabilities for daily living. In practice, however, many countries still have special school provisions for specific cohorts of students, notably those with intellectual disabilities (ANED, 2010).

These challenges underline how laws alone are insufficient to produce an effective commitment to 'education for all'. They also indicate the limits of inclusion in any system that seeks to include students with disabilities without the necessary changes to its organisation. Efforts towards inclusion in the mainstream are mainly made for those who 'fit' within the system as it stands. Riddell *et al.* (2005) suggest that a significant barrier in successful progression to and within FE for students with intellectual disabilities lies in a social misconception that equality is about treating everyone the same, which makes it difficult to provide and justify the cost-effectiveness of making adequate accommodations available according to individual need.

2.6.2 Socio-cultural factors

Institutional barriers highlighted in the previous section may be considered, for the most part, a result of the socio-cultural identity of a society and its institutions. Factors such as misconceptions of disability, ableism, the neoliberal agenda, stigma and paternalism all contribute to barriers in FE access as identified in the literature (Wolbring, 2008; McGaw *et al.,* 2007). Malta has a very distinct socio-cultural reality that stems from its geo-historical location. The Maltese identity is framed within a strong Catholic and traditional culture. Despite recent changes in laws that are decidedly liberal, the attitude of the individual and the community is still relatively conservative (Civil Union Law, Ch. 530, Laws of Malta, 2014; Gender Identity Act, Ch. 540, Laws of Malta, 2015). This section will review literature on what socio-cultural barriers affect access to FE for students with intellectual disabilities. These will then be compared to the results of the empirical study in this thesis.

ABLEISM

A main factor that affects the attitudes of family and society at large towards students with intellectual disabilities is ableism. Wolbring (2008) describes ableism as a set of practices and beliefs that assign inferior value (worth) to people who have developmental, emotional, physical or psychiatric disabilities. These beliefs form the foundation of many oppressive and discriminatory practices and are transposed in an environment that does not allow for dialogue or the active participation of people with intellectual disabilities in society (Cherney, 2011).

Corby *et al,* (2012) explain that students with intellectual disabilities, just like all other students, go through situations and life experiences that shape their character and attitudes and help form their identity. To a certain extent, one may argue that these personal attributes have a significant effect on an individual's life course. These life experiences are moulded through the socio-cultural environment and are, therefore, individual to the person. People with intellectual disabilities often voice frustration about the constraints placed on them by their family and society in general which removes them from natural peer settings and censors social realities in a bid to 'protect' them (McGaw *et al.*, 2007). Maltese authors and researchers such as Camilleri (2010), Callus (2009) and Azzopardi Lane (2012) maintain that the traditional and religious aspect of Maltese culture is a significant factor affecting exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities on a more general level. This specific nature of Malta’s cultural context is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Alongside the academic learning related to FE, a very important aspect of the experience for all students is the chance to further develop one’s identity through social interaction with peers and having an increased level of independence (Archer *et al.*, 2005). By the time students enter FE, they are expected to have already acquired certain personal and social skills inherent to that age group; however, it is often the case that students with intellectual disabilities may not yet have done so (Blomqvist *et al.*, 2005).

Research suggests that in many cases the young person with intellectual disabilities does not acquire the life skills obtainable in the child-adolescent transition (Skar and Tamm, 2001; Blomqvist *et al.,* 2005; Hartup, 2002). According to Hartup (2002) this may be due to various factors, namely overly protective attitudes of primary carers and a primary focus on academic achievement by educators. Lack of these life skills becomes more discernible and potentially harmful when young people with disabilities leave compulsory education and need to venture into to the world of work or FE, where the importance of such skills becomes more palpable (Blomqvist *et al.*, 2005).

THE NEO-LIBERAL AGENDA

Neoliberal and social democratic political systems are both in operation in the EU and are starting to be challenged in many sectors, including education (Mitchell, 2006). There is a marked shift in the EU from a more social democratic emphasis to a stronger belief system of neoliberal governmentality that is revealed in the current education and training policies and practices of the European Commission. A concrete example of this, according to Mitchell (2006), is the clear shift towards shaping Europe as the leading knowledge economy of the world translated in processes such as lifelong learning and freedom of mobility. In the EU projects and programmes of the past decade or so, one can clearly identify 'the production of a fast-paced, mobile and interchangeable labourer and the simultaneous exclusion of those considered slow, particularist and/or otherwise "different", who cannot or will not keep up with the recent changes' (Mitchell, 2006, p. 33).

Blacker (2013) also points out that this move to a more homogenous worker has shown that earlier efforts of social liberalism that embraced multiculturalism and diversity as beneficial to civil society and its development of an ethical identity, has been replaced with a market logic which has formed the basis of all educational ideologies and policies.

The weighting placed on mobilisation and self-empowerment through lifelong learning by the European Commission by default, has led to the growing exclusion of poorer members of society, such as people with intellectual disabilities (Larner and Craig, 2005). These changes, largely based on economic policies, are moreover broadly linked to discourses of privatisation of schools and colleges, which in turn give rise to competitiveness and individual entrepreneurialism. The pressures on colleges to churn out the 'ideal' worker places barriers to the accessibility of the same colleges for students who are perceived to have less potential to reach the required standard.

PEER INTERACTION

According to various theories such as the psychoanalytic (Mead, 1962; Blos, 1967) and the psychosocial (Hogan *et al.*, 2001) one of the primary tasks of adolescence is the development of an individual identity. The formation of an identity in adolescence essentially means becoming one's own person. Jeffs *et al.* (2000) explain how from birth the adolescent has been collecting various aspects of his or her personality through identifications with family and peers. These are internalised along with assimilated messages engrained in cultural and societal realities. All of these are integrated during adolescence, and form the foundation of one's character and basic identity throughout adult life (Jeffs *et al.*, 2000).

To achieve the task of identity formation outlined above, the individual has to go through a major transition, which involves moving away from the family as the centre of the young adolescent's life towards the peer group as the new locus of the young person's affections and interests. Erikson (1969) identified this developmental task as Separation-Individuation. This means that the peer group is extremely important to the early adolescent. Fine *et al.* (2007) describe how the peer group becomes the primary source of self-esteem, behaviour styles and decisions, appearance and interpersonal relationships, thus replacing the family as the previous source of affections and standards of behaviour so that they may evaluate them and decide whether or not to internalise them as their own. The new integrated set of standards will also include input from other sources gathered from the community and culture (Mead, 1934).

Young adolescents in this stage are, therefore, very self-involved out of necessity, and tend to pick friends that mirror themselves. This friend selection criterion may be the reason why many adolescents with disabilities report having few friends. In a study by Skar (2000) the social network of young persons with disabilities was compared with that of young people without disabilities and the results showed that the entire social network of children and adolescents with disabilities contained many adults and very few peer friends. In their research on the development of young people with disabilities, Spirito *et al.* (2001) found that the social network of young persons with disabilities barely contained peer contacts, let alone friends.

Pollock *et al.* (2007) maintain that to largely socialise solely with adults, as is the case for many children and adolescents with disabilities, can bring obstacles to the development of identity. From an interactional perspective, Mead (1962) describes how identity development takes place in different interplay situations with peers. For young people with disabilities, often surrounded by well-meaning parents or adults, this can mean that in different social situations the adolescent perceives him/herself in relation to adults and develops a dependence on adults, rather than the independence that is required among peers. Matheson *et al.,* (2007) found that in adolescence the constant presence of adults can be perceived as over-protectiveness and can hinder the adolescent's possibilities to make decisions of their own.

Children and adolescents without disabilities gain information from a variety of sources. This comes from their relations with peers at school, mainly during leisure activities. They can swap information and can experiment and share their experiences. They can also have free access to magazines and other literature on the internet and television, and in music and videos. Many young people with disabilities on the other hand, will be far more dependent on adults for what information they receive. Shuttleworth (2000) found that students with intellectual disabilities feel the lack of role models in the media and in everyday life.

STIGMA AND DISABILITY IDENTITY

Goffman (1963) offered a significant advancement in the concept of disability by moving away from a purely psychological concept. Various critics of his work, however, suggest that his theory was stagnant, limited to how stigma works in a society but not why (Eiesland, 1994). Later theorists suggested a range of ideas as to the reasons why stigma exists. Brown (2010) categorised these into three, namely an emotional process, a cognitive process and a way to exert social control. Wendell (1996) suggests that stigma arises from the discomfort of those who are able-bodied when faced with disability as it represents weakness or lack of control. Their own fears and failures are projected onto people with disabilities as they epitomise human fragility (Wendell, 1996). The new awareness of the origin of stigma helped to create ways to combat stigma by pushing for an agenda promoting positive disability identities spurred also by the new Disability Pride movements. Eiensland (1994) uses a social minority-group model to create a representation of people with disabilities as being resourceful, persistent and independent. Garland-Thomson (2009) uses Goffman's hierarchy of stigma labels as a tool to analyse and develop the notion of stigmatised individuals as active agents of change. She calls this process 'visual activism' and involves increasing visibility of the disabled body (Garland-Thomson, 2009). Campbell and Oliver (1996) were among the first disability studies scholars to recognise and use disability voice in an overt way to show that collective pressure in disability rights advocacy depends on the positive identities generated through the awareness of disability as social oppression.

Socio-cultural barriers may include stigmatising perceptions of FE institutions that including students with disabilities may reduce the institution's standard (Goode, 2007). Other professionals also seem to harbour ableist practices and this is seen by the lack of counselling facilities to support young people with disabilities with their transition to adulthood. Thompson (2003) asserts that people with intellectual disabilities are often described as

> perpetual infants who live in a state of grace, a permanent and holy innocence, but at the same time they may be viewed as a taint on our society, a threat to the intelligence of the nation, a danger to the gene pool. (Thompson, 2003, p. 34)

Socialisation agencies outside the family, such as school and community, play a big part in the development of students with intellectual disabilities. In many cases, however, it seems that the school system and other community services are replaying the 'family model' of over-protectiveness and rejection of the identity and sexuality of students with intellectual disabilities. These attitudes lead to a lack of privacy and a lack of opportunities for 'ordinary' leisure activities and meeting peers. Many times leisure settings are created by adults in the form of artificial and censored settings. In the literature review, Isaacson Kailes (2001) refers to this as 'false independence'.

Riddell *et al.* (2005) state that some believe that inclusion is about treating everyone the same which challenges the provision of support mechanisms. Taylor (2010) also discusses the notions of how educational inclusion can be socially misinterpreted and states this can lead to courses and programmes being closed down because students do not achieve their learning outcomes, instead of a concerted effort being made to provide new and creative ways to achieve.

Peters (2010) argues that

> despite predominant symbols and rituals which carry negative conceptions of disability, some people with ascribed disabilities choose to embrace their difference as a positive identity marker … This identity is often developed in spite of formidable barriers … (Peters, 2010, p. 231)

Much research is being done to examine how positive disability identity develops and the ways it can be sustained (Darling, 2010a) but I believe that education and exposure to disability-affirmative social norms is a key component of this. The lack therein of such disability-positive socio-cultural norms may be a factor that in itself stops individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families from pursuing FE due to self-defeatist notions of ability.

PATERNALISM AND GROWING UP

If our character is formed through our interactions and experiences during our formative years (Mead, 1963), young people with intellectual disabilities who are kept away from 'natural' peer settings and leisure activities will not acquire the socialisation and coping skills necessary to develop as an independent adult (Erikson, 1962). This time is even more crucial for students with intellectual disabilities because their impediment might make it even more difficult to understand the social cues that other children and/ or adolescents may pick up easily. This need for dialogue and education may be widely accepted; however, one needs to question whether this dialogue is limited to researchers and disability activists or whether it is accessible to the wider public, including those with cognitive impairments, because for change to take place, the communication networks need to reach everyone.

Studies by Skar and Barron (2005) suggest that young people with disabilities often lack control over their lives and have difficulties in developing their identity, which in turn leads to problems finding employment and forming intimate relationships and friendships, among other things. In a Maltese study by Camilleri (2007), it was widely reported by the young disabled students who participated in the research that they felt constrained when it came to going out and making friends and experiences. This situation is echoed in the words of people with disabilities internationally (World Sexuality and Learning Disability Conference, 2009). This conference focused on the importance of emotional and sexual education for people with intellectual disabilities and that this encompasses access to the psychological, social and cultural contexts and supports which acknowledge, nurture and promote emotional and sexual development in general.

Mead (1967) identified another important step in transitioning from child to adolescent and that is the capacity to form intimate relationships. This featured strongly in the literature as one of the barriers faced by students in FE and stems from overly-protective social attitudes. The FE experience for most students includes forming relationships with peers and these include intimate relationships, which for students with intellectual disabilities may prove to be a significant challenge. Many people with intellectual disabilities are kept away from talk of disability, relationships or sexuality as this may be seen as ‘inappropriate’, reflecting a socially assigned virtuousness (Callus, 2009).

Due to the notion that they exist in perpetual childhood, it is common for people with intellectual disabilities to be thought of as asexual even when they are physically mature (Bernert, 2011). The wide range of factors – experiences, beliefs, myths, values, understandings and misunderstandings – that form our views of sexuality and of the place of sexuality in the lives of students with intellectual disabilities can lead to a confusing and often contradictory range of ways of responding to their emerging and developing sexuality in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This can extend from denial to acceptance, from embarrassment to celebration, from putting up with to intrusion upon. Over-protectiveness of parents and staff is generally due to a fear of abuse. The threat of unwanted pregnancies also has bearing on the attitudes of parents and carers, especially in cultures with a strong religious influence such as Malta (Camilleri, 2009; Casha, 2008; Azzopardi Lane, 2012).

Lofgren-Martenson (2004) declares that information about relationships and sex is generally censored due to a variety of factors, amongst which are notions of asexuality and inherent innocence. Studies show that people with disabilities voice a general dissatisfaction with the limited opportunities offered by schools and educational settings regarding the availability of sexuality education and discourse on relationship issues (Lofgren-Martenson, 2004; Bernert, 2011). Research on sexuality and disability in Malta also shows that social messages make people with disabilities feel asexual and inadequate which in turn reinforced low self-esteem and self-confidence (Casha, 2009). Azzopardi Lane (2012) also researched sexuality and disability in Malta and found that many people with intellectual disability feel they are excluded from discourse on sexuality. Azzopardi Lane and Callus (2014) found that some people with intellectual disabilities accede to the sexual norms ascribed to them by society while others reject and resist them.

Thomas (2012) suggests that barriers to inclusion may stem from society's attribution of difficulty in learning to persistent stereotypes of students' inability rather than an inadequate learning environment. These stereotypes may be internalised by the students themselves which causes feelings of discomfort, alienation, anomie, fear, hostility and mistrust. Thomas (2012) describes how these could lead to a 'closure in learning' with students losing self-confidence and interest in their learning process. The literature on psychological barriers to inclusive education will be reviewed in the following section.

2.6.3 Psychological factors

The effects of socio-cultural barriers often have negative psychological consequences on young people with intellectual disabilities. These include fear, self-defeating attitudes and behaviours, and in some cases to the development of mental health concerns (Erten, 2011). These psychological effects become barriers in themselves and may stop students with intellectual disabilities from accessing FE or from being successful participants. Barnard-Brak *et al.* (2011) reported that during transition planning a significant number of students with intellectual disabilities reported lack of confidence, previously acquired fears due to bad experiences and unwillingness to disclose their disability.

FEAR

According to a study by LDPride (2000), fear and shame are two of the most common emotional difficulties reported by people with intellectual disabilities. Negative school experiences acquired in primary and secondary schools often result in feelings of shame and fear of judgement, failure and rejection (Raskauskas and Modell, 2011).

Studies on the experiences of students with disabilities at school show that an overwhelming number state that mistreatment, bullying and exclusion remained a very common problem (Broer *et al.*, 2005; Corby *et al.,* 2012). This may result in fear of furthering education (Buggie-Hunt, 2007; Barnard-Brak, 2010). Furthermore, those students who do manage to access FE have to disclose their disability in order to get the support required (Denhart, 2008).

In a study by Johnson (2006), students with less visible disabilities expressed the wish to enter college with a new identity that is at odds with a disability 'label'. However, this is difficult to negotiate due to the requirement of disclosure to apply for extra support and access arrangements. Torkelson-Lynch and Gussel (2006) argue that the disclosure required to gain the necessary support in post-secondary education often puts a label on students. Johnson (2006) asserts that some students might resent this 'forced' disclosure due to fears of anticipated attitudes of faculty, staff and other students.

Disclosure, however, means different things to different people. Some may find disclosure therapeutic whereas others may be less inclined to be open (Fink, 2014). Braithwaite (1991) describes how inherent to the fear of disclosure of one's disability is self-perception based upon internalised notions of the disability. Other components that shape an individual's perception of disclosure are their relationships with other non-disabled peers, the significance of disclosure in a particular situation and the response of the other person (Braithwaite, 1991).

Despite the challenge of disclosure, a study by Barnard-Brak *et al.* (2011) found that students with disability develop strategies to manage and meet their academic needs when asking for academic accommodations and these include downplaying their disability and scripting disclosure of disability.

Fear sometimes leads some students with intellectual disabilities to engage in inappropriate and challenging behaviours to conceal their fear and to keep away 'bullies' (Martz *et al.,* 2000). This may lead to disciplinary action being taken by the college against them that may threaten their enrolment (Lewis *et al.*, 2010).

SELF-DEFEATIST ATTITUDES

The literature shows that young people with intellectual disabilities show markedly low self-esteem in various areas of their lives, including academic and social ability (May and Stone, 2010). Literature on how students with intellectual disabilities in FE view themselves in relation to their peers shows that there is a prevailing feeling of hopelessness and lack of belief in learning ability (Denhart, 2008). This is also reflected in studies on the views of FE staff (Cook *et al.,* 2007) and the general student population (May and Stone, 2010). Negative self-perceptions and low expectations from society may affect students' self-confidence and resilience which may prove to be significant barriers to successful FE experiences (Hen and Goroshit, 2012). However, an Israeli study by Idan and Margalit (2012) indicates that some students with intellectual disabilities have developed a positive disability identity and emphasised the role of hope as a tool for academic self-efficacy. This may reflect a cultural difference that affects self-perceptions of disability in relation to academic achievement. This is an example of how particular countries differ in the socio-cultural importance placed on the meaning of success, which in turn affects the assimilation of different types of disability identities and their resulting attitudes. This is explained in Darling's (2010) typology of disability identities in the next paragraph.

Parents and other caregivers have a primary role in preparing students with intellectual disabilities for FE; however, they are themselves subject to socio-cultural influences about disability. Darling (2003) developed a typology of how parents of children with disabilities adapt and assimilate types of behaviours and attitudes related to their identity in terms of their child's disability. The author called upon theories such as Merton's Anomie (Merton, 1957) to explain the bases of these types of adaptations, focusing mostly on the premise that most people desire the same goals in life. Although Darling's study related to parents, she showed how these adaptations are also reflected in people with disabilities themselves in another study in 2010.

People with disabilities are also subject to the majority culture and norms and therefore aspire to the same goals of ‘normalisation’ (Foucault, 1980a). For people with disabilities and their families, the aspiration to be part of the majority culture is very difficult due to a variety of physical, social and cultural barriers. Included in normalisation is having access to appropriate educational placement, employment for one or both parents, adequate financial resources, recreational facilities and relationships with friends and relatives.

The absence of such a lifestyle moves some parents of children with disabilities to engage in ‘crusadeships’ to achieve rights and opportunities for their children (Darling, 2010). These parents typically work with others and belong to organised advocacy groups which form part of a larger subculture. Most parents on crusadeships maintained the adaptation only in so long as they achieved some degree of normalisation.

In most, if not all, of the cases studied by Darling (2010), most parents except the ‘altruists’ chose to identify with the majority culture rather than the disability subculture to avoid social stigma. Goffman (1963) and many others have shown that people with visible disabilities have a discredited status in society and as a result many have tried to conceal their disability in favour of a more ‘acceptable’ identity.

Finally, Darling (2010) discussed the families who have neither access to opportunities for normalisation nor access to the disability subculture. These include families living in isolation, those who were illiterate and those who were too preoccupied with other problems such as poverty to focus on their child's disability. This 'resignation' adaptation is generally more conspicuous in the least powerful sections of society. Comparatively, the 'resignation' adaptation in Darling's work echoes the 'retreating' model suggested by Nash and Nash (1981) where the deaf person fails at normalisation and also rejects the deaf culture.

Although the social stigma model is gradually being replaced by a Disability Pride model (Linton *et al.,* 1998) in Western countries, some people with disabilities and their families have no or limited access to the discourse or services offered by advocacy groups and other entities with the right type of information. Darling (1979) states that these families are either resigned or unaware, and she lists people with intellectual disabilities as being a significant part of this identity. The resignation type described by Darling (1979) is associated with the adoption of destructive behaviour as coping mechanisms.

Substance abuse has been linked to experiences of disability and social isolation (Chaplin *et al.,* 2011). Students with intellectual disabilities, especially when they are in peer-dominated settings such as FE, may tend to indulge in substance misuse to appear more ‘normal’ (Carroll Chapman and Wu, 2012). Some students with disabilities may indulge in dangerous promiscuous behaviour to try to counteract the label of asexuality imposed on them by society (Lockhart *et al.,* 2010). Promiscuity may also be a way to increase self-esteem or to decrease loneliness (Hassouneh-Phillips and Mcneff, 2005). One important addition to this is that in some cases students with intellectual disabilities, especially women with low sexual self-esteem, will form relationships with unsuitable partners because they believe that they do not deserve better (Linton and Rueda, 2015).

Although disability activists (Disability Pride, 2014) adhere to the new model of disability identity, Darling (2010), in a more recent study on typologies of disability identity, maintains that the actual identities of people with disabilities remain an empirical question. It may be the case that many people who are not part of recent social movements may continue to accept older views of disability. This may be a reflection of the situation in Malta where a significant section of society is shut out from discourses on disability pride and identity due to the sheer difficulty of the language used. The empirical study in this thesis will seek out answers to whether disability identity in Malta is a determining factor in the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in FE.

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

The literature review has revealed a correlation between psychopathology and intellectual disability, often referred to as dual diagnosis (Joshi *et al.*, 2010). The term dual diagnosis is generally associated with co-morbid psychopathology and substance abuse; however, it is increasing being used to also describe a person with intellectual disabilities who is also diagnosed with some form of psychiatric disorder (Blacher and McIntyre, 2006). Reiss (2011) states that life history and environment are strong factors that may affect mental health and adds that prolonged exposure to negative social situations has been linked to the development of certain psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, avoidance and affective disorders.

The increased prevalence of psychiatric co-morbidity in people with intellectual disabilities is well documented (Joshi *et al.,* 2010; Vedi and Bernard, 2012; McGee and Glick, 1998; Lugnegard *et al.,* 2011). Einfeld *et al.,* (2011) conducted a systematic review on psychiatric disorders in children and young people with learning disabilities and cited a prevalence rate of 30-50% compared to 8-18% for typically developing peers. The main difference between intellectual disabilities and psychiatric disorders is that the onset of the former is in the very early developmental period while the latter generally manifests itself in later years and adolescence (DSM V, 2013).

Research considers that the high prevalence rate suggests a correlation between the biochemical and structural abnormalities in the brain which may be inherited (Hen and Goroshit, 2012; Vedi and Bernard, 2012) and this is present in psychosis and impulsive and challenging behaviour. It is, however, important to note that the most common prevailing mental health issues in people with intellectual disabilities are anxiety disorders and affective disorders (Matson and Shoemaker, 2011). This suggests that there may be a strong link with personal experiences (Joshi *et al.*, 2010). Emerson and Hatton (2007) demonstrated that children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities are at more risk of social disadvantage which in turn is strongly associated with a higher risk of mental health issues.

Reiss (2011) studied the treatment options for people with intellectual disabilities and co-morbid psychopathology and found great lacunas in the availability of services. The main problem is that there is a clear separation between services for people with disabilities and those with mental health difficulties. Research by Reiss (2011) shows that the ‘diagnosis’ of intellectual disability generally always overshadows the one for the psychiatric condition, even though the latter may be more debilitating for the individual. Furthermore, the stigma associated with psychopathology is sometimes enough to stop people from seeking support services or even treatment (McDougle *et al.*, 2003).

Therapies such as counselling, psychotherapy and cognitive therapies have been found to be very effective as part of a complete treatment programme but many practitioners have been slow to adapt their practice to people with intellectual disabilities. McDougle *et al.,* (2003) state that these therapies are mostly reliant on the individual's intellectual functioning, such as reasoning and self-reflective practice, which may be challenging for people with cognitive or communication impairment. This means that young people with intellectual disabilities may not find adequate support to help them in accessing and fully participating in FE.

In conclusion, this section has shown how psychological barriers may originate from experiences of a socio-cultural nature and in turn may hinder the success of students with intellectual disabilities in navigating their entry and participation in FE. The main theme identified in the literature was fear of being mistreated which may result in non-disclosure of disability and hence inadequate support provision. Another barrier was the self-defeatist attitudes that are internalised by people with disabilities as part of their identity. These socially-assigned failings include a meagre outlook on their abilities and their worth leading to a 'resignation model' of disability identity (Darling, 2010). Finally, the literature review suggested that barriers to accessing FE could both result in mental health difficulties and in the students themselves being a barrier to FE.

2.7 Benefits of Inclusive Further Education

The benefits of continuing education beyond compulsory age have been widely documented and can be roughly categorized in three areas namely institutional benefits, socio-cultural and psycho-emotional benefits. The literature pertaining to each of these areas is included in the next sections.

2.7.1 Institutional benefits

Various studies have shown the inherent benefits of post-secondary education (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2003; Marcotte *et al.,* 2005; Prince and Jenkins, 2005) and these include higher wages and more job opportunities. Newman (2005) states that now the world economy is becoming more knowledge-based, achieving a post-secondary education has become critical. Braddock (1999) describes projections for the next decade which suggest the strongest job growth will be in those occupations achieved through post-secondary qualifications. This tallies with European data which show that job opportunities in sectors such as financial services, IT and the service industry are in demand but require a higher level of education (EUROSTAT, 2012). Studies by Carnevale and Fry (2000) as well as Day and Newburger (2002) in the US clearly portray the fact that the past 30 years have shown an increase in the gap between educational attainment and earnings. In 1975 those with an advanced degree earned 1.8 times as much as a high school graduate; however, this increased to 2.6 times as much by 2000 (Day and Newburger, 2002). European agencies are pushing for more young people to remain in education until they achieve a recognisable qualification that could translate into employment opportunities to target the significantly high unemployment rates (Europe, 2020). Increasing investment in inclusive practices in FE for students with disabilities helps member states adhere to legislative forces and maintain a high standard of service expected within the EU as well as on the global human rights level.

The global human rights agenda states that the benefits of inclusion have a wider remit than for the individual and this is reflected in studies claiming a campus-wide positive effect of inclusion. Having an inclusive agenda engrained in the school culture is positive for the staff and student body as exposure to diversity is in itself a learning opportunity and widens the scope of the institution's social and human agenda (EADSNE, 2010).

Carroll *et al*. (2009) studied the impact of a project where student teachers were taught alongside peers with intellectual disabilities and the results showed that the student teachers were positively affected and felt that the experience taught them that students with intellectual disabilities are capable of following an academic programme given the right tools and support. This project experience led some of the student teachers to seriously consider choosing special education as a specialism (Carroll *et al.*, 2009).

Black and Roberts (2009) evaluated a pilot project in Northern Ireland that involved the recruitment of people with intellectual disabilities as trainers for staff working in learning disability services. The evaluation identified that the project was mutually beneficial and provided the trainees with highly valuable insights into the abilities and needs of people with intellectual disabilities. Although this project was not based in a college setting, the findings show that there is added value in giving students with intellectual disabilities access to FE, not solely as passive recipients of course material but as active participant in raising awareness of disability as an important part of human diversity within campus culture (Black and Roberts, 2009). Owen *et al.*, (2004) also researched the development of a training role for people with intellectual disabilities and found that the benefits to the organisation justify the challenge of the planning and organisation required.

If FE institutions choose to invest in inclusive practices through provision of good general baseline support for students with disabilities (Shevlin *et al.*, 2004; Hart and Grigal, 2010; Gates, 2003), the whole student body will benefit from added access. This may result in better FE experiences, thereby improving post-school outcomes. Despite the neo-liberal agenda that pervades from global economic structures down into the grassroots of FE institutions, the human rights agenda for inclusion provides a counteractive force (EADSNE, 2010).

2.7.2 Socio-cultural benefits

Myriad studies have vouched for the positive effects of post-secondary inclusion on students with disabilities and this is extended to staff and other students. Corby *et al.,* (2012) argue that the case for inclusion has to include the fact that there are many benefits for all rather than just the students with disabilities.

The University of Alberta developed a third level programme for students with intellectual disabilities. Outcomes from an evaluative study by McDonald *et al.* (1997) revealed outcomes for students included higher self-esteem and confidence, defined and improved employment aspirations and better relationships with peers. Grantley (2000) reported similar outcomes from a University in South Australia where students with intellectual disabilities attended a full-time course but one day a week joined students in other audit mainstream courses. The study reported that students in the study modelled their social behaviour on that of other general-population students.

According to the EU Agency on Vocational Education (CEDEFOP, 2012), one of the main aims for FE is to increase chances of employment through a focus on attainment of vocational learning outcomes. Evidence suggests that people with intellectual disability aspire to work for the same reasons as people without disability; they enjoy working in actual paid jobs in the community (Bray, 2003). The quality of life of individuals with jobs in the community have been shown to be significantly higher (Kraemer *et al*., 2003; Winer, 2000). People with intellectual disabilities have also been shown to indicate higher levels of employment satisfaction than those with other disabilities (Fesko *et al.,* 2004), thus suggesting the possible heightened importance of work for this population.

Hart and Grigal (2010) suggest that having inclusive post-secondary options reflects a belief in the individual and ensures no one is excluded. Increasing employment options for people with intellectual disabilities also has a positive effect on an economy through reduced dependency on social welfare and commitment to tax contributions.

2.7.3 Psycho-emotional benefits

The long-term benefits of pursuing FE are multi-faceted and literature shows that people with intellectual disabilities believe that it would help them find work and make friends (Shah, 2007).

Blumberg *et al.* (2008) emphasise that being part of the FE system and attaining relevant qualifications increases opportunities for students with disabilities, both for future employment and earning potential. Competitive employment has been found to illicit greater psychological well-being and higher life satisfaction compared to unemployment in study participants with intellectual disabilities (Salhever, 2004). In addition, people in competitive employment have reported greater feelings of control and competence, compared with those who are unemployed or in sheltered employment (Winer, 2004). McConkey and Mezza (2001) found that people with intellectual disabilities believed that the main benefits of paid work for this population are increased self-esteem, independence and confidence.

O'Brien *et al*. (2009) describe how further education opportunities provide academic and practical skills and competences; however, they also give learners the opportunity to discover themselves and their place in the world. It also gives the experience of networking and making friendships and contacts that may help with employment opportunities (Grigal *et al.,* 2011; Harvey, 2012). As the global economy becomes even more knowledge-based, and with European pressure to reduce ESL and unemployment, one would be justified in thinking that more efforts would be made to help those minorities who still struggle in accessing FE.

The literature seems to be more focused on the institutional and socio-cultural benefits with less emphasis on the benefits pertaining to the individual. This may be due to the lack of research that includes direct feedback from people with intellectual disabilities themselves (ANED, 2010). The benefits of FE on the individual and on society more generally are well documented but the representation of students with intellectual disabilities in European statistics is still very low. Recommendations by European agencies for country-based empirical research to establish barriers to FE access may cast some light on possible cultural factors at play.

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review highlights studies on inclusive FE from countries with somewhat different cultural realities. Culture is what determines how systems are created and maintained in societies and, therefore, it is also what establishes the differences in the same systems; a clear example is educational systems.

The literature search revealed myriad studies on the different legislative changes in Europe and at country levels; however, studies on the effect of these laws and policies in practice is sorely lacking. There was also a scarcity of studies that dealt specifically with FE and students with intellectual disabilities as opposed to disability in general. This is very relevant since statistics show that these are the people who struggle most when it comes to educational attainment, employment and overall quality of life (ANED, 2010).

This chapter has looked at the recent history of inclusive FE for students with disabilities. The importance of definition when it comes to terminology was highlighted. An overview of some of the main debates still surrounding inclusion were discussed, and these included whether students with intellectual disabilities should be taught in mainstream or separate environments and whether educational programmes should be based on academic skills or life skills. Significant importance in the literature was given to the inclusion of self-determination and self-advocacy skills in educational programmes for students with intellectual disabilities at post-secondary level.

A large part of the literature review included the identification of barriers to accessing and participating in FE. These were divided into three themes, namely institutional barriers, socio-cultural barriers and psychological barriers. Each of these main themes was then divided into sub-themes; however, it was clear that significantly less research has been carried out on the barriers pertaining to the individual's psychological disposition to FE and the factors that play a part in this.

Current research in this area highlights the related debates about exclusionary forces in FE inclusion. These include the neoliberal marketisation of education, disability discourses including traditional paradigms on disability, notions of success and difference, and the inaccessible language surrounding disability discourse. Within FE, the curriculum has been shown to be a powerful force in including or excluding students, as have educator and administrations' attitudes, values, beliefs and knowledge; problems with lack of funding and resources; student bullying; and the inappropriate use of learning support assistants. As reported in this literature review, many of these factors are unquestioned and accepted as the way things are done, which reflects a form of ableism in the tradition and culture of many FE institutions.

These ableist attitudes in colleges are a reflection of attitudes found in many societies. Studies showed that frequently the experiences of students with intellectual disabilities are limited when it comes to opportunities to develop self-determination and independence. This is often due to restricted relationships that are characterised by dependency upon others. A lack of peer contact denies young students with intellectual disabilities exposure to popular youth culture which further demarcates their difference from their peers. This exclusion from social development results in a lack of experience and of the sexual script available to their peers. These experiences, or lack of them, put young people with intellectual disabilities at a disadvantage and lead to an even more pronounced demarcation of difference from peers. This may lead to internalised negative self-defeating attitudes and beliefs which in turn affect learning. The worrying issue of co-morbid psychopathology was also given its due importance because of the serious and often neglected issues associated with these challenges.

The literature review also highlighted the benefits of inclusion and gave a detailed picture of those mentioned in the articles found in the literature search including, most notably, economic benefits due to improved post-school outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities.

The literature review has given a clear picture of where the gaps lie when it comes to the subject of inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities at the FE level. There are wide claims on the importance of the recently enacted legislation governing this area but there are few empirical data to support claims for success. There is strong criticism that policies are not being transposed into actions. Although the case for inclusive education can be considered within legislative contexts and arguments of benefits and best practice, it is most often the practical application that provides the most challenges and that is where more empirical data are required.

Inclusive education for students with disabilities in Malta has definitely followed developments made in other countries, with primary and secondary education being provided in mainstream environments. It is, however, to a much lesser extent the case for FE settings. This thesis will seek to explore this phenomenon and offer some possible explanations.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design

> Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's lived experience, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them. (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p 10)

3.1 Introduction

The literature review has shown that students with intellectual disabilities still feature in very limited numbers in FE worldwide and while significant strides have been made in legislation and policy to enhance inclusive education in schools, the transposition into practice is problematic. The forces at play with the practical implementation of inclusive strategies are subject to socio-cultural influences, and therefore research has to be done in different locations to identify factors particular to the region. It is for this reason that an empirical study, based on interpretivist research tenets, will be done in Malta to explore the experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities when accessing and participating in FE. I hope, in doing this, to contribute to the multi-faceted picture of the emergence of inclusive education, both in a European context and globally.

This chapter will strive to knit together some of the most important elements in a research study including rationale, questions, methodology and methods. Following a thorough examination of the different research methodologies, I identified the methods best suited for satisfying the aims of the research questions, while also taking into consideration ethical principles governing disability research at this time. My original research questions were amended following my literature review and now read as follows:

1. What type of transition process is used in Malta to support students with intellectual disabilities to move into FE?
2. Do people with intellectual disabilities in Malta consider FE as having benefits for them and why?
3. Are students with intellectual disabilities aware of the further education and support options for them?
4. What are the factors that influence successful FE experiences for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta?
5. What are the barriers faced by students with intellectual disabilities when accessing further education in Malta?

The aim is for the research questions to be answered by people with intellectual disabilities to establish their subjective experiences in relation to inclusive FE in Malta. During the first focus groups feedback was given to amend the original set of questions to make them more easily answered and understood by participants. The reason for rearranging the research questions, therefore, was that I wanted all of the questions to be more accessible to the research participants.

The focus of this chapter is on the research design, including methodologies and methods employed to carry out the fieldwork. The data will be analysed using a constant comparative method (Miles and Huberman, 1994) followed by a method of network analysis (Bliss *et al*., 1983) where the most salient themes are identified by examining the narrative collected. The aim of network analysis, which is sometimes referred to as systemic network analysis, is to portray how ideas and themes relate to one another using a diagrammatical representation such as a tree diagram.

Direct research with people with intellectual disabilities comprises the qualitative component and is in harmony with inclusive learning disability research principles that I use as guidelines in my study (Walmsley, 2014). These research paradigms stem from earlier works on emancipatory disability research and the social model of disability (Oliver, 1995; Barnes, 2001). This is not to say that any claim can be made that the research is fully emancipatory or inclusive; however, effort was made to adhere as much as possible to the principles of this research ethic.

In the following sections an explanation of the flexible design approach is provided. In this context flexible design , as opposed to fixed design, refers to a qualitative methodology which allows for more freedom during the data collection process. One reason for using a flexible design method is that the variable of interest is not quantitatively measurable, such as culture. This chapter also discusses the process of research and focuses on the ethical aspects. An explanation of the different data collection methods – namely participant observation, focus groups and interviews – is given as well as an overview of the different stages of the research process, such as the planning, implementation and evaluation.

3.2 The Research Paradigm

Parahoo (1997) describes the research process as the tasks and actions carried out by the researcher in order to find answers to the research question. These are influenced by the thinking process, ethical and theoretical stance and assumptions made by the researcher. Depoy and Gitlin (1998) maintain that the first step to an effective research process is identifying the philosophical foundations of the study.

Although due consideration was given to both positivist and interpretivist paradigms, the latter was chosen as the foundation of this research. The use of an interpretivist approach rests on the value on the subjectivity of social realities; therefore, research based on interpretivist thinking includes getting the viewpoints of the individual. Lewis and Porter (2006) reported on the importance of involving the voice of students in research and focused primarily on students with intellectual disabilities. They argue for the collection of direct narratives and the involvement of students with intellectual disabilities as active participants in the research. All too often people with intellectual disabilities lack the opportunities to voice their thoughts and it is the scope of inclusive research methods and certainly the scope of this research to offer an alternative to that, albeit unintentional, exclusive research stance. This study aims to provide insight into the lives of students with intellectual disability through their narratives, so having the flexibility afforded by the qualitative and flexible nature of interpretivist design frames was crucial.

Flexible designs place importance on the individual experiences as stated by the same individual (Gorard, 2013). In this design, subjectivity is seen as having the most value and lends itself more to the purpose of describing and theorising on an issue. Flexible design methods are generally semi-structured or even unstructured with a base of holistic perspective and inductive reasoning (Elliott and Lukes, 2008).

Thomas (2009) states that interpretivist approaches in research are much more orientated to understanding human nature and the researchers tend to get close to the research participants. It can provide vital information on attitudes and satisfaction and this kind of information can then be used to improve social situations (Hustler, cited in Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Some interpretivist researchers also take a social constructivist approach and focus on 'the social, collaborative process of bringing about meaning and knowledge' (Kell in Allen, 2004, p. 45).

I use a constant comparative method to elicit the recurrent and salient themes emerging from the literature, and through the use of network analysis I show the interrelationship of themes and sub-themes though the use of tree diagrams and excerpts from the transcripts. These data analysis methods are all congruent with the interpretivist ideology adopted in my research. Thomas (2009) describes how constant comparison is the most appropriate analytic method for the interpretative researcher and involves going through the data over and over to identify similarities and discover main recurring themes.

Direct quotations that capture and represent these main themes will be included in an illustrative tree diagram of the network analysis in Chapter Five. Chapter Five will serve as an overview chapter of the main emerging themes and sub-themes showing a general picture of how the empirical data provided answers to the research questions.

The primary criticism of interpretivism is that 'it does not allow for generalisations because it encourages the study of a small number of cases that do not apply to the whole population' (Hammersley, 2010: pp.23). However, others have argued that the detail and effort involved in interpretive inquiry allows researchers to gain valuable and wide-ranging insight into particular situations that require such specific methods (Macdonald *et al.,* 2000; McMurray *et al.*, 2004).

3.3 Researcher and Research Participants

The research participants were recruited mostly through work relationships since I lecture in and coordinate a course for students with intellectual disabilities within the largest vocational college in Malta: The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). MCAST was chosen as the source for recruiting participants for several reasons, mainly because it has the highest rate of students with intellectual disabilities but also because of the intrinsic accessibility afforded through being part of the academic staff team.

3.3.1 Positionality

It is worth explaining my background as a researcher since this plays a part in both the understanding of subjectivity and also throws light on my interest in the subject. Thomas (2009) emphasises the importance of 'positionality' in interpretivist research. This means that the researcher places herself/ himself at the centre of the research and accepts the subjectivity of that central position. I feel this position is a determining factor in the success of my research in the context of me being a lecturer and disability activist for so many years. My background and interest in the subject of rights and inclusion puts me in a better position to understand participants' needs and methods of communication and facilitate the delivery of their message. As explained in Chapter One, my interest in disability culture started in my childhood with the start of a friendship with a boy who came to live in the house next door and he had cerebral palsy. His small triumphs amidst his daily struggles with social exclusion had a lasting impact on me and my future and led to my first full-time job working for a local NGO that offered services to people with disabilities. That was in 1998 and since then I have always worked within disability-related fields.

Being myself part of a minority has also fuelled my desire to work towards a more inclusive and secular Maltese society that concerns itself more with equality and appreciation of diversity than with traditional and conservative views of homogeneity.

I was thoroughly immersed in the whole research process and one of the greatest advantages for me was being employed at MCAST as a senior lecturer within the student support services department. This gave me access to resources and students whom I already had a relationship with so this helped establish contact. One may argue, however, that my position of 'power' may have an effect on participants as they may be reluctant to speak freely and honestly for fear of 'displeasing' me. For participants I still represent the educational system by virtue of my employment status within

MCAST and they may perceive my allegiance to the college as being a priority to me over my desire to produce a fair and truthful representation of facts.

3.3.2 Recruitment

The students who participated in this study were present students (some from mainstream courses and others who attended specialised courses for students with intellectual disabilities) or prospective MCAST students in their final year of compulsory education. The latter group were recruited during information talks at open days organised by MCAST, while the first two groups were recruited by giving out forms during lectures and then through a system referred to as ‘snowball sampling’ by Thomas (2009, p. 104).

Although I had ease of access in speaking to students within the college, I needed help to recruit participants from secondary schools and people with intellectual disabilities who had never entered FE. To do this I first introduced my research during a presentation I delivered to LSAs and inclusion coordinators of Maltese church and state schools. I asked them to speak to students and parents/ legal guardians and ask if they would be interested in participating. Many of those present expressed interest in the research and the general feedback was that such research was sorely needed and results would give an indication of what improvements can be implemented in the transition between compulsory and FE for students with intellectual disabilities.

This means that participants suggested to me other people with intellectual disabilities who might be willing to be interviewed. The groups were chosen to represent the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities at different stages of their educational pathways. The groups would be those in their final year of compulsory education, those on a mainstream FE course, those on a specialised FE course and lastly those who had never attended a FE course.

The participants interviewed who were never in FE were recruited through a local self-advocacy group called *Flimkien Naslu* (Together we will get there). This same group also invited me to join their weekly gathering, both as a focus group and to observe the processes and discussions that went on. In the end I had four persons per sample group for the interviews. This type of stratified sampling (Thomas, 2009) allowed for representation of the different stages students go through when faced with FE.

Due to the recruitment process taking place at MCAST and through a local self-advocacy group, the participants would be considered as having mild to moderate cognitive impairments with good expressive and receptive language.

3.3.3 Inclusion criteria / demography

The ages of the interview participants ranged between 16 and 25 with mixed gender and abilities, while for the focus groups the ages ranged from 15 to 44. The only criteria used for the interview participants were that they had lived and received their education in Malta. No other criteria for interviewees were given except that participants volunteer to be interviewed.

Interview questions were piloted within a focus group consisting of seven students with different types of learning disability. The final set of open-ended questions was also discussed with my staff team, who like myself, have been working within the field of disability and education for a number of years.

3.4 Ethics of Conducting Research

Thomas (2009) states that the research process includes multi-faceted aspects and it is rarely straightforward, especially in social ethnographic research. There is preparation before data collection, the data collection per se and the analysis following the data collection. Each and every research study carried out with vulnerable people, in this case with minors with intellectual disabilities, is fraught with ethical considerations. People with intellectual disabilities are vulnerable participants and the researcher has a responsibility to keep the participants safe during the research process (Liamputtong, 2007) and moreover, to strive to make the experience a positive and useful one. Steps are taken to ensure ethical integrity according to principles of emancipatory disability research and inclusive learning disability research as described in the next sub-section.

3.4.1 Emancipatory disability research and inclusive learning disability research

It has been more than two decades since Oliver (1995) first coined the term emancipatory disability research (EDR) and since then many disability movements have advocated it. EDR moves away from people with disabilities being seen only as subjects, to them taking control of the research process and becoming more active participants. It is based on the social model of disability which, in its broadest sense, is nothing more than a concerted shift away from an emphasis on individual impairments as the cause of disability to the way in which environments exclude or disadvantage certain categories of people. Emancipatory research emerged in 1991 from a series of seminars funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

As first identified by Oliver (1995), emancipatory research was based on changing the social relations of research production. In other words, for emancipatory research to be possible the balance of power within the research process would have to shift towards a more equal relationship between researcher and the people with disabilities who are being researched. Disability research would have to be done in partnership with people with disabilities rather than on them, as had been the case with traditional approaches. Zarb (1992) later added that while changing the social relations of disability research was a necessary way of making research more inclusive for people with disabilities, a further step was needed to make it truly emancipatory. This included also addressing the material relations of the process, such as funding, status and power. Changing the control of these resources would complete the process of emancipation within research.

The emancipatory research agenda acknowledges that social research, as with all social activity is a political process, and Moore *et al*. (1998) describe how they can be characterised by seven core principles which are control, accountability, empowerment, the social model of disability, need for rigour, choice of methods and role of participant experience .

EDR, however, has been criticised for the limitations it poses on the quality of research. Due to its insistence on the need for full involvement of research participants in design and methodology, Barnes (2003) argues that important data on people with limited ability to communicate and participate actively, may never be obtained. This holds true when doing research with people with intellectual disabilities as they may not be able to be thoroughly involved or may not understand what is required.

Inclusive learning disability research is based on the principles of EDR (Ramcharan *et al*., 2004). This type of research stems from the self-advocacy movement (Williams *et al.*, 2005) and takes as a fact that people with intellectual disabilities can engage as active participants in research, even being the researchers themselves. Camilleri (2011) states that

> self-advocacy has given people with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to speak for themselves, articulate their thoughts and act as informants about their life experiences and opinions, and even carry out their own research projects. (Camilleri, 2011, p. 59)

This raises questions about the support needs of researchers with intellectual disabilities and their relationship with non-disabled peers. Aspis (2004) implies that non-disabled researchers and those disabled researchers who do not have intellectual disabilities, strive solely for their own personal gain in the name of academic rigour, thereby excluding those with intellectual disabilities from their networks. Other researchers such as Camilleri (2011) assert that it is important to acknowledge the fact that many non-disabled and differently-abled researchers work hard to include people with intellectual disabilities as co-researchers but there is a lack of available candidates, especially those with intellectual disabilities. This perhaps may arise from the fact that most people with intellectual disabilities are socialised into being followers but not leaders, especially in small insular communities such as Malta (Camilleri, 2011).

Walmsley and Johnson (2003) describe different levels of participation in research and say that this is inevitable because of the intrinsic intellectual skills required for research. Some people's cognitive limitations may prevent them from participating fully in research; therefore, the support of others is imperative otherwise there is the risk of losing the stories and voices of so many people for the sake of a totalitarian interpretation of EDR principles (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003).

3.5 Methods

This study will be guided by the principles underlying EDR and ILDR. For this to be effective the use of a triangulation method of data collection will be adopted to give a more balanced and detailed picture of the situation. The methods chosen are interviews, focus groups, participant observation, document interrogation and my own reflections as a researcher. Triangulation is an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint (Cohen and Manion, 2000).

In the quantitative part of this research, a survey using 'document interrogation' will seek to answer research questions one and two on the number of students with intellectual disabilities entering FE in Malta and the types of options of FE available to them. As part of the planning and preparation for the empirical research, participants' documents on their educational history will be examined also through ‘document interrogation’ (Thomas, 2009). The process of document interrogation will also provide information on the third research question on the transition processes used by Maltese schools with students with intellectual disabilities. The qualitative part of the study, which refers to research questions three to five, will use ethnographic research including participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. These methods will be discussed in the next part of this chapter.

3.5.1 Participant observation

Bogdan and Taylor (1975) describe participant observation as ‘an intense social interaction between researcher and the subjects, in the milieu of the latter’. It can be seen as immersing oneself in an alien way of life in order to gain knowledge, an understanding, of that way of life. This methodology is consistent with the principles of interpretivism and allows for more detail and depth into the meanings people give their social environment and behaviour. It therefore requires personal involvement over a time period.

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of this type of fieldwork is the unstructured nature of it. Shaffir *et al*. (1980) describe how, unlike controlled studies, field studies avoid prejudgement of the nature of the problem. In the case of research with people with intellectual disabilities, using the observational method may be one of the most effective as it provides information that may not be obtainable by any other means. This is especially true if participants have communication or articulation difficulties.

Participant observation requires that the researcher documents findings and this is done through journaling or keeping notes for future analysis. Thomas (2009) cites Burgess (1984) who identifies three levels of participant observation from complete immersion and active participation to an observer with no interaction.

The vulnerability of participant observation lies in potential lack of validity – the accuracy and reliability of our description that cannot in truth be wholly objective. The subjectivity inherent in the researcher doing participant observation means that such research can never be really replicated, and we find subject (or reactive) effects, researcher (or demand) effects and sampling effects (Mayo, 1945). These are technical terms which basically mean that participants might try to give good impressions by telling you what they think you want to know or acting in a way they think you would like them to behave.

This refers also to other direct-contact research methods such as interviews and focus groups. There are all sorts of biases and factors that are at play during any kind of one-to-one interaction within research which need to be considered when discussing limitations to any study. A further discussion of these factors will be discussed in the limitations section of this chapter.

3.5.2 Interviews

Interviews provide in-depth information about a particular research issue or question. Whereas quantitative research methods such as experiments collect a small amount of data from many subjects, interviews gather a wide range of data from a few subjects. ‘A good interview is the art and science of exploring the subjective knowledge, opinions, and beliefs of an individual’ (Suler, 2002). The knowledge, opinions and beliefs of that person can be seen as a system and so the scope of the interview is to explore that system and all of its elements.

When we analyse the results from an interview we use the hermeneutic method. Gadamer (1960) describes how in this interpretation we look at how all the testimonials made by the interviewee are inter-related, analysing any contradictions and consistencies. The interview is a holistic research method which in essence means that all the bits of data from the interviewee provide a ‘big picture’ that goes beyond individual excerpts of data.

An interview can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Thomas, 2009). The structured interview consists of a list of fixed questions. The interviewer strictly adheres to the questions word for word. The unstructured interview, on the other hand, allows for more freedom and, therefore, flexibility in questioning. It allows for a more informal atmosphere since the style is more conversational. The researcher adjusts the questions according to how the interviewee is responding. One may even inject their own opinions or ideas in order to stimulate the interviewee's responses. Berry (1999) is of the opinion that the unstructured interview requires much more skill, is much more complex than the structured one. The semi-structured interview includes both rigid specific questions and ones which can be answered in depth and at length. Barbour and Schostak (2005) state that within a qualitative approach the most popular interview is the unstructured because it obviously allows for more depth and gives more control and power to the participants.

3.5.3 Focus groups

Powell and Single (1996) define a focus group as

> a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research. (Powell and Single, 1996, p. 499)

Parker and Tritter (2006) assert that the main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon people's emotions, attitudes and life experiences in a way that is not possible with other methods, such as observation, one-to-one interviewing or questionnaires. Nierse and Abma (2011) proclaim that focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context and compared to observation, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time.

Morgan and Kreuger (1993) maintain that focus groups are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and professionals, when the interest is on everyday use of language and culture of particular groups, and when the researcher wants to know the degree of consensus on a particular topic. Focus groups could be particularly important within my study to elicit discussion between people with disabilities. A series of focus groups could be held to generate a dialogue at the beginning of the research to identify the issues which are salient and which should be focused upon during the study. These groups would be maintained during the research to keep ongoing involvement and evaluative process.

Morgan (1997) states that focus groups elicit information in a way which allows researchers to find out why an issue is relevant to a particular group. Kitzinger (1995) argues that the interaction in the group also enables participants to ask each other question and re-evaluate their own perception of their realities.

Focus group research also has limitations. Some can be overcome by careful planning and moderating, but others are unavoidable and particular to this approach. Morgan (1997) stresses that the researcher has less control over the data produced than in either quantitative studies or one-to-one interviewing. The researcher has to provide a free and safe environment to facilitate interaction between participants. It should also not be assumed that participants in a focus group are expressing their own view but are still subject to external influences which may affect what they say (Berg, 2005). They are speaking in a specific context, within a specific culture, and so sometimes it may be difficult for the researcher to clearly identify an individual message. It is a common occurrence for people with intellectual disabilities, especially minors, to have had little experience of situations where they can speak their mind and where they are given the opportunity to express themselves. According to Cook and Inglis (2009), this may mean that within a focus group participants may be more liable to echo what leading speakers say rather than offer their own opinion.

3.5.5 Chosen methods

The research tools chosen were that of participant observation during self-advocacy meetings, semi-structured interview based on a topic guide and focus groups. This approach provided for conversation in an informal manner and at the same time was defined and would enable indirect probing and follow-up questions if required. Although substantial criticism is aimed at the limitations of qualitative methods, it is not the scope of this research to offer a generalisable study, rather it is to explore the subjective experiences of individuals who have intellectual disabilities in relation to leaving compulsory education in Malta.

The next sections will provide a detailed explanation of the steps taken to both prepare for and execute the empirical part of this study. These include getting informed consent, recruitment of participants, assessment of participant needs, ensuring accessibility and confidentiality, and ethical use of research.

3.6 Planning for Inclusive Research

Lewis and Kellett in Fraser *et al.* (2004) maintain that in order for research with people with intellectual disabilities to be valid, there needs to be sustained contact with participants so that data gathered can be re-presented to them for confirmation and possible reflections and amendments. In my case, the interview participants were followed for two scholastic years and I attended eight informal meetings of the self-advocacy group *Flimkien Naslu* (Together we will get there).

3.6.1 Ethical approvals

In order to carry out this research, a preliminary meeting was held with PhD Local Advisor and Managing Director of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (KNPD) Dr Anne Marie Callus, to ascertain the value and integrity of the research carried and that it would in no way impinge on the rights of the participants. Various other meetings were held with entities who I regarded would set me in the right direction as to what questions were important to include in my research. I discussed the importance of the use of emancipatory research with academics working in the field of disability studies and there seemed to be a consensus at least on the main principles governing this school of thought.

The necessary permission was obtained from the ethics board of MCAST, and from the quality assurance director of the Maltese Department of Education for the participants who were still in compulsory education and therefore under 16 years of age. The only condition was that students would not miss any lessons/ lectures.

Ethical approval was also sought and received from the ethics board of the University of Birmingham and also the University of Malta Human Subjects Research Ethics Committee. This is the committee approved by the data protection legislation for research undertaken within the Maltese Islands and which operates to standards commensurate with those in the UK and the EU. Since the study was carried out in the Maltese Islands, I was obliged to submit to this committee. Contact with the Human Subjects Research Ethics Committee was established at the end of December 2012. Approval by the said committee was granted without any conditions during February 2013.

3.6.2 Disability etiquette checklist

A disability etiquette checklist (Ask Me: NDA, 2002) was used to ascertain that no inappropriate language or behaviour was used during group explanations and interviews. This included directly addressing the person rather than the interpreter and using person-first language. Language was kept simple and direct, avoiding the use of jargon and abstract ideas to facilitate understanding by participants with learning difficulties. Another meeting was held with each participant individually after transcripts were ready and each was read out to ascertain that the information received was indeed what was intended. Some clarifications were made and amended on the transcripts. I also wanted to make sure that I had differentiated methods of posing and simplifying questions without removing the meaning or in any way leading participants to an answer.

I endeavoured to ensure that individual students did not feel in any way compelled to participate. The participants were provided with a consent form which was read out to each participant (Appendix five). An explanation about both the purpose of the study and consent was given (Appendix two). All participants were given an opt-out option both at the beginning of the interview and at any point throughout the study. A red card was prepared, which was another tool for them to use when they wanted to refuse to answer (Aldgate and McIntosh, 2006). Research between an adult and a vulnerable participant has an inherent imbalance in power and even if the researcher tries to mitigate this imbalance, power cannot be easily dispelled (Robinson and Kellett, 2004). The red card technique goes some way to give participants a sense of power and control.

All participants were given my contact details in case they wanted to further discuss the study or had any queries following the study. Some contact remained with the students who attended MCAST at the time, mainly in the form of requests for advice on dealing with accessibility problems.

3.6.3 Setting

The semi-structured interviews took place at MCAST since many of the participants were either current or prospective students attending open days. The literature review uncovered that MCAST, besides being the largest FE institution in Malta, also has the largest number of students with intellectual disabilities in its student body. This is mainly due to the flexible entry requirements of MCAST as a vocational college. This meant that there was greater opportunity to find participants for the study.

Besides being employed by MCAST as a senior lecturer, I am also part of the student support services team as well as co-ordinator of the pathway to independent living unit. This unit provides vocational courses for students with intellectual disabilities and I therefore had access to resources that may be of use to aid communication during the data collection.

The room used for the interviews was physically accessible, uncluttered and quiet. I made every effort to avoid using a classroom since I felt that the participants would feel intimidated in that environment. In the end I used the relaxation room usually used for counselling sessions. The room in question is small but very comfortable with sofas and pleasant décor. In accordance with the EDR principles, a lot of planning went into providing accessibility in many dimensions, such as communication, mobility and information.

Much thought went into the setting as I wanted the students to feel comfortable and for the environment to move away from the power relations inherent in a classroom setting. The focus groups with students were also held at MCAST Student House, in one of the rooms used by student group bodies for meetings. The room was informal and fun and helped create a relaxed atmosphere with the group.

I made sure that the light was stable with no flickering and ceiling fans were not on because two of the participants had photo-sensitive epilepsy. In the risk-assessment I re-established the college policy on dealing with seizures and as I am myself trained as a first aider and have extensive experience in seizure management, there was very limited concern as to the safety of the participants.

The meetings of the group *Flimkien Naslu,* on the other hand, took place at a Burger King outlet in the capital of Malta, Valletta. The group meets there every week and I was invited to join whenever I wished. I went for eight consecutive weeks and part of the meeting was always aimed at a discussion on education and access for people with intellectual disabilities. Although the environment was very busy and loud, it was important for me to immerse myself in their reality and this included their choice of venue.

The interviews of the four participants that were not students were done in their own homes. I asked each of them to decide in which room to do the interviews and three of them chose the sitting room and one chose the kitchen. Many Maltese families consider the kitchen as the most important room of the home and may entertain in it; however, on formal occasions it is more common for guests to be invited into the sitting room. The reason why one of the participants chose the kitchen may be because I have known this person for a few years and there is a familiarity between us that is not present with the others.

3.6.5 An accessible process

Sensitively approaching vulnerable people was the major concern throughout both the study's preparation and the data collection process. As Schofield *et al.* (2000, p. 20) report 'interview strategies therefore need to include subtle ways of helping participants show us some of their real concerns, without challenging defences'. The different methods adopted in the empirical study secured a sensitive approach towards people with intellectual disabilities considered as one the most vulnerable participants. Prior to the interviews I also made arrangements for both the college counsellors and a psychologist to be available in case the participants were distressed as a result of the interview.

Risk assessments were made to identify areas of concern and establish ways of minimising them (Appendix one). The needs of the participants were identified through an initial meeting wherein the interview process was explained and the consent form given. I also asked permission to read their IEP (Individual Educational Plan) and other relevant documents to establish student needs. This document interrogation provided additional details of certain individual requirements such as having augmentative and alternative communication aids (AACs) available and a laptop with communication software and pictorial grids. Participants were told that they could have an adult present with them during any part of the research process if they wished.

3.6.6 Confidentiality and informed consent

Following consultation with relevant authorities as described in section 3.6.1 above, I was asked to obtain parental consent for participants who are legally minors. After receiving the approval and consent forms I had full access to student IEPs. No files were taken off the school premises. This was necessary to ensure confidentiality and adherence to data protection at all times (Data Protection Act, 2002). Upon completion of the data collection, any information that could in any way identify the students was removed.

I made sure that all the participants understood what the study was about and how it would be recorded. I used audio recordings as I wanted to give the participants my full attention rather than having to write notes. I also did not want to miss anything that was being said and in the case of the groups, that would be very likely unless the sessions were recorded. This was explained to the participants and included in the consent form.

3.6.7 Dissemination of the study

A copy of this dissertation will be available at the University of Birmingham as an online resource and hard copies will be given to the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (KNPD) in Malta as well as to the Malta Government Grant Scheme as per my local scholarship agreement. It is my aim that this study is used for dissemination and reference purposes. The participants were informed of the future use of the study and that care would be taken to ensure anonymity.

The next section will list the methods I chose for the study based on an interpretivist research paradigm which allows for more flexibility and better accessibility to direct narrative.

3.7 Tools for Research

During the last decade many studies carried out with people with intellectual disabilities have used the flexible design method. Some of these include Hutcheon and Wolbring (2012), Shah (2007), Finn *et al.* (2008) and Vickerman and Blundell (2010).

A variety of tools are available to aid research with this student cohort; however, one needs to keep in mind that people with disabilities, even the same type of disability, will still have different support needs. Many disability activists and educators stress the danger of generalisations when it comes to research with and about disability (Cook and Inglis, 2009; Dye *et al.*, 2014). For example, the use of pictorial vignettes or AACs may be a good tool to establish better communication with some people with Down's syndrome who stereotypically understand better with visual representation. However, this is not always the case and may lead to embarrassment and discomfort during the data collection exercise. Preparation prior to the contact is essential if the researcher does not know the participant. It is not enough to have an understanding of the disability; one needs to take the time to get to know the individual person (Cameron and Murphy, 2006). This may be through an initial contact meeting and through the reading of documents such as the Individual Educational Plan (IEP). Thomas (2009) refers to this as document interrogation and is used for data collection. In this study, besides the initial meeting, participants' IEPs and other documents were surveyed.

3.7.1 The research questions

The table below re-states the research questions and provides a visual representation of the methods and tools used to attempt to answer each one.

Question	**Methodology**	**Method**	**Participants**
1. What type of transition process is used in Malta to support students with intellectual disabilities to move into FE?	Qualitative/ Qualitative Qualitative	Document Interrogation Interviews Focus Groups Participant Observation	Dept. of Education, MALTA/ MCAST Students *Flimkien Naslu* Group
2. Do people with intellectual disabilities consider FE as having benefits for them and why?	Qualitative	Interviews Focus Groups Participant Observation	Students *Flimkien Naslu* Group
3. Are students with intellectual disabilities aware of the further education options for them?	Qualitative	Interviews Focus Groups Participant Observation	Students *Flimkien Naslu Group* Parents/ Guardians
4. What are the factors that influence successful FE experiences for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta?	Qualitative	Interviews Focus Groups Participant Observation	Students *Flimkien Naslu* Parents/ Guardians

5. What are the barriers faced by students with intellectual disabilities when accessing further education in Malta?	Qualitative	Interviews Focus Groups Participant Observation	Students *Flimkien* *Naslu* Parents/ Guardians

Table 4 Information on research questions

3.7.2 Document interrogation

I used document interrogation to get a better picture of the number of students with intellectual disabilities in FE. I used responses to parliamentary questions (PQs), newspaper reports of local statistics as well as contacting FE institutions directly. I also contacted various governmental, non-governmental and private institutions to try to develop a picture of the location and numbers of students with intellectual disabilities within the Maltese educational systems.

I then compared this data with other data that I collected from FE institutions and NGOs who offer training to school leavers with intellectual disabilities and the NSO census document on employment and people with intellectual disabilities which was finalised in 2013. This helped form a clearer picture as to where students with intellectual disabilities were ending up after finishing secondary school. It also provided a context in which I could develop the main objective of this thesis, that is, the study of students' experiences of leaving compulsory education and moving to FE.

The second document interrogation task undertaken in this study was looking through the IEPs and other educational reports of the students who participated in the interviews. The decision to survey educational reports seemed to be the most natural step to gain a picture of the educational history. This was required to assess whether post-school planning was included in the students' IEPs. This would indicate the level of preparation by schools in conjunction with students and parents in the final year before transition to FE. Another important reason for going through educational documents was to provide baseline information of student needs that would aid in preparing for the interviews.

Part of this research included the actual evaluation of the data collection method used. In this study the interview questions were pre-tested in a focus group made up of students with intellectual disabilities attending MCAST. The focus group was held once at the beginning of January 2013 and again at the end of the month, after amendments were made. The data collection exercises commenced in late January 2013 and lasted for three months.

A total of 13 IEPs and other documents were surveyed and information gathered from them was transferred into simple table form. The information pertaining to individual student needs that were pertinent to the interviewing process were noted in detail. This process took an average of one hour per student. I identified the sections within each IEP that were pertinent and would help me establish the best method and tools to use with the student during the planned interview. I also gathered any information of transition planning in the IEP.

The results of this document interrogation helped in getting some baseline information about the research participants which was very effective in shaping the best scenario for the interviews and focus groups. The other data such as PQs and statistics were retrieved mostly through direct contact with government agencies or online sources. These hold some reliability due to the official capacity of their source. The results of the task gave me the impetus and information I required to move onto the next stage of my research which was the empirical study.

As explained in the literature review, the study of students with intellectual disabilities' experiences of transitioning into FE is the main objective of this thesis. In the literature review (see Chapter Two) research on the subject is plentiful in the UK and other countries but this is not the case in Malta. No local previous research of the transition of students with intellectual disabilities from compulsory education to FE has been published to date. There is an even deeper void when it comes to research on the experiences of students within FE and of those who never accessed it. In response to this vacuum, I wanted to explore this situation through the use of participant observation, focus groups and interviews. The next sections will outline the empirical study.

3.8 The Empirical Study

The empirical study built on the results of the quantitative survey. The survey of IEPs collected basic information about the participants' demographics and learning needs. Though providing information about the educational needs of the participants was essential when planning the actual study, this was insufficient to capture an understanding of the experiences of these students in their transition out of compulsory education. As a result, the empirical study focused on the participants' narratives of these experiences starting with an initial meeting to establish rapport and explain the process. At the beginning of each interview and focus group, the purpose of the study was explained again and participants were reminded of their ownership of the whole process. I also explained again that I would be recording all the dialogue on an audio recorder for later transcription.

3.8.1 Focus groups

The first part of the empirical study was participating in the weekly meetings of the local self-advocacy group, *Flimkien Naslu*. This gave me the opportunity to hear some views about the school experiences of the seven group members and reasons why many of them never entered FE. The discussion questions related directly to the research questions such as whether respondents were aware of the various FE options available to them and whether they felt that students were prepared for the transition from secondary school. Other questions pertained to barriers they faced in this transition and expectations for the future. On some weeks the group discussed other issues relating to intellectual disability or personal difficulties they were experiencing.

At the same time of joining the self-advocacy group, the first focus group was held with eight MCAST students. In this situation, a pilot study was carried out to test the relevance and clarity of the draft questions that were going to be asked during the semi-structured interviews and to establish whether any additional information was required. The feedback was encouraging and prompted the addition of a final question regarding how the participants pictured their ideal FE. The final, amended topic guide included eight mainly open-ended questions (Appendix four).

The student focus groups lasted an hour and a half while the weekly meetings of *Flimkien Naslu* generally lasted three hours but they were somewhat informal in nature and included a dinner break of around 20 to 30 minutes. During the meeting some of the participants floated in and out for cigarette breaks. The aim of these focus groups was for the initial verification of effective interview guide questions and then later on the process became more like a group interview where I was part of the group conversations on the topic of my study.

3.8.2 Interviews

Of the 16 students interviewed, two were accompanied by their LSA as they felt they needed someone to help in case I could not understand their speech patterns. The interviews went well and lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. The general atmosphere during the interviews improved as we progressed and at the end the participants left smiling and much more comfortable then when we started. Interview guide can be found in appendix three.

3.8.3 Participant observation and documenting the process

I used a system of journaling during the whole course of the research process to document my personal journey in relation to the participants and their recounted experiences. This helped me formulate thoughts and feelings into written words and this translated well within the research paradigm of interpretivism. Keeping my diary was helpful as I could retrace my steps to evaluate my experiences and this helped me develop further on both a personal and professional level. A sample of my notes can be found in Appendix eight.

This type of research helps to add dimension and depth to the voices of the participants through capturing non-verbal communication which is not conveyed in the audio recordings. Geertz (1975) calls this ‘thick description’ and includes observation and self-reflection of what is said and what is not-said in social scenarios (Geertz in Thomas, 2009). The following chapters will attempt to offer an exploration of the interviews and focus groups using thick description and thematic analysis.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the methodology upon which this research is based has been explained, including the research paradigm used, sampling method, procedure, limitations and ethical issues of the study, as well as the individual steps taken to analyse the data obtained. The flexible design research method used focuses on the participants’ lived experiences of FE and provides us with a glimpse into their reality.

In conclusion, it is the author's opinion that for the purpose of this study a flexible research design was best suited, with an ethnographic approach which allowed for the actual interaction and relationship between myself and the participants to develop and enhance the analysis of the subject matter. A triangulation method of data collection and analysis were used to provide as holistic a picture as possible and to have as much participant involvement as possible.

Once the empirical study was finished all interviews were transcribed. All transcripts of interviews have been translated from Maltese into English but original language versions are available if required (Appendix seven). After the individual transcripts were printed, the data was placed into categories from which the most salient themes were identified. In order to facilitate matters, a series of tree diagrams were created from these categories. Trends in the data were explored and findings were supported with reference to the literature review. The process of analysis and categorisation of research findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. Prior to that, in the following chapter an exploration of the Maltese cultural context will be provided to provide a better understanding of the setting in which this research was done.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cultural Context – Speaking of Angels

4.1 Introduction

The literature review has identified the main factors that act to prevent effective inclusive FE for students with intellectual disabilities; these fall largely into three categories namely institutional barriers, socio-cultural barriers and psychological barriers. Although these are interlinked in both their origin and the effect they have on inclusion, it is essential to sift through and unravel these three categories to see the whole picture. Part of this process is looking at different socio-cultural realities to isolate country-specific barriers and their roots.

The literature review showed that despite strong legislative changes, the implementation of inclusive education on a practical level in Europe remains fraught with difficulties (ANED, 2010). One might speculate that socio-cultural attitudes of the individuals responsible for educational practices have not yet caught up with the rights-based agenda that has pushed for these legislative processes. One could make a prima facie case for the position that it is Maltese dominant culture and traditional approaches to disability that have an impact on how ideas about inclusion are received in society, especially in areas such as education and employment.

This chapter will lay out a basic picture of Maltese culture with a focus on views on disability. The scope of this chapter is to provide the historical and cultural aspects that characterise Maltese society, in particular the dominant social forces such as religion and the Roman Catholic Church, the family, schools and media framed within the political and economic spheres. All these factors enable the reader to understand the context of this empirical study and how traditional cultural and religious ideologies influence the way disability and inclusion are perceived in Malta.

While I am reserving my full empirical findings until later in this thesis, it is worth reporting some excerpts from personal reflections in my research journal to substantiate my prima facie position on the cultural exclusivity of Maltese culture. I shall do this via examples of certain commonplace practices in this culture and through my own experiences of the culture. These are included in this chapter as journal entries in a simple table format.

4.2 About Malta

With 196 square miles and a population of just over 400,000, Malta is one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in the world. Malta is a southern European archipelago in the Mediterranean Sea, made up of three small islands. It lies 50 miles south of Sicily (Italy) and 207 miles north of Libya. Only two of the islands are inhabited and these are Malta and the smaller sister island of Gozo. The capital of the Maltese islands is Valletta and at less than half a square mile is the smallest capital in the EU. Malta's official language is Maltese but English is taught at school in parallel with the national language. This is not always the case, however, as students with intellectual disabilities are often not given access to the full subject spectrum and many schools choose to teach them only one language. The choice generally depends on the colloquial language used in the family home; however, over 75 % of people use Maltese as their main language (NSO, 2011).

Maltese is a Semitic language with various influences from the succession of different rulers that historically used Malta as a naval base due to its strategic Mediterranean location. Malta was a British colony from 1813 and gained independence in 1964, the same year it was admitted in the United Nations. Malta became a republic in 1974 and joined the EU in 2004. In 2008 Malta joined the Eurozone. Malta held a referendum for EU accession mainly because of concern from the Maltese that joining the EU would mean having to compromise on traditional and Christian values. Malta has an extensive Christian legacy; Catholicism is the official religion in Malta and is included in the constitution.

The National census of 2011 showed that the disabled population in the Maltese islands stood at nearly 6% of the general population and people with intellectual disabilities made up 5.5% of this figure. The table below shows the percentage of people with disabilities in relation to the general Maltese population and the percentage of people with intellectual disability in relation to the general disabled population.

	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Total Population 2015 (NSO, 2015)	425,104	---------
All people with disabilities	23,848	5.9% of total population
People with intellectual disabilities	1,311	5.5% of disabled population

Table 5 Maltese population statistics related to disability

4.3 The Socio-cultural Environment

Maltese culture and history has to a greater or lesser extent produced a small island mentality that struggles with anything deemed ‘different’ or ‘unfamiliar’, and that holds on tightly to a national identity rooted in a perceived homogeneity. This mentality is part of what give Malta its distinctiveness but also what hinders society from fully endorsing inclusion of people with disabilities as the attitude of ‘not in my backyard’ still dominates many sectors of society who resent having to associate with or make concessions for those who are outside of the proverbial norm (Humphries, 2011). On the other side of the coin is the influence that the church exerts on the Maltese social conscience. Despite the 'good intentions' inherent in church teachings of tolerance and charity, this has resulted in all people with disabilities being looked upon as charity cases.

Journal Entry 1	
Charity model	*Once again today my students came back with a Euro 50 note and a bag full of food that a random stranger gave them during their trip to the shopping arcade. This has happened time and time again as passers-by assume that people with disabilities are all in need of charity.*

4.3.1 The church and disability

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Malta is sometimes traditionally claimed to be an Apostolic See because, according to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul the Apostle was shipwrecked in Malta (Cassar and Bondin, 2012). This is a source of much pride amongst many Maltese as religion is a large part of the Maltese identity. This is reflected in the presence of over 370 churches in the Maltese islands (in 12 square miles).

The Church and its leaders have for centuries been some of the most valued members of society and influence social and political decisions in Malta. An example of this is the fact that divorce was only legalised in Malta in 2011 due to strong opposition from the Church. Prior to the passing of the law, Malta was one of only three countries worldwide that did not have divorce, with the other two countries being Vatican City and the Philippines.

Of course, a large part of the work done by the Church is providing support to society's most vulnerable. Monsignor Azzopardi was seen as a pioneer when he built the first residential home in 1965, Providence House, to relocate people with disabilities, many of whom were at the time housed in old people's homes and mental health hospitals. Cuschieri (1995) describes how many people with disabilities were kept in degrading and inhumane conditions.

Although Monsignor Azzopardi had wished to build smaller homes in the community, to be more in line with the deinstitutionalisation happening in other countries at the time, this proved to be impossible due to resistance from locals (Bonnici, 2005). Providence House still operates from its original premises, formerly the Royal Navy Rest Camp. These premises remain a segregated institution which is also physically detached from the nearest village. Community supported living is still quite uncommon in Malta and this is possibly due to continued resistance from neighbours.

Journal Entry 2	
Attitudes towards disability	I was in a conversation where villagers stated that they do not want people with intellectual disabilities as neighbours because it would devalue the price of their property due to the 'noise' and concern that they would be a general nuisance. This made me reflect on the misconceptions that people have about intellectual

	disability and their perceived needs.

As mentioned above, the Catholic Church has a strong influence on Maltese society. Oliver (2009) describes how traditional models of disability promote a moral and/ or medical approach, effectively relegating the individual to a passive recipient of care. This is reflected in the attitude prevalent in Maltese society towards people with disabilities, in particular those with intellectual impairments.

Callus (2011), through her extensive work and research on intellectual disability and self-advocacy in Malta, depicts a situation which does not allow for personal involvement of people with intellectual disabilities in their life choices. She also maintains that this comes from a cultural context based on a charity model.

These religious overtones are not unexpected in Malta since the pioneer of disability services was a priest. Gonzi (1995) stated that before the 1960s, disability was a taboo subject which few spoke about. Dun Mikiel Azzopardi encouraged discussion on disability through reference to one’s religious duties to marginalised groups. He referred to people with disabilities as ‘angels’ and this word is often used to this day in Maltese conversation. This may have been an attempt to replace a previously-held belief of disability as a punishment from God due to sin. This may be one of the factors that makes people reluctant to associate with individuals with disabilities.

Journal Entry 3	
Angelic identity	*During my research I also came across references to ornamental stonework that traditionally in the sixties used the facial features of children with Down's syndrome for use in religious statues of cherubs and angels. I have since seen a couple of these statues in roadside niches and private gardens in Malta.*

4.3.2 The charity model

Within this context, the term 'charity' has two different meanings. One relates to charity being a Christian virtue, to love thy neighbour and the other is to carry out charitable acts for disadvantaged members of society, those 'less fortunate' (Camilleri, 2006). This means that people with disability are seen as both angels and less fortunate, a situation that reduces social responsibility to simply giving a donation every Christmas (Grixti, 2004). This does nothing to put people with disabilities on an equal footing and pushes discourse on rights and social change aside.

Religious figures are also at the helm of many Maltese non-religious organisations, which means that this charity model continues to thrive in many services and residences for people with disabilities. Regular trips to Lourdes, Fatima and other European shrines are very popular in Maltese disability organisations. In 2007, the KNPD issued a publication entitled Rights not

Charity to put pressure on all local NGOs to move away from the charity model towards a rights-based approach (Bezzina, 2007c).

Despite the clear link between the disability and the charity sectors in Maltese social attitudes and beliefs, the past decade has seen some attempts at separating the two, even by the Church itself. In a policy document issued by the Church in 2006, the role of people with disabilities in life and work is very firmly set within the boundaries of the social model, with a focus on removing disabling barriers from society (Malta Kurja Dokument Annwali, 2006). In 2009, Providence House's new director appealed to the public to help residents out of a belief in their right to autonomy and individuality and not out of pity (Times of Malta, 2 Jan 2015).

Although these were significant first steps to a change in attitude, the effect of the charity model is still very palpable in Maltese society and there is scant local literature showing what people with disabilities themselves understand by the labels assigned to them or indeed their general awareness of their impairment and needs (Callus, 2011).

Wolfensberger (1972) described eight roles ascribed by society to its socially disadvantaged members and two of these seem to relate to the concept of 'angels'. These are 'holy innocents' and 'eternal child'. This terminology, according to Wolfensberger (1972), directs the individual to internalise attitudes and behaviours typically associated with the role placed upon them in a self-fulfilling prophecy. The labelling theory, as first discussed by Becker in 1963, suggests that this type of discourse devalues people and keeps them in the perpetual position of passivity which in turn keeps the mechanisms of power in the hands of those who are in control. Speaking of angels traps people with disabilities in a situation of passivity and helplessness. Such attitudes flourish in a culture like Malta's, where Catholic imagery, symbolism and practices exert a strong influence (Falzon, 2009).

Journal Entry 4	
Public attitudes on disability	*Recently a colleague of mine who has a mobility impairment and uses a wheelchair told me a story which remained ingrained in my mind and is a perfect example of the pervasive belief that people with disabilities are to be pitied and treated like children. She was at a wedding with her husband and as they were chatting with a group of people, a prominent local politician came and started shaking everyone's hand. When he got to her, instead of shaking her hand, he leaned down, gently grabbed her face with his hands and kissed her on the forehead. She was obviously mortified and speechless. The politician was doubtlessly oblivious to her embarrassment and never for a second thought that this gesture was inappropriate.*

Besides the charity model, a common belief that permeates the Church's teachings is that any ailment or tragedy experienced by the individual is a 'cross to bear' given by God as a test of faith and piety (Smalley, 2001). This is often used colloquially in reference to having children who have a disability and implies that they are a burden on the parents.

Journal Entry 5	
Cross to bear	*In my short stint working at a local special school, every morning the students were required to recite the rosary and a special prayer. This prayer included reference to the cross that my parents have to carry. It is worrying that none of the staff and students used to bat an eyelid about the wording used in the school prayer. It makes one think of how deeply engrained certain beliefs are and so they simply go unquestioned.*

4.3.3 Local society and the media

During the Second World War Malta suffered incredible devastation both in its physical and social structures. Emerging from the rubble, however, was a new vision for the rebuilding of new services providing support to the most vulnerable which were previously non-existent. Although these were still segregated they provided some much-needed support. These included special schools and adult training centres (DES Report, 2006). NGOs and charities started emerging with a specific focus on the needs of people with disabilities and most of these were led by parents of people with disabilities themselves (Callus, 2012). In the late 1970s and early 80s, Malta saw a shift in demand for services to move away from the predominant medical model to a more socially oriented one:

> A small nucleus of parents began to shift focus away from the medical model of disability and to look for more enduring solutions through social change. (Camilleri and Callus, 2001, p. 87)

The discourse on rights and human dignity stems from the recognition of the social factors leading to disability; however, despite moving away from the medical model, predominant social attitudes are still strongly influenced by decades of church preaching about being charitable towards those 'less fortunate'; people with intellectual disabilities have been at the forefront of those considered as needy. This is still upheld by parents and families and is frequently exacerbated by the local media.

Local televised fundraising variety shows and events are a common occurrence and very popular with the Maltese audience. These more often than not collect money for people with disabilities. Within these programmes reference to angels is used very frequently, even in newspaper reports covering the event. For example, an article published in 2007 was entitled 'Thousands raised in aid of the angels of Siggiewi (Providence House)' (L-Orizzont, 2007), and an annual fundraiser by a local authority was entitled 'From our hearts to the angels' (Grupp Rabat-Dingli, 2008). Recently local media, newspapers, radio and television programmes have started to carry sporadic reference to the correct use of terminology and are pushing for a rights-based approach (KNPD, CEO Interview, 2014).

In 1987, the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (KNPD) was established and made a landmark stride to bring the rights of people with disabilities into social and political dialogue and practice. The commission to this day is the singular most powerful entity in Malta that is lobbying and advocating for an inclusive society. It works with the local media and other large societal sectors to make the changes required in moving away from paternalistic and disempowering attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities.

Besides KNPD, other governmental organisations offer services to people with disabilities and more than 40 NGOs. This plethora of services is now seen as being too fragmented, especially considering the size of the island population. Furthermore, many of these services are run by professionals, priests and parents, with little or no direct involvement from people with disabilities themselves (Azzopardi Lane, 2009). This reinforces a culture wherein people with disabilities, especially those with intellectual impairments are viewed as passive recipients of care and are not considered as being able to be their own advocates.

An added repercussion of the large number of services available is that there is definitely an element of competition for service provision. According to Camilleri (2009), disability services in Malta become something of a lucrative business employing highly trained specialists and demanding very high fees for services. This also means that there may be hidden agendas that covertly sabotage efforts for services to become mainstream as it would result in a decrease in demand for such extensive specialisations.

4.7 The Socio-economic Status

According to recent EU reports, Malta is one of the EU countries that has improved significantly in its economic growth performance in the last five years (DBRS, 2015). Having access to EU funding greatly affected the standard of living and offered opportunities for improvement in many sectors of society, mainly education and employment. Although the prospects afforded by the EU determined Malta's current advantageous status, one core element of Maltese society still plays a very big part in the shaping of our success and that is the family. It may be that strong family ties, however, are also what hinder advancements in certain areas, most notably when it comes to children leaving the family home with the ensuing detachment and independence that that brings with it.

4.7.1 The family

Malta has a very close-knit community with nuclear families living close to each other and helping out in domestic duties and child-rearing. It is very uncommon for children to leave the family home unless they get married. In larger countries, children often leave the family home to pursue their studies but the small size of the Maltese islands means that all FE institutions are a short bus ride away at most.

Most people with intellectual disabilities in Malta live with their parents all their lives (MNC, 2011). This may be due to the fact that they are not able to marry and do not have the independent living skills and means to sustain themselves (Azzopardi Lane, 2013).

A survey published by KNPD in 2004 showed that 92% of respondents relied on family members for support, both material and related to personal assistance, because they could not afford to buy the services they needed (Callus and Bezzina, 2004). Although family support helps people with disabilities to have a better quality of life, it also reinforces dependency and the 'eternal child' notion inherent in Maltese society.

4.7.2 Education and inclusion

Bartolo (2010) describes the history of education and inclusion in Malta as somewhat following trends in the UK. The development of inclusive education was measured but steady and can be traced to the establishment of compulsory education for all primary school children in 1946. Although Malta's cultural history dates back to 5000BC and despite the fact that our University is more than 400 years old, it was the actual introduction of compulsory education that steered the first efforts to ensure that all children could access public education (Bartolo, 2001). Zammit Mangion (1992) states that it was then, in the 1970s, that kindergarten and secondary schools became compulsory and state-funded; by the 1990s, 95% of children were attending school regularly. Public special education services were introduced by the British in 1956 and continued growing until the 1980s.

The integration of students with disabilities in mainstream schools also resulted from British influence through the Warnock Report in 1978, and included the current statementing process to assess student needs. Currently 3,700 (6.2% of general population) have a formal Statement of Individual Educational Needs (IEN) and are supported on a one-to-one or shared-arrangement basis by a learning support assistant (LSA) in mainstream classrooms. The Maltese government employs around 4,000 LSAs in mainstream education. According to the latest government statistics, there are 2,800 children in state schools receiving the LSA service, with 900 children in Church schools and 120 in private education also being provided with a publicly-funded LSA (SEN Report, 2012). Maltese education is relatively homogenous with two-thirds of students attending state schools and the other third attending Catholic Church schools and a small percentage attending private schools.

Special schools, although renamed resource centres, currently accommodate around 250 students (Bartolo and Borg, 2009). According to Eurostat figures, an average of 0.3% attend schools for people with special needs in Malta, in contrast to an average of 2.3% in the EU, with the rest of disabled students fully integrated into mainstream education.

Students move from kindergarten to primary schools and until 2011 had to pass a rigid assessment to gain and progress into a good 'junior lyceum' school. The students who failed were relegated to 'area secondary schools'. This tracking system was severely criticised as being contrary to inclusive education (King, Bartolo, Borg *et al.*, 2000) and has been conducive to the substantial increase in early school leavers (ESL) leading to Malta having the highest level of post-secondary students in FE in the EU (ESL Report, 2012). Following this, a reform was introduced which eliminated the entry exams for secondary education and introduced re-designed curricula and more teacher training. Bartolo (2011) states that pedagogy still relies heavily on traditional, whole class teaching especially in secondary education and as a result teachers are still largely in favour of streaming.

Inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary schools in Malta is still underdeveloped. MCAST is the largest of two vocational colleges, and accommodates an average of 400 students annually who require additional support in its mainstream course (this includes physical impairments and medical conditions) and another 60 in specialised courses for students with intellectual disabilities (SSSC Report, 2012). There are no other

FE institutions in Malta that have currently enrolled students with intellectual disabilities.

One of the biggest and most obvious differences between the support given in compulsory education and that in post-secondary is the discrepancy in human resources used for academic support. While most students with a Statement of Educational Needs (SEN) are provided with individual support during compulsory education, MCAST only has six full-time LSAs in its specialised course and another six to cater for all the students in mainstream courses. This significant difference in provision suggests a lack of investment in continuing inclusive education.

Students who require academic support have to provide documentation showing and proving their specific needs. The support arrangements listed in the educational reports are limited to provisions of functional services such as reader, scribe and/ or extra time during exams. The only baseline support (Hart and Grigal, 2010) offered to each student is an entitlement of one hour of extra tuition per week (MCAST SSS Guidelines). The minimal level of opportunity and support available for students with intellectual disabilities in FE locally may be a reason why they are largely invisible in these educational spaces.

In a study on ESL by the Malta Ministry of Education in 2012, results showed that only 0.9% of the general student populations of FE institutions in Malta are students with disabilities. The direct relationship between ESL and unemployment has been greatly documented in Europe (Nevala and Hall, 2011; EC report on ESL, 2014). The unemployment rate for the general population in Malta is very good compared to EU averages (5.7% compared to the EU average of 9.7%: Eurostat, April 2015), with the current number of unemployed people standing at 6,501 (NSO, December 2014). In stark contrast the number of people with disabilities registered as unemployed in Malta stands at over 23,000 (KNPD Register, 2012).

Some believe that the main reason for this discrepancy is that employers are reluctant to employ people with disabilities due to misconceptions about disability and fear of liability (Evans, 2014). Another reason, however, is definitely the poor educational attainment level of people with disabilities in Malta. Illiteracy stands at 23.5% compared to 6% of the general student population (EU Literacy Report, 2012).

4.7.3 Employment

People with intellectual disabilities are considered to be one of society's minority groups at highest risk of poverty (EU Poverty Report, 2012). One of the main factors preventing people with disabilities from gaining independence is employment and therefore the lack of financial means (WHO World Report on Disability, 2011). The employment rates of people with disabilities in Malta stand at only 4.5 % of the disabled population (National census, 2011).

Literature offering explanations for this is lacking. However, a 2013 publication of the Malta Business Bureau examining employment trends in Malta established that job creation in Malta since 2010 has emanated mainly from service-based sectors such as ICT, financial, professional, food and accommodation. Cordina (2012) said that registered growth has been positive for workers holding medium to high-skilled jobs, but rather negative for people with low skills. People with intellectual disabilities may not have relevant or sufficient qualifications to meet criteria for most jobs in Malta. They may be also be perceived by employers to be a liability (ETC, 2012). This could be due to a lack of public education and exposure to disability.

The Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) published country reports in 2011 displaying the situations of education and people with disabilities across Europe. Access to employment was found to be the biggest challenge for young people with disabilities in Malta compared to non-disabled youth.

> Their employment rate tends to be much lower and they are over-exposed to unemployment and to exclusion from the labour market. Those accessing employment have more precarious and part-time jobs

> than the general population and may therefore be at risk of poverty. These challenges tend to be particularly strong for youth with cognitive impairments, with multiple impairments or with mental health conditions. (ANED, 2011, p. 133)

A study by Bezzina *et al.* (2009), using direct testimonials of people with intellectual disabilities in Malta, found that the most cited problem reported in the study was lack of financial independence due to the fact that most respondents relied solely on social security benefits. These, however, were not sufficient to support them in their everyday lives, especially those who needed specialised equipment. In this study by Bezzina *et al.* (2009) respondents expressed concern about lack of job opportunities. Most of those interviewed did not work, and those who did were engaged in low-skilled or clerical work and hence did not earn more than the minimum wage. Moreover, the research participants asserted that they had few opportunities for on-the-job training and promotion and were not given the possibility to work flexible hours. This financial situation limited their choices for their quality of life (Bezzina *et al.*, 2009).

A recent change in the law on disability pensions in Malta has opened up more opportunities for people with disabilities who wish to work. Up until 2014, anyone who received the disability pension could only receive remuneration for work if the salary and the pension jointly did not exceed the minimum wage. This was preceded by another law that stated that one loses the disability pension once employment is attained. Many people with disabilities chose not to work in the fear that if employment was lost, the re-issuing of the pension could take up to eight months. The Equal Opportunities Act was changed in the last budget in November 2014 to allow people with disabilities to retain their pension and work without constraints. These measures also included a significant effort to enforce a clause stating that every employer has to recruit one person with a disability for every 20 full-time employees. The enforcement of this quota has seen some success with large companies starting to offer job opportunities to those on the Disability Register (ETC, 2015). One needs to wait to evaluate whether these measures prove successful in decreasing the unemployment rates of people with intellectual disabilities in Malta since the law does not specify any impairments and there may be a general preference for people with physical and sensory disabilities.

4.5 Secularism and Politics

The Maltese political system takes place within a framework of a parliamentary representative democratic republic with the president of Malta being the constitutional head of state. The general control and direction of the country remains with the prime minister who is the head of government. Since Malta gained independence in 1963, the party electoral system has been dominated by two parties, the Christian democratic nationalist party PN *(Partit Nazzjonalista*) and the social democratic labour party PL (*Partit Laburista*).

In March 2013, the Maltese labour party won the general election after being in opposition for 28 years, and this has brought with it a shift to a more rights-based governance that has already provided more tools for equality nationally. Recent legislative changes have strengthened the rights of different minorities in Malta and this included the enforcement of clauses in the Employment Act to increase employment opportunities for the 'registered disabled' (Malta Employment and Industrial Relations Act, 2015) and other civil rights such as the introduction of the Gender Identity Act (Ch. 530, Laws of Malta, 2015) and Same-sex Civil Unions Act (Ch.540, Laws of Malta, 2013).

The Church in Malta has long been considered the 'third political party' and under the previous right-wing government this was endorsed as intrinsic to society's moral obligations (Bettettini, 2008). The present prime minister of Malta, Dr Joseph Muscat has upheld his socialist roots and made clear statements that he wants Malta to become a secular society and to move to a distinct separation of church and state (Times of Malta, 9 Feb 2014).

Despite being on the cusp of significant changes in the governance of the Maltese islands, the influence of the Church and traditions still have an effect on the socio-political dimension of Maltese society. The paternalistic nature of strong, traditional Maltese families has a negative effect on the aspirations of people with disabilities (Camilleri, 2006, p. 1). The predominant culture that forces dependence of people with intellectual disabilities on their families, is sometimes legalised through processes such as incapacitation and interdiction (Callus, 2009). Most recently, in 2012 a new guardianship act was approved in parliament which gives people with disabilities the opportunity to have their finances taken care of by a court-appointed person (Guardianship Act, Malta: 2013).

This law will finally help families who have children with certain conditions to protect the interests of those children while not having to resort to the draconian measures of incapacitation and interdiction. Although this law was much-awaited, there are significant shortcomings in its principle and applications, mostly due to the fact that only parents can apply for guardianship. This means that individuals whose family wants to maintain control over their life and finances have no choice.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the context within which this study will be implemented. The strong religious influence and community ties have significance in the paternalistic attitudes that are dominant in respect to people with disabilities in Malta. The charity model is also discussed to provide explanations for the roots of exclusionary attitudes towards disability. The educational system’s past and current systems are described as well as how inclusive education came about and some current challenges highlighted.

The low number of participants with disabilities in FEHE and the labour market is cause for concern. The history and culture of a country determines social attitudes and attributes and therefore needs to be factored into any exploratory research. The empirical study in this thesis looks at the factors that affect or otherwise the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta through the eyes of the students themselves. Malta has a very strong cultural identity; therefore, this chapter attempted to provide an idea of the context of the study which, it is hoped, will help the reader visualise the participants' narrative and ensuing discussion against the backdrop provided by this chapter and, to a lesser extent, the literature review. The participants of the study are part of Maltese society and so are influenced by its culture and the predominant beliefs and attitudes as am I as the researcher. The interpretivist nature of this study also requires an overview of the context to understand the subjectivity of the process.

It is hoped that the knowledge imparted in this chapter and in the next three data chapters can be used to identify specific exclusionary practices in Malta. This chapter covers key areas of Maltese life including the culture, socio-economic status and political context; it is against this background that the reader can place the context of the study results.

CHAPTER FIVE

A First Look at the Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of data collected from the focus groups, participant observation and interviews with the 21 study participants who are all people with learning disabilities. The interpretivist approach used in this research led me ultimately to employ a narrative approach to the final part of my empirical work. This narrative approach is a collection of the stories told by participants through conversations, which I use in concert with the findings of the semi-structured interviews, the focus groups and my own self-reflections and observations of the whole research process.

My empirical work comprises my analysis of data which I gathered on participants' experiences of their educational career, in particular about the transition to and participation in FE. The study also brings forward the experiences of those individuals who did not experience FE and explores the possible implications for this.

5.2 Participant Profile

In total, the study accesses the views, opinions and experiences of 24 individuals with intellectual disabilities with ages ranging from 15 to 44. The focus groups were held with two groups of six and seven participants respectively, while the interviews were undertaken with four different groups making up a total of 16 individuals. Five of the participants were involved in both the focus groups and the interviews. One of the initial participants dropped out of college and therefore also removed herself from the study. Her details and narrative were removed from the thesis as per her request.

The two focus groups included one group of students who were attending both mainstream and specialised courses within the Malta College for Art, Science and Technology (MCAST), while the other included older participants who are involved in a local self-advocacy group called *Flimkien Naslu* (Together we will get there). The average age of the two groups at the time of the research was 18 and 33 respectively. This may show some interesting differences related to how experiences of school years and inclusion have or have not varied in the last two decades in Malta.

The interview groups were divided according to their educational career paths at the time of the empirical study. Group one were in a mainstream FE vocational course while group two attended a vocational course for students with intellectual disabilities, both within MCAST. The third group of students were in their final year of secondary school while the participants in group four have never attended FE colleges.

The primary participants of the study are the individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, the research also includes some data from two parents and two LSAs who accompanied some of the participants at their own request. I include myself as a participant in this study due to my position in the research process. I am participating in the research through unstructured observation and self-reflective journaling, excerpts of which are included as data. This enabled greater opportunity for using a constant comparative method of network analysis of content and context.

The use of direct quotations from parts of the interviews and focus groups is done throughout the following three discussion and analysis chapters (Chapters Six to Eight) to deliver the exact messages given by participants as closely as possible, and to give particularly apposite illustrations of key points and themes. I also use 'thick description' in my analysis. Thick description was a term coined by Geertz (1975) to illustrate that social research is about understanding, for example, an element of behaviour by identifying subtle nuances and non-verbal communication to establish a more complete picture of the situation. In my research I attempt to capture such elements during the interactions with the participants and these are recorded in my personal journal for use in the final analysis of the study.

The following tables give some information on the primary participants of both focus groups and interviews along with some basic personal information as transferred and displayed below. The educational pathway taken is included in an attempt to identify whether factors such as being schooled in the state-run or church-run system affect the experiences and attitudes of students with disabilities in relation to pursuing FE. A short biography of each participant is also included as an appendix (Appendix six)

5.2.1 Focus group participants

FOCUS GROUP 1 (FG1)

This focus group is from *Flimkien Naslu* (Together we will get there) – a Maltese self-advocacy group for people with intellectual disabilities. Its member details are show below in Table 6

No	Pseudonym	Age	Further Education	Employment Status
1	Ina	21	State secondary school → Special school → Pathway Vocational Course → Level 1	Student
2	Abby	25	State secondary school ↓ No FE	Unemployed
3	Oliver	31	Church school ↓ No FE	Employed – office hand
4	Martha	44	State secondary school ↓ No FE	Unemployed
5	Molly	39	Church school ↓ No FE	Employed –cleaner
6	Charles	41	Church school ↓ No FE	Unemployed
7	Judy	33	Church school ↓ No FE	Employed – laundry worker

Table 6 Focus group one – held with members of a local self-advocacy group made up of individuals with intellectual disabilities

FOCUS GROUP 2 (FG2)

Focus group 2 contained students with intellectual disabilities attending different courses within MCAST.

No	Pseudonym	Age	Educational Career Path
1	Nadia	17	State secondary school → Pathway Course
2	Stella	17	Church school → Pathway → Level 1
3	Sina	16	Church school → Pathway → Level 1
4	Ned	23	Church school → Special school → Pathway Course → Employment
5	Kieran	19	Church school → Level 1 → Level 2
6	Caleb	18	Church school → Pathway Course → Level 1

Table 7 Focus group two – made up of current FE college students with intellectual disabilities

5.2.2 Interview participants

INTERVIEW GROUP 1 (IG1)

These four students are currently attending a mainstream MCAST course referred to as 'inclusive individual support' in the model discussed in the literature review by Hart *et al.* (2006).

No	Pseudonym	Age	Educational Career Path
1	Tristan	25	Church school → Pathway → Level 1
2	Crista	18	Church school → Pathway → Level 1
3	Ina	21	State secondary school → Special school → Pathway Course → level 1
4	Conrad	19	State secondary school → Pathway → Level 1

Table 8 Interview group one – students in mainstream FE

INTERVIEW GROUP 2 (IG2)

These four students are currently attending an MCAST vocational course for students with intellectual disabilities called Pathway to Independent Living, referred to in Hart's model as 'substantially separate' (Hart *et al.*, 2006).

No	Pseudonym	Age	Educational Career Path
1	Mina	17	State secondary school → Pathway Course
2	Caleb	18	Church school → Pathway Course
3	Kieran	19	Church school → Pathway Course
4	Nadia	17	State secondary school → Pathway Course

Table 9 Interview group two – students in specialised courses in FE

INTERVIEW GROUP 3 (IG3)

These four students are currently attending the final year of secondary compulsory school in different local schools.

No	Pseudonym	Age	Education
1	Larry	16	State school
2	Nathan	15	Church school
3	Steph	16	Church school
4	Malcolm	17	Church school

Table 10 Interview group three – students in entering FE

INTERVIEW GROUP 4 (IG4)

These four individuals moved from compulsory education in a special school to a day centre so they never attended FE colleges. They are part of *Flimkien Naslu*.

No	**Pseudonym**	**Age**	**Education**	**Employment Status**
1	Abby	25	State secondary school ↓ Special school ↓ Adult Training Centre	Unemployed
2	Oliver	31	Church school ↓ Special school	Employed – office hand
3	Martha	44	State primary school ↓ Special school ↓ Adult Training Centre	Unemployed
4	Molly	39	Church school ↓ Special school	Employed – cleaner

Table 11 Participants who have never been in FE

The data above present an initial picture where most of the participants were schooled in church-run institutions. This may be due to the provisions by

Maltese church schools to give priority to students considered as ‘serious cases’ (Regulations for Admission into Church Schools, Malta, 2015, p. 2). The culture inherent in Maltese church-run schools could be a factor that has an effect on how students are socialised into forming one particular identity based on traditional views of disability. This will be considered in the discussion and analysis chapters.

5.3 Research Questions

The literature review has shown that FE for students with intellectual disabilities provides some definite challenges in all countries. The European situation shows that barriers are multiple and range from a lack of proper transition planning to inadequate educational supports in FE to socio-cultural attitudes to disability. Although international legislation and policy has made significant strides in addressing these problems, it seems that these are not being effectively implemented in practice.

The literature review shows that institutional limitations are definitely a major factor when it comes to challenges faced by FE institutions and local governments. However, socio-cultural realities are different for different countries and the experiences of students with disabilities themselves are often lost in the midst of political dialogue. The fact that Malta has such a small number of students with intellectual disabilities in FE and in employment shows that there may be some significant problems in the current inclusive educational system, framed within the wider socio-cultural setting. The results of this study in fact show some clear trends in the beliefs and attitudes of the participants. Significant insights into the issue at hand were achieved by asking people with intellectual disabilities about their own lives and experiences within school in Malta.

This study investigates the subjective experiences of students with intellectual disabilities through the observation and interpretation of their discourse. The study resulted in a large quantity of narrative data due to the unstructured nature of the chosen methods.

All the interviews, focus groups and conversations were recorded and the audio files transcribed. As explained in Chapter Three on research design, I used a system of theme mapping and constant comparison, which then allowed me to elicit the most salient and recurring themes for each research question area. The following sub-sections are divided according to the research questions, including the main emerging themes and a selection of related narratives. A more detailed analysis and discussion of each theme will be provided in the following three chapters.

The research questions focus on five areas, namely transition from compulsory education to FE, held knowledge about FE options available, as well as the benefits and barriers they attribute to FE. Participants were also asked to describe an ideal FE experience that would help them to be successful. The results showed a very clear and consistent picture of the challenges faced by participants in the transition between compulsory and FE and this included a lack of accessible information and internalised negative attitudes resulting from bad school experiences.

5.3.1 Research question 1

What types of transition process are used in Malta to support students with intellectual disabilities to move into FE?

This research question was largely answered through the document interrogation phase of my study. The 13 IEPs I examined contained mostly information about the adaptation of lessons, with only three having a specific section on post-school planning and transition management. These three belonged to students from the same school. The other IEPs had a basic reference to transition in the final recommendations section.

All secondary schools are obliged to arrange yearly MAP sessions within which the student along with parents/ carers, LSA and other relevant professionals meet to discuss progress and plan the educational pathways to be taken. The IEP is discussed and revised in this session. Although the student is meant to be an active participant in these sessions, it is still common practice in some schools for the student to be excluded. Perhaps a more common practice is for the student to be present but relegated to the side lines with no direct involvement. Four out of the 16 interviewees said that they participated in discussions about post-school outcomes. Seven of the participants said that their parents were the primary decision-makers and although they attended MAP sessions they were not asked to participate. Five of the participants said that they never attended a MAP session or any meeting about their education and future.

The participants who said they never attended any MAP sessions belonged to three different interview groups which shows that this practice is still used to this day. This reflects my personal experience of delivering talks in schools about FE options. The schools invite parents and carers and the students are left out of the discussion. On many occasions I have remarked on this exclusion to the school and the response is always that 'they would not understand'.

MCAST provides the option for students who want to enrol in the specialised courses for students with intellectual disabilities to attend orientation days during which they spend the day following a typical timetable. During this time they meet staff and students and get information about the courses on offer and enrolment procedures. This option is not available to students accessing mainstream courses, even those who want to move from the specialised courses within MCAST. During one of the sessions with FG2 the participants mentioned how difficult it was to move to FE and then again to move from a specialised course to a more mainstream course without the necessary transition support.

5.3.2 Research question 2

Do people with intellectual disabilities consider FE as having benefits for them and what are the benefits?

The benefits of FE were seen to include exposure to the social and learning environment as well as the opportunity to increase employability and independent living skills, although the study found that the participants had much less to say on this than on the rest of the research areas. This could perhaps be due to a lack of knowledge and exposure to the long-term goals of FE.

The participants had a very mixed and wide array of perceptions on the benefits of pursuing FE. Out of the 16 interview participants, only eight could name at least one other FE college. The respondents in Group IG3 failed to answer questions about other FE options; however, they mentioned friendship as being a benefit of going to college. Another theme that came up often was the possibility of meeting a boyfriend/ girlfriend in FE since it is, for most students in Malta, the first co-educational school they attend. This wish for intimacy and friendships suggests that like all adolescents, the participants place great value on the social and emotional development. All the respondents agreed that FE is important but only eight could tell me why. This question seemed very baffling for many of the respondents and when I probed them to tell me why it was difficult for them to answer one of them put it very aptly.

Interview Group Three
Extract 1 – Lack of knowledge about FE

Malcolm	I was never told anything about it at all… never!

Considering that Malcolm is a final year student at secondary school, the lack of information and involvement in the transition planning is significant. The respondents from Interview Group IG1 who had an answer were all in FE attending a mixed hybrid course at a vocational college.

The two parents and two LSAs who accompanied some of the participants intervened during part of the interview and identified the social and academic experience as being a main benefit of FE. Employability and independence were mentioned by six of the participants.

Interview Group One and Three
Extract 2 – Parental perceptions on FE outcomes

Parent 1	I think it helps them to get a job but here no one will employ someone with disabilities such as our kids.
Parent 2	My daughter needs to stay in school to learn more on how to deal with life and how to do more things for herself. I always think of what she will do when I am not around anymore.

One of the LSAs mentioned the social aspect as being an important benefit of FE along with the opportunity for learning and progressing to become more independent and more employable.

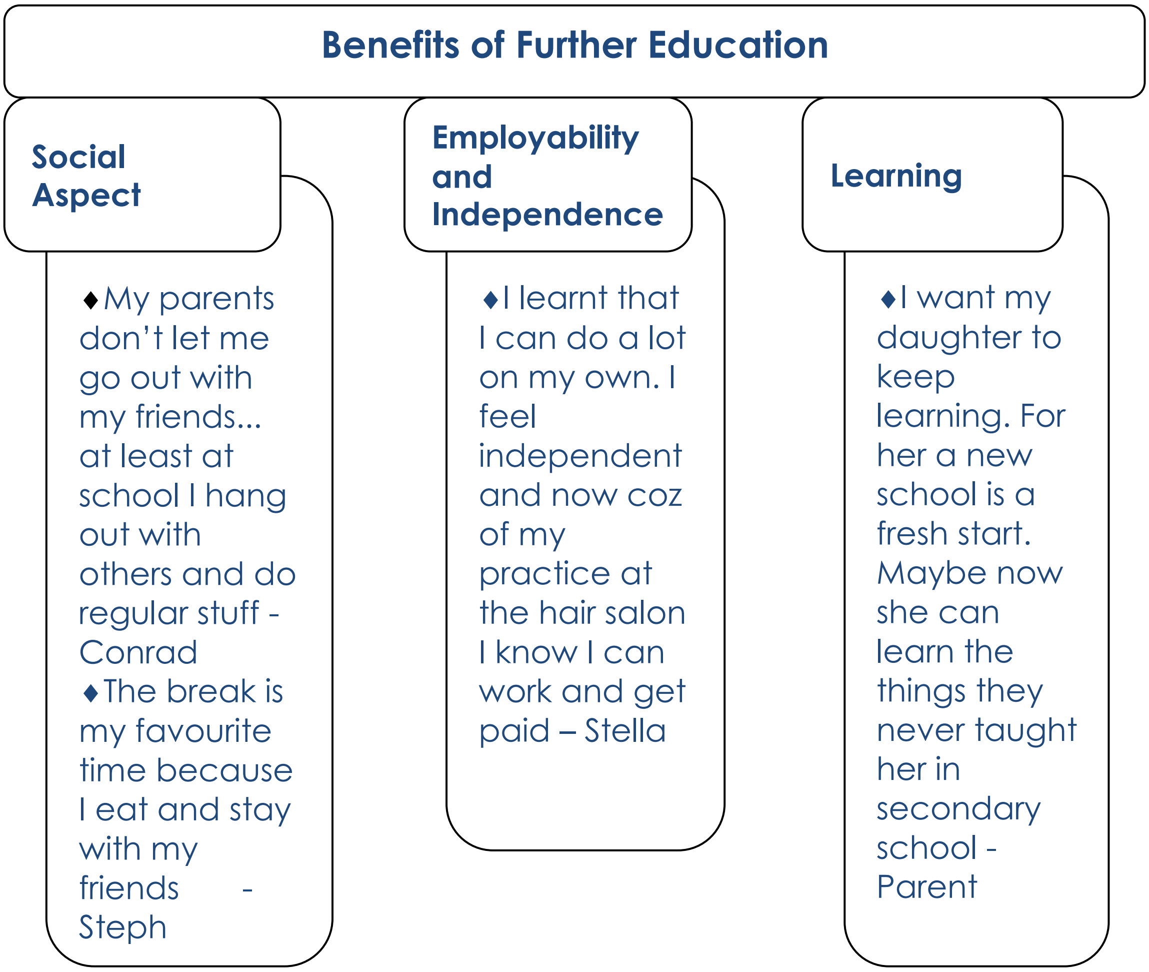
There was a marked difference in the responses of the focus group participants. The participants from the self-advocacy group (FG1) immediately identified various benefits, primarily the social aspect as well as being able to learn more skills to get better job prospects. The student focus group (FG2) on the other hand hesitated to start the discussion but eventually settled on a short discussion on employability skills. Friendships were also mentioned but the students from the mainstream courses claimed that they felt isolated from their non-disabled peers.

Focus Group Two
Extract 3 – FE students on isolation

Stella	It is different now as the others don't really want us… like they stay with the others so it's good to have each other.

The main benefits mentioned were, therefore, the social aspect, employability/ independence and learning. These three themes reflect the general benefits associated with FE; however, the difference in knowledge about the benefits of FE in the groups is noteworthy. The participants in FG1 had a wider understanding of what FE would give them while it was a strain for the younger student participants to come up with a comprehensive list of benefits. This points to the fact that the students have a lack of information about the subject while the participants in FG1, despite the fact that six of the seven people had never attended FE, knew more about the associated benefits. The lack of knowledge about FE will be considered in the next section which deals with barriers to FE.

Despite the fact that the study participants struggled with identifying benefits to FE, some main ideas emerged. The following figure shows the network analysis of the main themes arising from the data pertaining to research question two on the perceived benefits of FE according to the research participants.



Benefits of Further Education

Social Aspect

- My parents don't let me go out with my friends... at least at school I hang out with others and do regular stuff - Conrad
- The break is my favourite time because I eat and stay with my friends - Steph

Employability and Independence

- I learnt that I can do a lot on my own. I feel independent and now coz of my practice at the hair salon I know I can work and get paid – Stella

Learning

- I want my daughter to keep learning. For her a new school is a fresh start. Maybe now she can learn the things they never taught her in secondary school - Parent

Figure 1 Network analysis of benefits of FE

5.3.3 Research question 3

Are students with intellectual disabilities aware of the further education and support options for them?

This question ties in with first research question (RQ) on the transition arrangements available to students with intellectual disabilities in Malta. The results of my study clearly show that these students are frequently excluded from talks about FE and the type of support available to them. The support available in Malta for students within compulsory education is far more than that in FE colleges. In MCAST the support available varies substantially depending on whether they enroll in specialised courses or in mainstream ones. Despite the minimal support on offer, it seems that students with disabilities are not made aware of what is available. There may be various reasons for this, including an ableist attitude that places students with intellectual disabilities in a passive disempowered role or it is possibly a reluctance from FE institutions to 'market' the services available due to the cost associated with this type of provision. Another reason could be a lack of understanding regarding the accessibility of information. This was clearly explained by Ina who is the only participant who has been through both mainstream secondary schools and a special school before moving to a specialised course within MCAST to then progress to a mainstream vocational course. Ina is also part of FG1 and has spoken on various occasions about accessible information.

Interview Group One Extract 4 – Accessibility	
Ina	It is not just about large print but it is about using other things like simple words, pictures and the right font style. In many cases it is about providing audio material or someone to read for you.

Oliver (2009) also maintains the importance of using Maltese instead of English for important information and learning material.

Focus Group One Extract 5 – Language barrier	
Oliver	Many of us were never learnt English but we are expected to read and understand it.

This dilemma is one that recurs in my daily work as an educator. As explained in Chapter Four on the cultural context, Malta's two official languages are English and Maltese; however, the majority of citizens use Maltese on an everyday basis. Both Maltese and English are taught simultaneously at school but it is common practice for schools to teach only one language to pupils with intellectual or sensory impairments. The language chosen is the one used within the family and this is usually Maltese. The fact that within FE the language used for all subjects except Maltese language is English places those students at a great disadvantage. Official documents and information are also provided predominantly in English.

5.3.4 Research question 4

What are the factors that influence successful FE experiences for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta?

During the focus group meetings a lot of ideas ensued on how FE can be made more accessible and successful for the participants. A discussion on what is considered successful resulted in an agreement that the main markers of success for the participants were to have meaningful friendships and relationships with peers, to become more independent and to find employment. To make this happen the focus group participants highlighted three areas that needed improvement, namely effective and ongoing support both for academic and social aspects, better transition planning and more accessible options of available courses with teachers who have the right aptitude and are specifically trained on disability. The focus group participants who had experienced the specialised course for students with intellectual disabilities mentioned the positive aspects of being part of a tailor-made course. Three of the participants mentioned that this helped them make friends and get used to the environment of a large college before moving into mainstream courses. Also, the focus on life skills in the curriculum as well as having individual attention and lectures in small groups by knowledgeable staff helped them to learn and adapt.

13 of the 16 interview participants spoke mainly about feeling happy and safe as being an important part of a successful FE experience. Previous

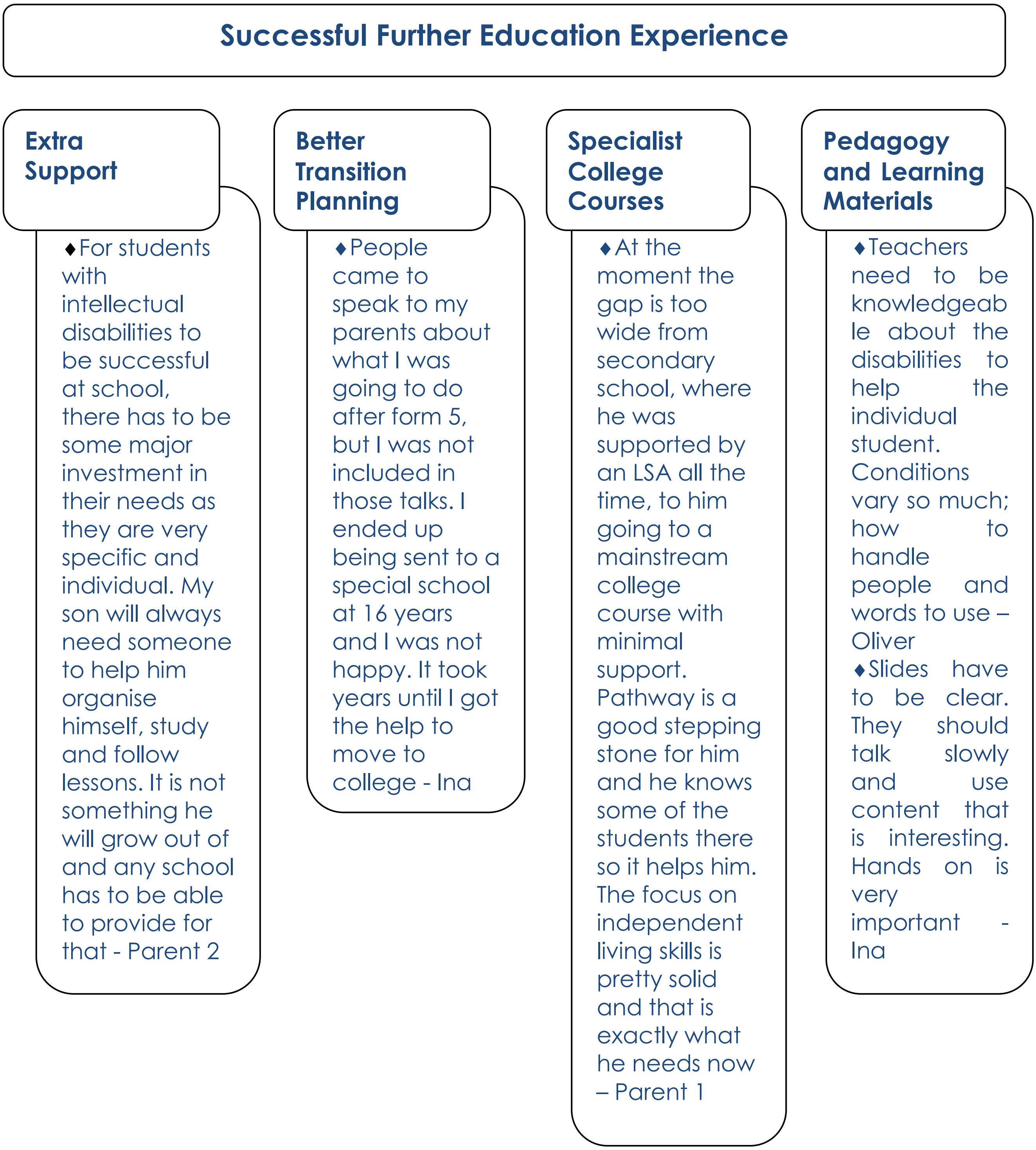
experiences of being bullied and isolated at school were frequently mentioned by all of the participants and this has had an impact on their attitude towards FE.

Interview Group Three
Extract 6 – Friendships

Larry	To have friends as I never really had any friends at school. They pick on me so I just keep away and sit with my LSA.

The need for more support from LSAs was a determining factor for 11 of the interview participants, as well as the parents and LSAs in the study. The LSA support in compulsory education is on a one-to one basis or one LSA is shared between two students. This level of support is not available at MCAST so students struggle to cope with the academic and social demands, especially in mainstream courses. Two of the participants in the research, however, mentioned that having an LSA with you at that age is embarrassing and other types of support should be offered.

The data in this study shows that the participants have some clear ideas as to what would make FE a successful experience for them and these are collated in the network analysis figure below and supported through the use of some narrative exerpts.



Successful Further Education Experience

Extra Support

◆For students with intellectual disabilities to be successful at school, there has to be some major investment in their needs as they are very specific and individual. My son will always need someone to help him organise himself, study and follow lessons. It is not something he will grow out of and any school has to be able to provide for that - Parent 2

Better Transition Planning

◆People came to speak to my parents about what I was going to do after form 5, but I was not included in those talks. I ended up being sent to a special school at 16 years and I was not happy. It took years until I got the help to move to college - Ina

Specialist College Courses

◆At the moment the gap is too wide from secondary school, where he was supported by an LSA all the time, to him going to a mainstream college course with minimal support. Pathway is a good stepping stone for him and he knows some of the students there so it helps him. The focus on independent living skills is pretty solid and that is exactly what he needs now – Parent 1

Pedagogy and Learning Materials

◆Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the disabilities to help the individual student. Conditions vary so much; how to handle people and words to use – Oliver

◆Slides have to be clear. They should talk slowly and use content that is interesting. Hands on is very important - Ina

Figure 2 Network analysis of the factors affecting successful FE experiences for students with intellectual disabilities

5.3.5 Research question 5

What are the barriers faced by students with intellectual disabilities when accessing further education in Malta?

Although the participants struggled to identify the benefits of FE, the barriers cited, on the other hand, were numerous and included mainly negative school experiences and internalised beliefs and attitudes. All of the focus group and interview participants in the study struggled with bullying and loneliness at secondary school, as well as inadequate educational systems that did not cater for their needs. These experiences were said to have affected their perception of themselves. This is seen throughout the narrative of the study which is full of references to internalised notions of inadequacy and indifference.

The five research questions were addressed to provide as complete a picture as possible of how students with intellectual disabilities experience inclusion or exclusion from FE. The flexibility of the methods adopted, however, allowed the participants to focus on whichever subject they felt more strongly about, and by far the most discussed issue was the last question about the barriers to FE access. Although the discussion deviated a few times to a more general issue regarding social exclusion, I did not consider this to be a problem since many of the points were still applicable to a wider socio-cultural attitude in Malta.

A majority of the narrative was about barriers to inclusion so due importance is given in this thesis to the subject (RQ5) although the other questions are all inevitably linked. The participants had a lot to say about exclusion and provided testimonials on the reasons for such a poor representation of individuals with intellectual disabilities, not only in FE but in adult-dominated social environments.

The literature has shown that in Malta only 2.7% of people with disabilities attend post-secondary education and the statistics for students with intellectual disabilities is even lower (Malta National Census, 2011). This research is looking at reasons for such poor participation. The main identified barriers are negative school experiences and inadequate educational systems. The first theme includes mainly experiences of bullying and isolation which in turn result in internalised beliefs of inadequacy and attitudes of indifference. The second theme refers to both the compulsory educational system including ineffective or absent transition planning and also the inadequate accessibility and support systems of FE.

All of the interview respondents mentioned negative school experiences as one of the main reason why they think students with disabilities do not even attempt FE. Bullying as a word featured in all of the focus group and interview transcripts, as well as words that refer to experiences of isolation and loneliness. The respondents were very eager to share this information and in many cases the stories recounted ended up taking up most of the interview time as the often harrowing experiences needed to be explored and processed in that immediate setting.

During the focus groups the exploration of negative school experiences became a deep and sometimes painful sharing of experiences as the group participants opened up about their own individual past. At first this seemed to engender the possibility of emotional danger to the more susceptible students and my first instinct was to intervene and facilitate the dynamics to maintain the safety of the individuals. However, before I could speak, one of the more outgoing students got up and changed her place to sit close to her friend who was recounting a particularly scary ordeal she had gone through at school. This gesture pushed me back as I realised that I was trying to exert control and protect unnecessarily. This perhaps reflects how adults in their social world treat them and results in them not having real experiences that in themselves teach self-preservation and independence skills.

The fact that students with disabilities still experience negative attitudes at school points towards the possibility that although schools in Malta may have become more inclusive, there is still work to be done to make sure that each individual student is truly integrated. Attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities in schools are perhaps a reflection of a societal stance based on traditional ideologies that place disability in a charity category that allows the nature of interactions to be purely toleration and commiseration.

These beliefs and attitudes may be affected by general socio-cultural messages of ableism that still permeate Maltese society. A demonstration of this is the type of content in the discourse between participants and also between the parents and the students. The discourse is laced with repeated words and expressions showing religious dependency.

This sympathetic approach, however, does not seem to translate to offers of true integration in the form of friendships and social interactions which in turn leads to the experiences of isolation and rejection mentioned by the research participants. The internalisation of these experiences may lead to attitudes and beliefs of personal inadequacy or indifference which in turn reinforce socio-cultural notions of disability.

The following figure depicts the three principal themes arising out of my empirical data, each of which is then divided into three sub-themes. The next section of this chapter offers further explanations.

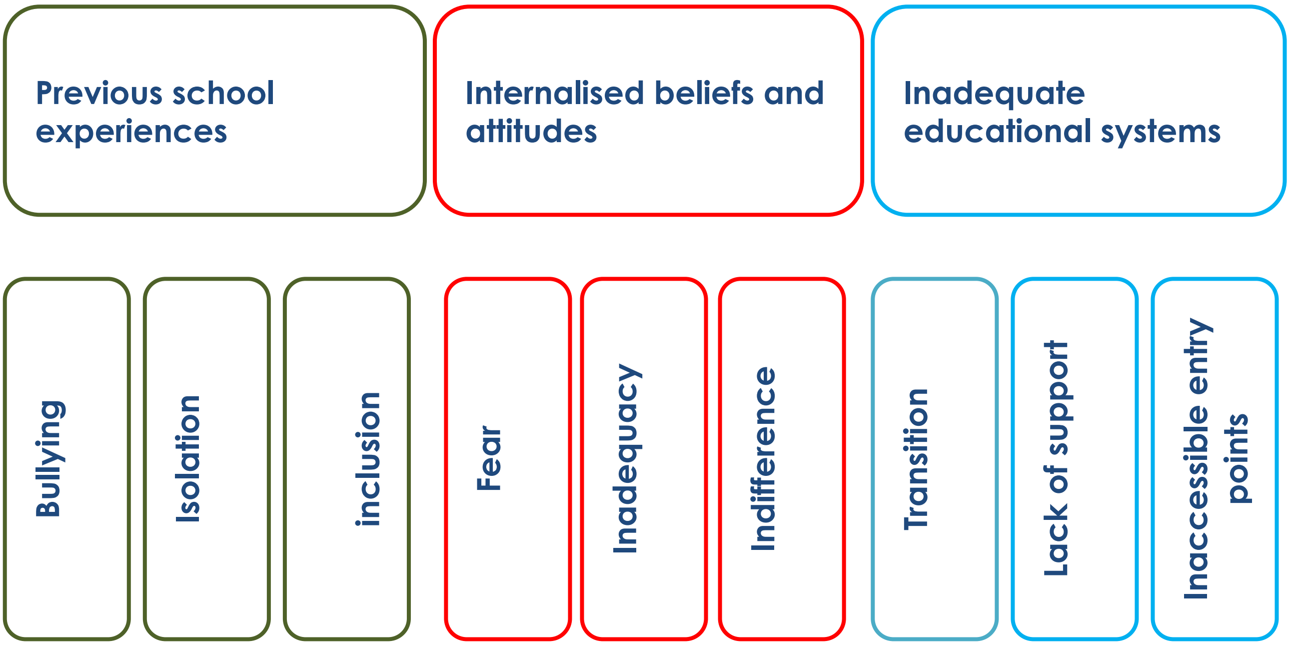


Figure 3 Network analysis of the barriers to FE for students with intellectual disabilities

5.4 Barriers as Main Emerging Themes

The participants' concentration on the last research question moved me to place my own primary focus on this aspect of the study and to deliver my analysis and discussion on the three core themes of the final question on barriers to FE in Malta. Each of these three themes and their sub-themes are presented below in an overview and diagrammatical representation which includes selected quotes from the narrative exemplifying each point. A detailed analysis and discussion of these three themes follows in the next three chapters.

5.4.1 Theme one – previous school experiences

All the participants of the interview groups mentioned bullying and isolation as being the single most significant reason for them not wanting to, or struggling with, the idea of continuing their education beyond compulsory age. The common belief was that they would be extending their negative experiences and many reported always looking forward to the end of their school years. The focus group discussions also identified bullying as a determining factor; however, three of the participants in FG1 said that they wished they had the opportunity to stay in school so that they could have had friends. Two of the participants claimed that they had very little opportunity to socialise at present and despite their bad experiences with bullying when they were younger, they were hopeful that they would have friends in FE. This point was also brought up during eight of the interview sessions where it was stated that the time spent at college was the only time they had to be with their peers due to parental restrictions.

Three of the participants in FG2 said that they had also feared meeting the same students due to the fact that most of their peers ended up going to the same college. One student claimed that a girl who used to mistreat her in secondary school also enrolled at MCAST and she made sure to avoid going to the canteen area for fear of seeing her.

Emerging Theme One – Previous school experiences

Bullying

◆For many years I suffered bullying from some of the girls. They used to make me do errands for them. It was disgusting because they made me pick up remains of their lunch and pieces of eaten fruit. And they said that if I didn't they wouldn't be my friends. I thought it would be the same in every school so I stayed home – Molly

◆I spent most of form 4 and 5 hiding from bullies under the theatre stage where they keep the props. No one came to look for me – Larry

Isolation

◆It broke my heart seeing that he did not have any friends. I used to try to talk to him about it but I think he was embarrassed – Parent

◆I never had any real friends. The girls who spoke to me did so because they were told to. I wanted to hang out with the other kids who had an LSA like me but my teacher wanted me to stay with the girls who were better than me - Ina

Integration not inclusion

◆I never really did anything like the others. I was always out of class and never attended any lessons as such. They treated me like a stupid thing with no brains so I never wanted to study more. All I wanted was for school to finish. I left at 16 because I knew I would not be able to follow lessons – Crista.

◆Well I was not allowed to do what the others did even during outings… it felt… I felt very sad. I would just sit there alone - Ned

Figure 4 Emerging theme one

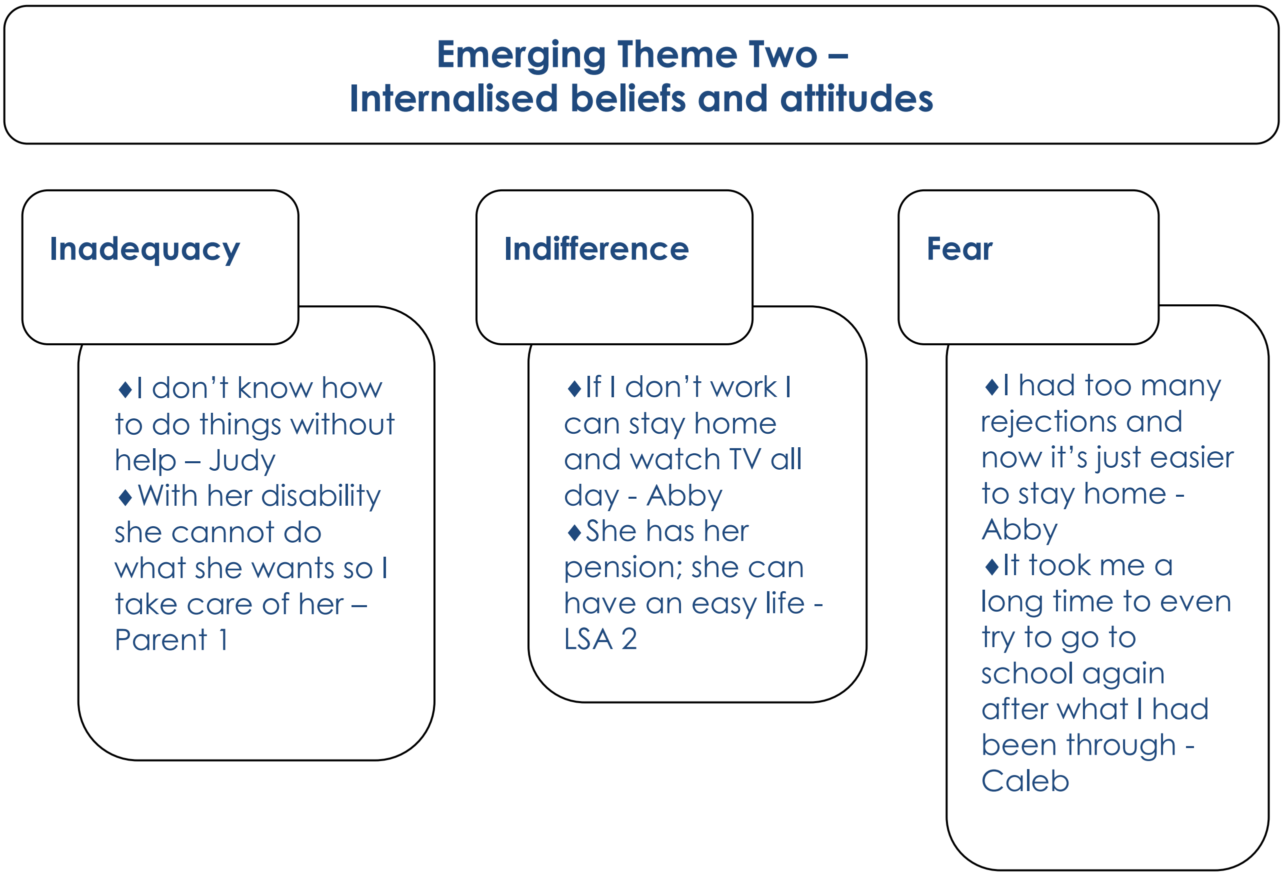
5.4.2 Theme two – internalised beliefs and attitudes

It was very apparent from the interviews that many students have defeatist attitudes when it comes to a lot of areas in their lives but this is particularly so when it comes to school. The FG participants exhibited attitudes of indifference and hopelessness at their educational and employment prospects. Six participants from FG1 held beliefs that they are or were not capable academically to succeed in college. Conversely, the students in FG2 said that they used to think that they may not be able to succeed but now that they are in college, they have higher hopes and they have changed their perspective on their abilities. During FG1 meetings the issue of special schools being chosen as a safe option came up. Ina and Ned were very bitter about the fact that they were placed in a special school for more than a decade without ever having a say in it. There was an agreement that there was no real academic value in what they learned as it was mostly art and craft-based projects and outings.

However, they mentioned having more friends there in comparison to mainstream schools. The eight participants who had attended a special school did not have the experiences of isolation but recounted instances of mistreatment from teaching staff and LSAs. Three participants said that their parents sent them to a special school because there was free food and transport provided, as well as the fact that it was a sheltered environment.

The two parents were also very negative about the prospects of their children citing mostly the abysmal opportunities for employment for people with disabilities in Malta as a demotivation. The parents and the LSAs spoke of the ‘hardship’ of work and that in some cases the person with intellectual disabilities can just rely on the family and the state pension and not ‘bother with work’. One of the mothers turned to her daughter and said ‘you can stay at home and keep me company no?’ The daughter looked at me resignedly and said nothing. I knew this student well, having taught her for more than a year, and I knew that she really wanted to work in hotels. Her silence may have been due to the way she was socialised into being submissive and in not having choices to exert. My experience has shown me time and time again that these traditional beliefs and attitudes are a notable force that act to intensify exclusion in Maltese society.

Fear is an emotion that was expressed very often during both interviews and focus groups. In the case of students where the disability was not visible, there was fear of disclosure, which may stem from a fear of being hurt, rejected or ridiculed.



Emerging Theme Two –
Internalised beliefs and attitudes

Inadequacy

- ♦I don't know how to do things without help – Judy
- ♦With her disability she cannot do what she wants so I take care of her – Parent 1

Indifference

- ♦If I don't work I can stay home and watch TV all day - Abby
- ♦She has her pension; she can have an easy life - LSA 2

Fear

- ♦I had too many rejections and now it's just easier to stay home - Abby
- ♦It took me a long time to even try to go to school again after what I had been through - Caleb

Figure 5 Emerging theme two

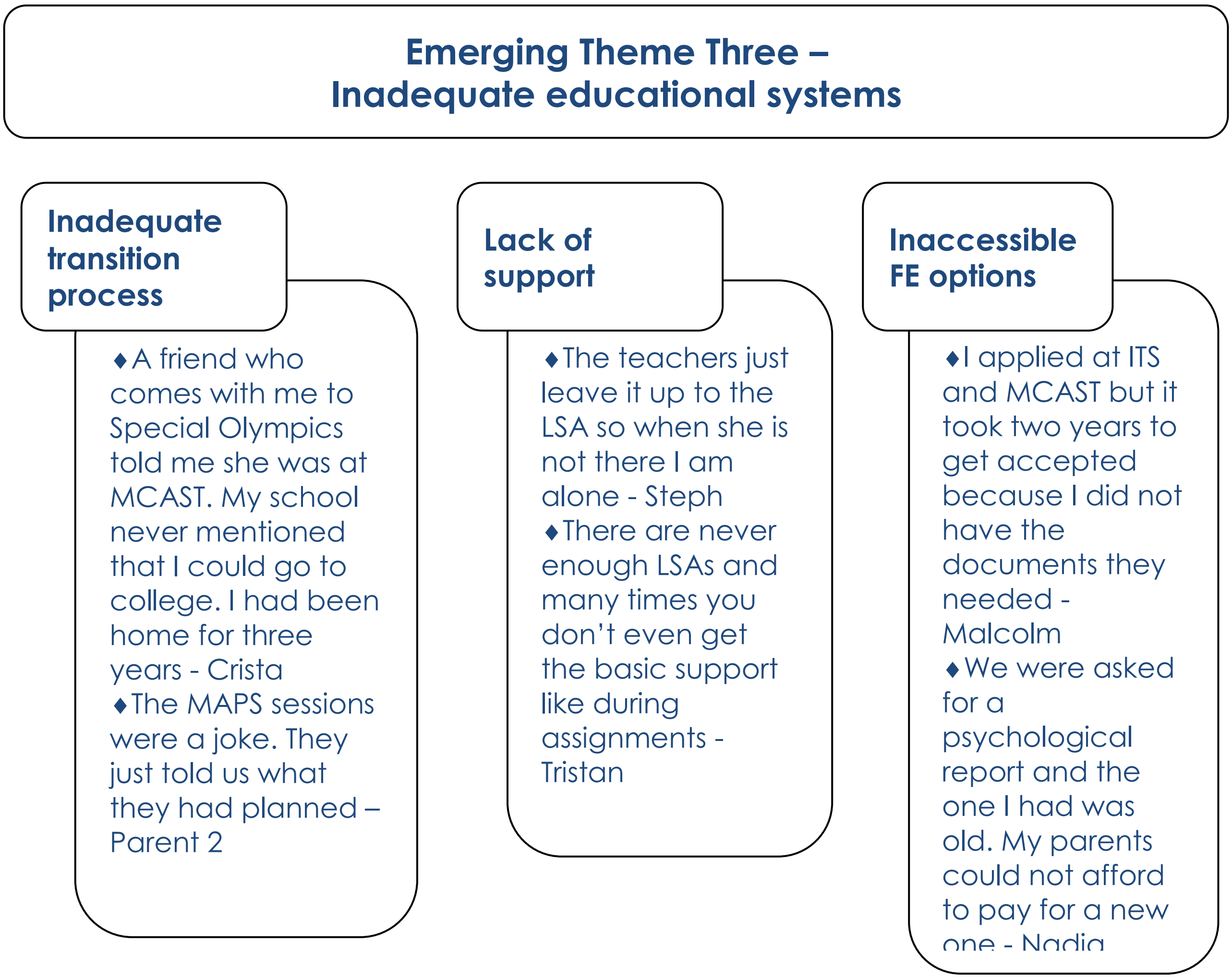
5.4.3 Theme three – inadequate educational systems

Another area that was cited as a barrier to FE was inadequate educational systems in place. The parents and LSAs questioned the lack of choice available to students in relation to their educational needs and desires, particularly in transition planning. Although 11 of the interview participants reported sitting in for their MAPS sessions, only four said they were active participants. Most of the time the agenda and certain decisions were set prior to the meeting with no involvement from either the student or the parents. A very common concern for parents was that even though their son/ daughter was integrated physically in mainstream school, they were not really included. Even with the best efforts of schools to create the optimum environment for them, the students with disabilities were at best just tolerated by their peers. This situation was mentioned at both compulsory level and at FE.

A notable point that was mentioned by both focus groups and half of the interviewees was the fact that the documents required to get into MCAST and other FE institutions are difficult to provide. The cost of providing a psychological report is seen as a barrier to inclusion: many families cannot afford the fee and the waiting time for free assessments by government psychological service departments runs to over a year.

During the focus groups both parties agreed that the curriculum in mainstream courses is too academically oriented with inadequate life skills training. Some parents complained that even during the last term of the final year of compulsory education, when most students are off school preparing for their SEC examinations, the schools do not take this opportunity to teach some transitional life skills to students who will not sit for SEC examinations.

The focus group participants who have experienced post-secondary mainstream education stated there is a serious lack of support during the course and that the lessons are too difficult to understand. During the individual interviews, when asked about how FE can be more successful for students with intellectual disabilities, all of the participants mentioned practical pedagogical changes. These include ideas such as using Maltese as the language in teaching materials instead of English, using more visual and audio aids and for lecturers to speak slowly, clearly and to use simple words.



Emerging Theme Three –
Inadequate educational systems

Inadequate transition process

- A friend who comes with me to Special Olympics told me she was at MCAST. My school never mentioned that I could go to college. I had been home for three years - Crista
- The MAPS sessions were a joke. They just told us what they had planned – Parent 2

Lack of support

- The teachers just leave it up to the LSA so when she is not there I am alone - Steph
- There are never enough LSAs and many times you don't even get the basic support like during assignments - Tristan

Inaccessible FE options

- I applied at ITS and MCAST but it took two years to get accepted because I did not have the documents they needed - Malcolm
- We were asked for a psychological report and the one I had was old. My parents could not afford to pay for a new one - Nadia

Figure 6 Emerging theme three

5.5 Self-reflection

I give the following commentary not as auto-ethnography per se but as what I consider to be a valid commentary based on my own experience of teaching students with disabilities. During this experience I have often wondered about the legitimacy of including all students with disabilities within a mainstream environment. The questions in my head have been reflected by students, parents and other professionals in the field. The investment that has been poured into the Maltese educational system, at least in primary and secondary schools, to provide the accessibility needed for students with the whole spectrum of needs has been phenomenal. The experience of all the research participants', however, points to a school experience marked by defeatism, negativity, bullying and/ or neglect.

Despite this, there is reluctance to consider the possibility that this type of mainstreaming in Malta has been a relative failure. If we consider the high level of early school drop-outs and low number of students with disabilities furthering their education beyond the compulsory years, we may need to re-think our goals as a country. There are some obvious changes that need to be made which are also parallel to European policy guidelines. One of the 'least painful' is to strengthen the IEP process in the final years of compulsory education to include a solid transition plan.

Another change needs to take place within FE colleges to provide more supported and accessible entry points and procedures and provisions of both anticipated baseline support systems and specific supports according to individual needs. During the research process I had a recurring concern about the issue of mainstream versus separate education. This has followed me throughout my life and I had never reached a definite opinion; however, through this research I have come to believe that true inclusion lies not in putting all students in the same school but it is providing them with options of any type of education they deem best suits their needs. It also means that all the options have to be accessible and include good standards with different entry and exit points. This idea would ideally hold true for all students at all different levels but perhaps even more so in FE since it is at this age that students need to become more independent and be supported to make their own choices.

This research process gave me a glimpse of the harsh realities faced by people with intellectual disabilities in Malta. It also made me realise how decisions taken by people in power to adhere to policies and guidelines set out by international institutions are not necessarily transposed in a way that is beneficial to the individual. The students who are placed in mainstream schools are not necessarily included and those in specialised schools and courses may not be getting a quality education.

Stories of bullying and isolation will keep being heard if research asks for personal narratives from students with disabilities. In my role as a programme coordinator at MCAST I have heard countless times from students attending a specialised course for students with learning disabilities that they finally have some friends unlike their time at mainstream secondary school. This all made me wonder then whether the concept of this ‘forced’ inclusion is working, since the results of this study show that negative school experiences are the main reason why students with intellectual disabilities chose not to pursue FE. These experiences also lead to self-defeatist attitudes and beliefs which in turn affect other areas of their life. These attitudes in people with intellectual disabilities and their families shape their identity and reinforce societal views about disability.

Teaching can be understood as an act of responsibility towards a student, instead of an instrumental action whence knowledge is given to students. Anders Safstrom (2003) describes how teachers are increasingly treating students as objects of knowledge that reinforce their ego. This reminded me of one of the evenings when I attended the informal meeting of the self-advocacy group *Flimkien Naslu*. When I arrived the group was debating one of the episodes of a popular TV programme. D.R.E.A.M.S is a Maltese TV show that portrays the lives of a group of young artists. One of the focus group participants, seeing my ignorance of the programme in question, proceeded to give me a summary of what it was all about.

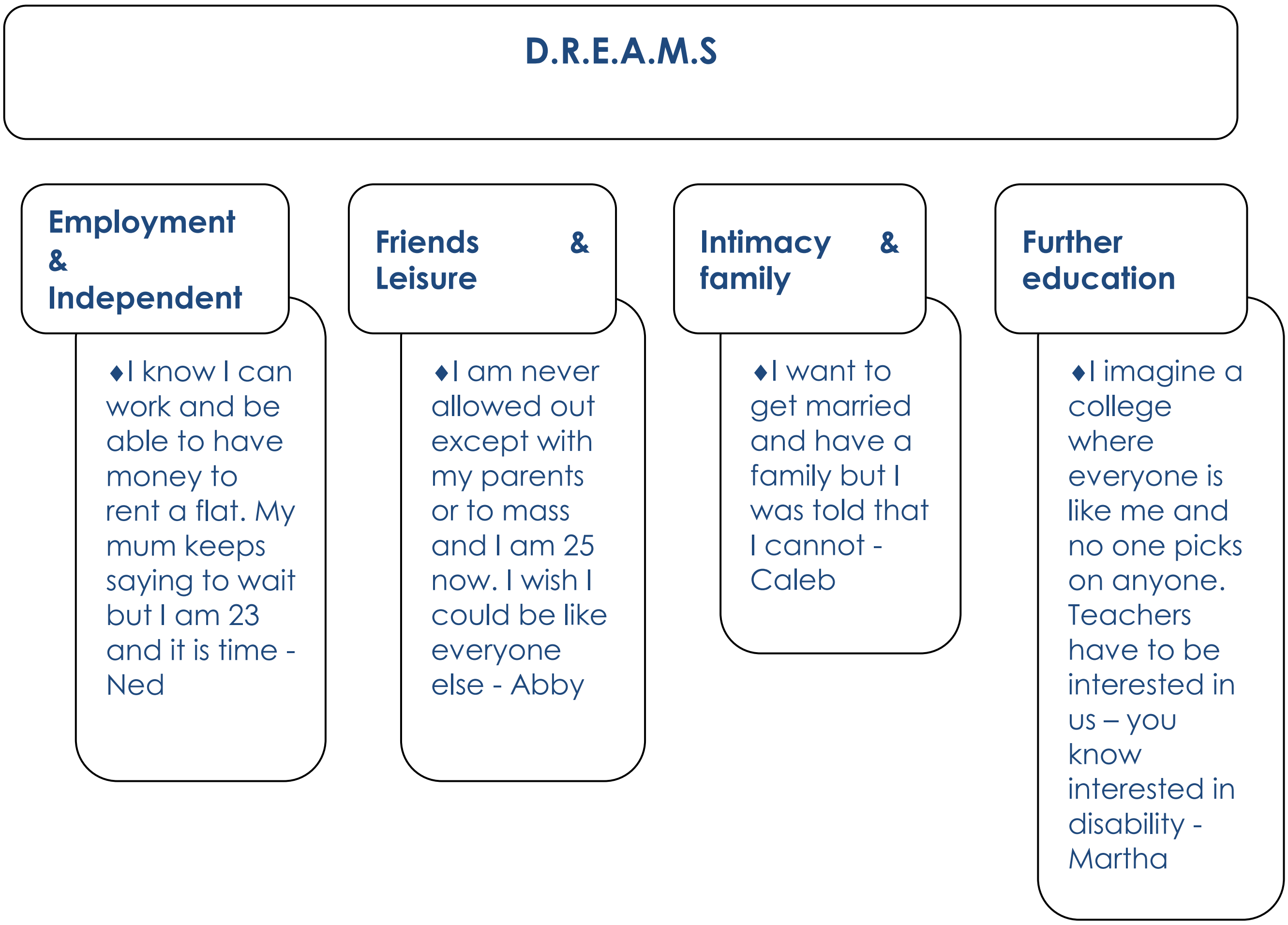
Focus Group One
Extract 7 – D.R.E.A.M.S

Ina	It's a group of young people, you know like us, and they are trying to convince their teachers that they are good at what they do. Their teachers are strict and choose only the best students for the scholarship. They do not see that for one guy it takes ten months to get to a spot and for the other it takes 10 minutes. They don't care about the effort they just care about the results. You know…it's the same for us!
Oliver	People like you come and interview us and ask us about our lives and views but nothing really changes…for us.

I went home and watched all the re-runs of the TV show. I have been working with people with disabilities for that long sometimes my vision gets blurred. My own personal dreams get in the way of clarity. I have moved from working within a medical model institution to a charity model to an emancipatory educational model. My own personal transitions should reflect a deeper understanding and a wider scope for inclusion; however, during this focus group I started feeling part of a tainted process. There is a fine line between doing ethical research and doing it for the motive of personal progression. I started doubting myself and my research. I know that what I am doing will hopefully increase insight on the barriers to FE for students with intellectual disabilities, but is this a justification for being the one holding the lens?

When I was transcribing the same focus group session, I caught a statement made by Martha, which I had missed due to the background noise and people talking at the same time. In reply to my question of what are the things that are important in a school environment, Martha said ‘that the teachers are actually really interested in us…in disability too you know!’

Her statement somehow, and perhaps unjustifiably, made me feel less of a ‘user’ because I have always been interested in my students, in their difficulties and in their impairments, in diversity more generally. Not as a researcher but more on a human level. I decided to include a section in my research dedicated to their dreams and aspirations. I let all the people with intellectual disabilities in my research actively take over the interview and focus groups and just talk about what they liked and what they wished without questioning or guiding the discussion either way. This resulted in some of the most inspiring narratives of the whole research process.



♦I know I can work and be able to have money to rent a flat. My mum keeps saying to wait but I am 23 and it is time - Ned

♦I am never allowed out except with my parents or to mass and I am 25 now. I wish I could be like everyone else - Abby

♦I want to get married and have a family but I was told that I cannot - Caleb

♦I imagine a college where everyone is like me and no one picks on anyone. Teachers have to be interested in us – you know interested in disability - Martha

Figure 7 Network analysis of participants' dreams for life

Figure 7 shows the main dreams mentioned by the participants. The lack of friendships seems to be a great hurt for all of the participants; some even became emotional as they recounted the extent of their loneliness and lack of freedom. Being employed is seen by more than half of the participants as the most important thing to achieve in life and this was also associated with the social aspect of having colleagues and belonging somewhere. Other frequently mentioned personal dreams were to be happy and be able to go out and make friends. All but three of the participants spoke about parental constraints and the fact that they were not allowed out unaccompanied. The three who did not mention parental constraints were Charles and Molly, who live together as a couple, and Oliver who has no parental restrictions. In these situations it may be worth noting that the parents of these three participants either lived abroad for a long time or are in fact of a foreign nationality.

The participants from the self-advocacy group brought up independent living as an option, albeit admitting it is very difficult to achieve. The opportunity to make choices came up repeatedly and there was a general wish that they would not be treated like charity cases but like equal human beings. Oliver maintained that to be independent means to be in control of your decisions, especially when it comes to intimacy and having relationships.

Interview Group Four
Extract 8 – Speaking of angels

Oliver	One of the worse things we do to ourselves is let people speak up for us. That is the worst thing. We let our parents speak for us and it's a mistake. We let the priest speak for us and that is also a mistake. We cannot let people treat us like babies anymore or as if they are speaking of angels.

5.6 Connecting the Findings

The literature review resulted in three main areas which act within the inclusion and exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in FE. The table below is re-inserted from Chapter Two to show the emerging themes from the literature for comparison to my study results.

Institutional Factors	Socio-cultural Factors	Psycho-emotional Factors
Transition Support Pedagogy, curricula and the educator Lack of evaluation Information Financial	Ableism Peer interactions Stigma and identity Paternalism and growing up	Fear Self-defeating Attitudes Psychopathology

Table 12 Factors affecting FE identified in the literature

This thesis presents findings from a study the results of which show that the experience of the participants can also be categorised in the same three areas which emerged from the literature review.

5.6 1 Research questions and findings

The first three research questions did not elicit a significant response which, despite the limitations placed on the study, shows in itself that people with intellectual disabilities in Malta are not included enough in conversations that are relevant and important to their lives. This leads to the fact that they may not be involved in choice processes. The findings of this study suggest that the people with intellectual disabilities involved in this study had little awareness of the options for FE available to them and they also struggled to identify how FE could be of benefit. The research participants, however, spoke a lot about their past experiences of school as being a scary and lonely time. The narrative word count pertaining to the last research question was larger than for the other four research questions put together. Therefore, this study is placing focus on the barriers to FE inclusion and the factors that may influence successful transition to and participation in FE for students with intellectual disabilities.

5.6.2 FE attendance motivators

Unfortunately, a strong motivator to continue on to FE recounted by more than half of the participants was to get the monthly student maintenance grant. Many parents of students with disabilities have said this to me directly over the years, claiming they only send them to MCAST to have an additional income for the family. This has also led to a phenomenon whereby students with disabilities purposefully extend their years in FE by repeating or moving from one course to another. This is generally coordinated by parents and/ or significant others in a bid to delay what is aptly described in this parent's statement 'as inevitable progression to becoming a couch potato'.

It may be said that school is generally not a place where most young people would choose to be. This is mainly due to the constricting demands placed on them by curricular systems and educational expectations. Of course, the socialisation aspect of the schooling system then provides students with a venue for peer relations and emotional growth and development. Despite the academic demands and pressure put on students to perform successfully, many adults look back upon their school days with some feelings of nostalgia.

Although the data show significant difficulties experienced by the participants in making friends, it was interesting that there still was an element of 'hope' that FE could indeed be a different experience in this regard. This was, however, related mainly to making friends with other students with disabilities in specialised courses of study rather than in mainstream courses.

According to the findings of this research, most of the participants in this study remember their school days as ridden with negative emotions and feelings of fear, vulnerability and loneliness. These experiences may be considered factors in explaining the low numbers of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta. The foremost reason for students with intellectual disabilities not pursuing FE is negative school experiences resulting in feelings of fear and passivity. The negative school experiences included bullying, isolation and educational systems that are limited to providing a restricted form of integration and not real inclusion.

5.6.3 Negative school experiences

Fear of being bullied, harassed or ridiculed was mentioned very frequently by research participants with many offering tales of incidents suffered throughout their school years. Like bullying in general, bullying of students with disabilities represents both a civil rights and public health challenge. Amongst the possible effects of bullying the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010) includes lowered academic achievement and aspirations, increased anxiety, loss of self-esteem and confidence, depression and post-traumatic stress, deterioration in physical health, self-harm and suicidal thinking, suicide, feelings of alienation, absenteeism and other negative impacts, both educational and health related. While both students with and without disabilities face significant negative emotional, educational and physical results from bullying, students with disabilities are both uniquely vulnerable and disproportionately impacted by the bullying phenomena. Despite this, there exists a dearth of both research and policy focusing on eliminating the bullying of students with disabilities.

Negative school experiences also involve issues of lack of accessibility, both in the transition process from secondary school and in the post-secondary options. Accessibility here refers to a general concept including lack of information, correct pedagogy, trained staff and comprehensive transition planning. The transition process was also identified during the 'document interrogation' as the participants' IEPs did not contain any reference to a transition plan. The participants mentioned that they were not involved in decisions of FE planning and some options were not offered which meant that they were not allowed to make informed choices pertinent to their educational career. This could be seen as a reflection of general societal attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities as they replicate a paternalistic, charity model that disempowers them. This could be an explanation as to why so few of the participants could discuss in any detail how FE could benefit them or what types of careers they aspire to. This was in stark contrast to discussions of past experiences which were related in much detail. Narratives on the benefits of FE and the future in general were significantly more animated when it came to having friends and socialising compared to identifying employment. The lack of ambition and the defeatist attitudes towards employment may be showing that either they feel they are incapable of work or else they know that the opportunities are too slight.

5.6.4 Internalised attitudes and beliefs

Another theme that emerged from my own observations was the over-reliance on religious faith as a driver for decision-making or lack of it. This was observed as having become internalised as an attitude in both students and parents/ carers and may be contributing to defeatist mentalities and a reluctance to invest in their academic future. The participants demonstrated internalised beliefs and attitudes of passivity and dependency which may arise from dominant socio-cultural messages. The results will be discussed in the following sections and compared to data that emerged from the literature review.

The participants of both focus groups and more than half of the interviews mentioned a pervasive experience of not having choice over anything substantial. This may be due to a societal attitude towards people with intellectual disabilities that in turn becomes internalised as self-defeatist attitudes. These attitudes were observed during the research as some of the participants voiced concerns that they never attempted FE because they knew they would inevitably fail.

5.6.5 Educational exclusion

School exclusion of students with disabilities is a complex phenomenon that has repeated itself at every educational level since the first legislative changes that allowed for students with disabilities to be included in mainstream education in Malta (Bartolo, 2010). The last national census (NSO, 2011) suggests that less than 3% of students with disabilities access FE, a statistic only marginally higher than the numbers shown in the previous national census in 2005. This increase may be due in part to the establishment of mixed hybrid courses for students with intellectual disabilities within MCAST.

Although the extent of exclusion cannot be corroborated due to lack of available data, this study focuses on the why and the how rather than the how many. The interpretivist nature of this research compels me to put aside the numbers and delve deeper into the barriers perceived by students with intellectual disabilities when accessing FE colleges in Malta. It was noted that the participants had limited awareness of the possibility of attending college and this was because they were not informed of the available options. The debate in the UK and US about college access and the new right neo-liberal agenda increasing school competitiveness to attract the best students, is perhaps being manifested also in Malta. A recent move by the local Maltese government to open up the local market to foreign FE institutions is raising the stakes for local institutions to offer the highest standards of academia. This may be translating to a decreased investment in the promotion of accessible courses to those students who struggle academically. The marketisation of schools and colleges may be beneficial for Maltese colleges and the University to become part of a more pluralistic society; however, with that comes a need for the same institutions to maintain accessibility for students with intellectual disabilities through the provision of the required access points and support mechanisms.

Let us start with the question of *how* are some students with disabilities being excluded from and within FE colleges. The more obvious reason for exclusion from most FE and HE colleges in Malta is the students' lack of qualifications. The two other available options are MCAST and ITS. Both these colleges offer foundation level courses which require no formal qualifications but course accession is subject to the provision of a school leaving certificate and an interview. MCAST then also provides two entry level two and three courses designed specifically to cater for the needs of students with intellectual disabilities and mental health concerns. These courses are 'substantially separate' (Hart *et al.,* 2006), which means that students within these courses share all campus facilities and student activities and groups but lectures are held in specialised environments with lecturing staff who are trained in inclusive pedagogy. Besides the vocational colleges, students with intellectual disabilities can also opt to start attending the Resource Centre in Wardija, which was previously a special school. The stigma that is associated with completely segregated surroundings such as those in these resource centres, deter many parents and students from applying to attend this school, and unlike all other FE options, students in post-secondary resource centres are not given the monthly student maintenance grant. The eight participants who went to a special school felt that their parents made the choice for them, primarily based on the availability of state-funded free transport and school lunches which are only available in these schools.

In Chapter Two, research by Erten (2011) and Barnard-Brak *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that psychological barriers have a significant effect on the life choices of people with intellectual disabilities. My findings had several similarities with the above-mentioned research and some important differences. The negative school experiences and the general socio-cultural factors in Maltese society all affect the formation of the identity of the participants. The macro-analysis of the participants' discourse in interviews and focus groups, as well as in their more open narratives showed elements of dependency and passivity and in some way these were seen to be part of their individual identity.

The participants from the self-advocacy group had a more disability-affirmative attitude, which was to be expected, while the other participants had a very vague understanding of both their disability and what their specific needs were. This may reflect the stigma that still surrounds disability in Malta. It has always been apparent that many people with disability in Malta are 'protected' from knowledge about their own disability through the omission of any discourse of disability in front of them. Darling's typology of disability identities referred to in the literature review mentions that sometimes families are alienated from the disability culture discourse and their son or daughters' impairment due to other priorities such as poverty. According to the literature review, families with poverty issues have less involvement with disability services and this may result in missed opportunities.

During my research I noticed that a significant number of the participants wore shabby clothes that were not age appropriate. From comments I gathered, it was evident that they wore hand-me-down clothes which points towards some socio-economic difficulties. This was already apparent when some of the participants spoke about the entry requirements to FE in Malta. Most of the accommodations available are considered the bare minimum by the participants and they are then subject to the provision of documentation as proof of disability. This documentation is a report of psychometric testing that costs between Euro 400 and Euro 700. Although this is provided by the state until the age of 16, following that it needs to be done at a private clinic. In my experience this psychological report is a significant barrier experienced by students each year, especially since many of them are unaware that they need it.

5.7 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide an overview of the findings in my study by portraying the main emerging themes. The research used a qualitative approach to generate some explanations as to the low intake of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta.

Thirteen participants took part in focus groups while 16 others sat for semi-structured interviews and were divided into four groups: students finishing compulsory education, students on mainstream courses in an FE institution, students on specialised courses in an FE institution and individuals with intellectual disabilities who were never in FE. The study had secondary participants who accompanied some of the students during the interviews at the participants' request. These were two parents and two LSAs. Their input features in the study and although this was not planned, some information emerged from their contribution. I also observed the dynamics and interactions between the participants and the adult present.

My input as the researcher is included in the study through excerpts from a journal I kept of my experiences and interpretation of this process. This chapter considers the results of the various phases of the study, and besides giving an overview of the main themes, it also attempts to synthesise the themes and connect the findings. The themes will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters within the context of the existing literature and the research questions. The data collected in my study has helped shed some light on some of the perspectives of young Maltese people with intellectual disabilities in relation to the benefits and barriers to FE and what factors affect successful FE experiences.

In interpretative studies such as this one, the analysis and discussion are generally merged together to provide a comprehensive piece of work of the main findings. The following three chapters are, therefore, an attempt to offer insights into the main factors affecting inclusion into FE for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta. The answers to the five research questions are evidently interrelated and the lack of adequate responses on awareness of FE options, support available and benefits demarcates that there is indeed a lack of adequate information provided to students with intellectual disabilities about issues that concern them. This exclusion from relevant conversations is one of the key factors that will be considered in the next chapters, along with other barriers to FE such as previous school experiences, internalised beliefs and attitudes, as well as the contribution of educational systems. These are the three main themes arising from my study and they will each be examined separately in the following three chapters respectively.

CHAPTER SIX

Previous School Experience (Socio-cultural Factors)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter gave an overview of the main findings of my study. In my research I looked at possible factors affecting the poor representation of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta. Although the literature review shows that in other countries the barriers to FE are generally associated with a lack of accessible educational structures, the results of my study suggest that in Malta one of the main emerging themes relates to student and parent reluctance as a result of negative school experiences, which themselves stem from cultural expectations and real or perceived barriers to inclusion. Young people experience bullying and isolation enabled by a system that is not really inclusive but merely uses integration ratios as markers for successful implementation of EU guidelines on inclusion. This draws attention to the possibility that in Malta students with disabilities are included physically but excluded emotionally. This chapter will include an in-depth discussion on the theme of school experience as seen through the eyes of the study participants.

My study also looked at perceptions of the benefits associated with FE according to the participants. The participants' response on the benefits of FE was somewhat sparse but will be discussed in Chapter Seven which will look at students' internalised notions of inadequacy and defeatist attitudes. Chapter Eight will look at educational systems' role in the exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities, both in schools and in society at large.

The following diagram shows the network analysis of the first main emerging theme and its sub-themes.

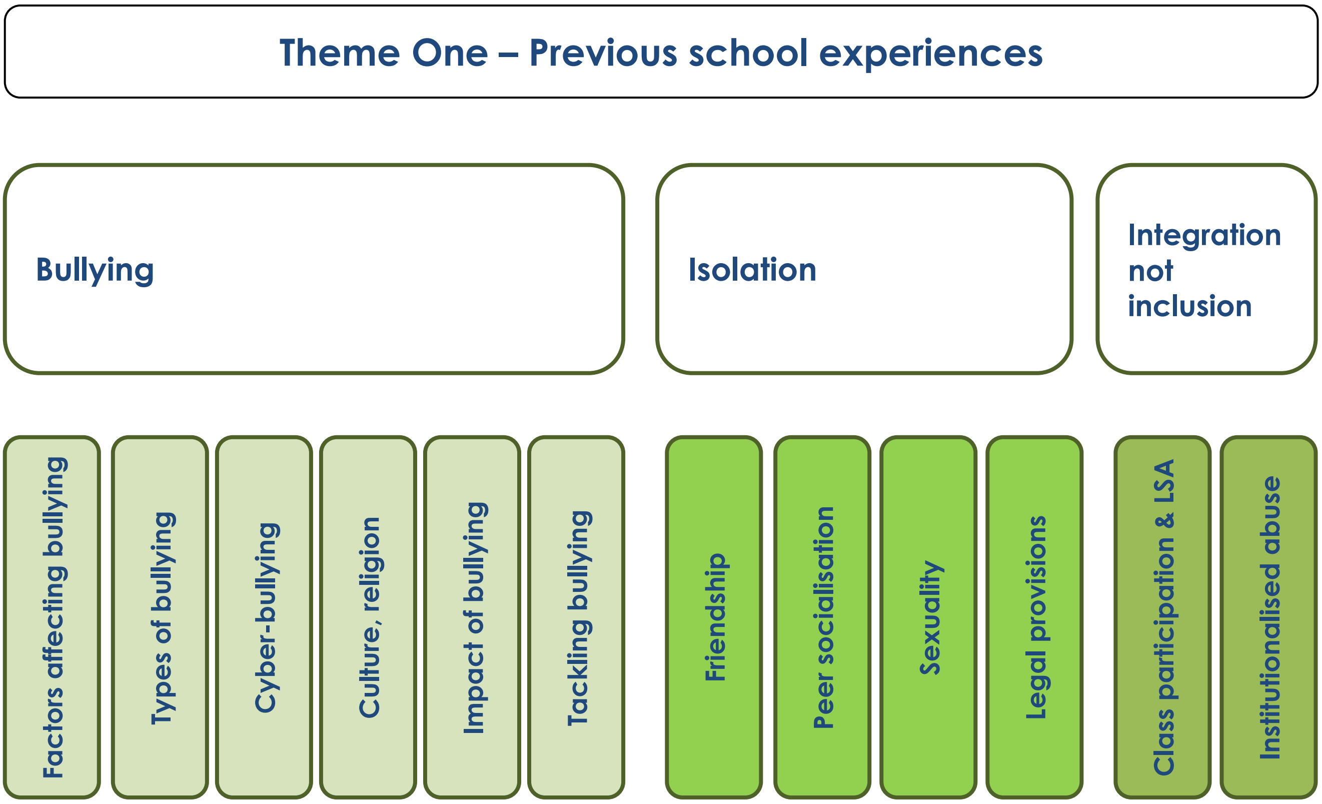


Table 13 Network analysis of theme one

6.2 Bullying

Bullying affects a student's ability to learn and this is even more pronounced when it comes to students with disabilities since most of them already have to face challenges in the school environment due to their impairment. This section will look at the factors that may influence bullying and victimisation in my study. These factors include age, gender, type of disability and whether education is provided in mainstream or specialised environments. Since bullying of students with intellectual disabilities did not feature significantly in my literature search, I include some reference to studies on the subject in this chapter.

The increase in the significance of the social group during adolescence also holds true for young people with disabilities; however, difficulties in social skills may hinder further their ability to find or hold their own with their non-disabled peers in a social setting. Students with intellectual disabilities may be an easy target for bullies because their behaviour and speech patterns may be regarded as odd or different. Students with disabilities may not understand the nature of bullying. They may misread social cues and may be unable to learn and assimilate specific ways to deal with a bullying situation. Bullying is mostly about power and frequently students with disabilities are easy targets due to their vulnerability, be that physical, intellectual or socio-emotional. Mishna (2003) asserts that their disabilities and the high risk of being victimised increases their predisposition for academic and social problems in the future.

Research examining characteristics of youth involved in bullying has consistently found that both bullies and those bullied demonstrate poorer psychosocial functioning than their non-involved peers (Nansel *et al.,* 2008). Students who are bullies seem to show high incidence of conduct problems and dislike for school. On the other hand, the students who are the victims of bullying show elevated levels of physical and mental issues such as insecurity, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Carter and Spencer, 2006; Colloroso, 2002).

Often bullying is overlooked as a serious problem but statistics show that the incidence of mental health problems in young people has been rising dramatically and in most, if not all, cases, they result from bullying and being isolated at school (WHO, 2014).

For the purpose of this thesis I will adopt the following definition of bullying as used during the 8th European Forum on the Rights of the Child (EC: 2013)

> We say a child or young person is being bullied or picked on when another child or young person, or a group of children or young people, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a child or a young person is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no-one ever talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the child or the young person being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a child or young person is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two children or young people of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel.

6.2.1 Factors affecting bullying

The incidence of bullying expressed by the participants is congruent with findings of the European survey cited in the literature review which states that Malta shows one of the highest rates of bullying in secondary schools in Europe (EAN, 2012). Despite the fact that EAN statistics refer to bullying in the general student population, research has shown that students with disabilities are five times more likely to be bullied than their peers (Edwards McNamara, 2013). This is validated through the experiences of my study participants and varies according to age, gender, inclusion model and type of disability.

VISIBILITY AND DISABILITY

Carter and Spencer (2006) conducted a literature review on international studies addressing bullying and students with disabilities. They made a distinction between visible and non-visible disabilities. The results showed that students with both visible and non-visible disabilities experienced bullying significantly more than their non-disabled peers. However, students with non-visible disabilities experienced more bullying than those with visible disabilities. A reason why some students with less visible disabilities are often the victims of bullying is that they may be seen as getting unjustified, preferential treatment at school through access arrangements. Intellectual disability in many cases is not visible and this may lead to ill-treatment by peers. As one respondent of my research explained:

Extract 9 – Peer perceptions of access arrangements as unwarranted advantages	
Crista	The girls in my school were always telling me that I was a cheat because even though I tried my hardest I never passed the end of year test and they still let me go to the next year. When they found out I would sit for my 'O' level they teased me and said I will cheat because I get someone to help me read and write.

MAINSTREAM VS SPECIALISED EDUCATION

Some distinctions were made by the participants on experiences of bullying between experiences in mainstream versus specialised education and also between primary, secondary and FE.

Hebron and Humphrey (2013) focused on differences between the experiences of students with autism within mainstream and special schools. The findings clearly showed a markedly higher incidence of bullying within the mainstream setting in regards to students with autism. Carter and Spencer (2006) also separated students with disabilities' experience of bullying according to whether they were in mainstream classrooms or not and found a significant increase in reported bullying and mistreatment. This corresponds to the experiences identified by the participants in my study which show that bullying is far more rampant in mainstream environments in Malta.

The FE students who attended specialised courses within MCAST reported some instances of bullying during recess in common campus areas. The bullying originated from non-disabled peers. During a discussion within FG2, two of the participants claimed that having been in a specialised course for students with disabilities helped them make friends and deal with incidents of bullying as a group during the time when they were in general campus areas.

All the four respondents who were in mainstream FE courses during the time of the interview experienced some verbal abuse and reported being made fun of and isolated from their non-disabled peers during recess time. However, they were included in class discussions and treated generally well during lectures.

The participants who had experienced being in a special school and in FE specialised courses did not report any bullying by peers. This tallies with literature claims that bullying and isolation are more predominant in mainstream environments (Hebron, 2013).

The results of this study show that bullying is very common in the participants' school experiences as is loneliness and isolation. This was not one of the main findings in the literature review, although some prominent researchers and commentators suggest that it may be more present than is shown in the literature. Baroness Warnock is a well-known personality in the history of inclusive education in the UK and also in British current and ex-colonies like Malta. She spearheaded the statementing process to establish disabled students' needs and introduced them into mainstream education in the 1970s. Decades later she re-evaluated her position and is now advocating a return to special schools, or rather returning students with disabilities to new, small specialised schools (Warnock, 2005).

Baroness Warnock and several others cited in the literature review seem to echo the difficulties with mainstream education for all suggested by the study participants, including among others, the seemingly unresolved issue of bullying and isolation in mainstream education. The results of this study also coincide with findings by Kauffman and Hallahan (2005) on the increased rate of bullying on students with disabilities in mainstream education. Other authors such as Barnard-Brak *et al.* (2011), Johnson (2006) and Torkelson-Lynch and Gussel (2006) described how students with disabilities struggle with disclosure of their impairment in new schools due to fear stemming from past experiences of bullying.

AGE

Nearly all the respondents mentioned bullying as part of their secondary school experience and all respondents reported being ostracised and ignored for most or a significant part of their school years. When asked about their experiences at MCAST, students reported that they experienced a different type of bullying, mostly in the form of teasing and being made fun of, although it happened less often compared to their compulsory school years.

Interview Group Two
Extract 10 – Less bullying in FE than in compulsory education

Sina	There is a group of boys that pick on us sometimes but it's less than at secondary school. We are older now so I guess…they also know better.

The respondents within my research also mostly referred to bullying as part of their experience in secondary school rather than when they were in primary school.

Extract 11 – Perceptions of bullying differences between primary and secondary school

Oliver	Moving to secondary school was a shock because when I was younger I wasn't treated this badly.

This is a common phenomenon as youngsters become less tolerant as they grow older due to the fact that they often want to stick to their own social groups and become less accepting of those different from themselves (Erikson, 1969). 'Younger students have less complex social groupings and may be more tolerant of the differences associated with certain disabilities' (Hebron, 2013, p. 67).

The students who did pursue FE stated that incidents of bullying were markedly less than in secondary mainstream schools. The bullying experiences recounted were also of a more verbal nature and originated from non-disabled students from other mainstream courses during recess and just before or after the start of lectures. The types of bullying, as recounted by the study participants, in compulsory school years were broader than in FE and included physical, verbal and emotional abuse. The male participants experienced a wider range of abusive assaults while the female participants mentioned more verbal and emotional harassment. This corroborates findings from an international comparative study suggesting variance in types of bullying according to gender (Smith *et al.*, 2002) with boys resorting to physical aggression and girls to verbal abuse and social exclusion.

6.2.2 Types of bullying

Some of the participants reported that sometimes the bullying was physical in nature while other times it was emotionally damaging.

Extract 12 – Physical and emotional abuse

Larry IG3	In form one these boys were bugging me and they were form five. They chased me to form two class and it was like a pack of hyenas chasing a wildebeest.
Nadia FG2	I had some friends but there was a lot of negative peer pressure. They used to make me do things that got me in trouble. Like this one time when they made me put down my hair and told me I looked pretty because they knew I liked this teacher and they made me go to him with my hair like a witch's. They made me believe I looked good. He asked me what happened and I told him. He spoke to me and told me to be strong and not let the other children use me for fun.

Reported forms of bullying in my study included name-calling, teasing, physical attacks, severe verbal bullying and aggression, taking of belongings and imitation.

Focus Group One
Extract 13 – Types of bullying in mainstream secondary

Molly	I hated school because the others used to call me names all the time and I only made some friends when I was in form four when they saw I had a boyfriend.
Judy	I was very, very bullied. They used to call me names and never speak to me. It was always like that as far back as I can remember. I loved home economics but I had only few friends.

Another form of bullying mentioned by the participants is through the use of texts or phone calls.

Focus Group One
Extract 14 – Harassment through other media

Molly	I used to get all these rude texts and phone calls in the middle of the night then one day my boyfriend called GO [phone service provider] and made a report. They said they will have to involve the police to trace the call so I just changed my number.

6.2.3 Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is the same as traditional bullying but it is done through the use of technology such as the internet. This type of bullying was mentioned by some of the research respondents who regularly use the internet. This may have featured more but in my experience many people with intellectual disabilities struggle in the use of IT because applications require some degree of literacy and are generally in English and no Maltese versions exist to date. These are issues that many of the study participants struggle with. Ten of the participants said they were not allowed to use the internet unsupervised by their parents or carers and four claimed not to have access to a computer at home.

Myriad incidents have been reported in the media both locally and internationally regarding the increase in cyber-bullying. The main reason could be attributed to the technological advances and the opportunities they provide for more interaction and also the anonymity allowed by the remoteness of the interaction. The key messages I received from the respondents about use of the internet in general were very positive in respect to the social and academic opportunities it afforded. However, for some this also meant that they were made fun of on a wider scale.

Some of the participants stopped using the internet due to experiencing cyber-bullying. Some of the main types of cyber-bullying are account hacking and misuse, tagging in rude or offensive pictures or videos, posting snide remarks or threats and circulating images or videos of that person to others without permission. Some said it was just an extension to regular bullying they suffered at school or worse because students who usually did not harass them at school did so online.

Extract 15 – Cyber-bullying

Caleb FG2	My MSN account got hacked by this guy at school and he started sending sex photos to my friends and got me in a lot of trouble. I reported him to the head but by the time they sorted him out, I lost my few friends and went through the rest of the school year unhappy.
Nathan IG3	The kids from school used to call me names online and make fun of me because of my disability. They called me retard or said jokes about it.
Larry IG3	The bullying was following me at home, even kids who usually just ignore me were joining the group who was chasing me. I just cancelled my accounts.

A student who has some mannerisms which he finds hard to control said that his peers often mimicked his hand fluttering and even posted a video online of him with editing and sub-texts ridiculing him.

Interview Group Three
Extract 16 – Targeting perceived ‘odd’ behaviour

Larry	I cannot help my hands. They made fun of me all the time and posted a video on Youtube that they took at the gym. They wrote that I am crazy.

Cyber-bullying increases the number of people involved and possibly the severity of bullying (ABA, 2011). It can be agreed that the cyber-bullying increases the imbalance of power and it enables a larger number of young people to get involved at the click of a button. It can also be taken to an extreme since one cannot see the direct impact on the victim. Some of the respondents said that sometimes things are easily misinterpreted online and this may cause undue friction and stress.

Focus Group Two
Extract 17 – Miscommunication through online chatting

Nadia	Once I was joking with my cousin and she thought I was being rude but I wasn't. She was angry and I got very upset. She also has a disability like me and she thought I was doing what the kids at her school do.

Some research has shown that it may be the case that children and young people do not know whether something is bullying or not. This is possibly more inherent in cyber-bullying than in face-to-face bullying as there are fewer cues to understand intention, and words can be interpreted and read in different ways. It may be hard for students with intellectual disabilities to identify when online communication has changed from joking to bullying.

6.2.4 Culture, religion and bullying

Religious overtones sometimes coloured the narrative recounted as some of the participants stated that their peers made reference to a remnant of a religious belief that disability is a punishment from God onto sinners.

Extract 18 – Disability and sin

Charles FG1	I never believed them when they said that God made me like this because I am a sinner but it hurt me a lot because I love God and besides...they spoke his name in vain.
Tristan IG1	I didn't have any friends at first to spend my break with. I used to sit alone in a corner and the other kids would taunt me and ask me how I got this scar on my face. And I, well…I hated being reminded of it so I would not talk and then they used to make up stories that God sent a lightning bolt because I was ugly so it would scar me and hide my face because a scar looks better.

The cultural dimension of a society has an impact on how violence is looked upon. The WHO (2012) states that there is evidence suggesting that in countries with a high incidence of domestic violence there is an equally high incidence of bullying in schools. The EU country reports on domestic violence (EC: 2010) show that in Malta 26.5% of women have experienced one or more acts of physical, sexual or emotional violence perpetrated by a current or former partner. This corroborates the WHO (2012) research cited above and suggests that Malta's socio-cultural make-up could be a significant factor in the sanctioning of such behaviours. The high rate of domestic violence may mean that many young people grow up expecting that violence is an acceptable way to get what one wants.

In Malta marriage holds deep religious meaning which at times reflects a conservative mentality of women obeying and submitting to men. The pressure to uphold marriage vows and the shame associated with marriage breakdown in Malta may stop victims of domestic violence from reporting it. The small insular communities also prevent the possibility of anonymity as social communication channels are prominent and often betray confidentiality. Just like other small communities, Maltese society is fascinated with each other's business and there is an unwritten rule to protect 'one's own'. This phenomenon may stop victims of violence from stepping forward to make reports while at the same times if reports are made they may be ignored.

6.2.5 Impact of bullying

Even the participants who did not report any bullying recalled their school years as being a very lonely and difficult time and this was the reason given for hesitations on whether or not to pursue post-compulsory education.

Focus Group One
Extract 19 – Bullying as a barrier to FE

Oliver	Why would I stretch it further after all the bad things that happened to me. I knew I would see the same kids there anyway.

Some of the participants stated that they did not even finish compulsory education and they dropped out citing emotional and psychological complications. Twelve of the participants admitted staying home feigning sickness to avoid going to school.

Focus Group One
Extract 20 – Bullying and early school leaving

Abby	It was very hard to make new friends. Because I was quiet they thought I would stay for anything. Sometimes in the school van they used to push by me with their big bags and hit me on purpose because they knew I would easily lose my balance. I just left school then and my mum sent me to the centre [state day centre services].

The school experiences had a profound effect on how the participants viewed school in general. Asked whether they liked school or not, most of the participants said that they hated it while some said that it was ok. Only three participants said that they actually liked it and these had only ever experienced special schools.

Tristan finds it hard to discuss his school experience because it was very emotionally challenging and he still has a lot of resentment.

Interview Group One
Extract 21 – Resentment towards school

Tristan	The students were very noisy. I was quiet, always at the front. The school was very old. I used to get bullied because I was a slow learner I was always placed with the worst classes and they used to make me do wrong things. I used to get punished unfairly because of them. They used to throw stuff at me but now I don't think about it. I'd rather not talk about them.

Both bullying and cyber-bullying are experiences the research participants have had in considerable measure; however, an even more common experience recounted is the feelings of isolation and exclusion from school and the normal experiences of adolescence.

6.2.6 Tackling bullying

Malta has a very poor track record of any kind of investment in anti-bullying strategies, whether generic or specific (MGRM, 2013). The Ministry of Education has an anti-bullying service that offers interventions to primary and secondary state and church schools through a referral system based on a national policy on behaviour at school that dates back to 1999. Data from the Malta government anti-bullying team shows a discrepancy: according to the case logs of 2013 they had 207 reports of bullying in schools; however, the EAN survey (2013) in the same year found that 22% of Maltese students reported being bullied at least once a week. This roughly translates to 5,720 students. This discrepancy may show that bullying incidents go largely unreported. This could either be due to students not wanting to report or because the schools do not act on reports.

Two of the participants claimed that when they spoke up about the bullying, there was no change to the situation. Abby recounted how much of the bullying used to go unpunished.

Extract 22 – Unpunished abuse	
Abby FG1	Sometimes I used to be picked on by older girls because I was so quiet and not good in sports. They used to hide my things and throw garbage at me. I never told anyone that I was very depressed. I once told a teacher but she didn't do anything and it became worse. I told my mum and she told the headmistress but it never stopped.
Malcolm IG3	I hated it because I couldn't understand much and I was bullied for several years. They used to call me names all the time, and steal my things. No one really did anything about it even in the few times that I actually told someone.

Bullying is a phenomenon that perhaps schools are reluctant to report since in Malta the community is small and tends to act very quickly, blacklisting the school in question. The under-reporting of bullying, especially towards students with disabilities, is relatively strange since many of the students with disabilities have an LSA with them at all times even during recess. This begs one to suspect that maybe LSAs fear for their position as they may be seen as being disloyal to their school. Parents may also fear retribution for reporting bullying that would endanger their son or daughter further. Although anti-bullying strategies are perhaps not being as effective as envisaged, the provision of these policies is ammunition for schools to deal with this problem when needed. Isolation, on the other hand, may have an even more lasting effect and there is no legal recourse. Although schools are obliged to provide for the most inclusive environment, no one can force other students to be friends with those with disabilities.

In the literature review the developmental theories suggested by Erikson (1968) and Mead (1934) state that at this age (11-15 years), young people, as they struggle with identity formation, seek out others who they feel mirror themselves. It is then perhaps a natural part of growing up that makes for isolation of students with disabilities in secondary school.

Although the issue of bullying in schools has been given significant attention globally through campaigns such as EAN, STAND UP, HERO and I CHOOSE (ABC, 2014), the specific experiences of students with disabilities seem to have garnered less attention judging from the limited research documenting it both in Malta and internationally. Generic international strategies to combat bullying in schools, especially in Europe, have been criticised because research has shown that the best way to tackle bullying is to create policies, campaigns and projects that specifically target the victim group, in this case people with disabilities (Raskauskas and Modell, 2011).

One may speculate as to what the possible reasons are for not targeting specific victim groups. A main hypothesis is that it may be more cost-effective to invest in bullying as one general phenomenon. Besides the financial implications, other factors such as socio-political attitudes may reject ideas for specialised anti-bullying campaigns to avoid garnering unwanted attention on social problems.

Bullying emerged as a significant experience faced by the participants who discussed the types of bullying suffered, how schools tackled their complaints, cyber-bullying and the general impact of these experiences on their well-being and attitude towards school.

6.3 Isolation

As discussed previously in Chapter Two, for most young people early adolescence is marked by the movement of interest away from the family towards the peer group as the new locus of the young person's attention

(Erikson, 1968). For the most part, however, the participants had no or few friends at school. The ones that attended mainstream school experienced peer rejection and in many cases even bullying, while the ones who attended special schools experienced neglect and sometimes even bullying from teachers and other school staff.

The effects of bullying require little questioning but being isolated and neglected by your peers and teachers at school can have an equally negative effect on children and young adolescents, especially if they feel that this abandonment is directly related to something unchangeable like a disability. The 18 participants that reported a bad school experience did so mostly because of the bullying they suffered but all the participants from mainstream secondary education mentioned the loneliness and isolation they experienced.

6.3.1 Friendship

For many of the participants, peer relationships ended on the last day of school; however, even while still at school, most of the participants had very few friends. The friendships were for the most part restricted to school. Only one participant maintained the friendship after leaving school. Many said that their parents 'vetted' their friends or they were 'vetted' by the parents of potential friends.

Interview Group One Extract 23 – Parental control of friends	
Molly	I had a friend once but my parents didn't let me talk to her anymore because she used to do my hair at school and get make-up for me to make me look pretty. My parents found out and were very angry. They came to the school. They spoke to our headmistress and changed my class. They treated us like criminals and even the school did. I was 16.

Many participants referred to professionals and teachers as friends, for lack of proper peer relationships.

Focus Group One Extract 24 – Projected friendships with service providers	
Charles	I had a friend in hospital. She was my nurse. I really missed her.

Much of the social life experienced by the participants is with their families. However, it was noted that even whilst still at school, outings were often a time when the participants were accompanied by parents. For the most part these outings consisted of visiting relatives or going to church. This dominance of adult presence in the adolescent's life leaves little space for individuation. The participants who are at MCAST state that being there is the only place where they have friends. The students attending the specialised course reported having many friends and for the ones who were in mainstream secondary schools this was one of the best things about being in college. The students who are in mainstream FE courses at MCAST were all previously enrolled in a specialised course for students with disabilities (Pathway). They reported that they made other friends besides the ones who were with them at Pathway but they all have learning disabilities and have extra support.

6.3.2 Natural and artificial peer socialisation

In my years lecturing at MCAST, and more specifically during the research study period, I noticed how students with disabilities interact in the common areas, canteen and during campus activities. The students with more visible disabilities all tend to stick together, regardless of whether they were ever in the same course of study. Other students with less visible disabilities try to integrate with other student groups but they eventually retreat to the 'safety' of the disabled social groups, often due to being rejected or slighted in some manner. The issue of minority subcultures and inclusion has definitely been a subject of much debate in recent years as some activists and researchers argue for inclusion to mean also having the choice to be separate (French and Swain, 2002). In my view, minorities have a right to be different and to be separate if it is their choice. Discrimination and exclusion only come about when there is a lack of entry points or a lack of accessible options. In the literature review I cite articles on the deaf culture which has asserted itself as wanting separate provisions with the possibility of integration and interaction at will (Nash and Nash, 1981). In the literature review I also referred to studies on the need for people with disabilities to be given tools to be self-determined but inherent in that is the right to not have to be self-determined (Finn *et al.,* 2008).

The models of disability identity portrayed in the literature review, most notably work by Darling (2003) and disability pride (French and Swain, 2002), provide a basis for what may essentially be a newer understanding of inclusion as having the option to be included as opposed to being 'forced' into mainstream environments. The lived experience of the participants of my study also direct us to viewing inclusion as being the provision of different educational options of good standard and focusing on giving flexible choices for education. It is human nature to 'stick to our own' and we need to perhaps accept that for some students with disabilities, being educated with other students with disabilities may be what they consider as the best environment for their learning and healthy emotional development. A very common problem mentioned by the participants was the lack of friends and at the same time having friendships was considered as one of the most important things in life. If being in a mainstream environment reduces the socio-emotional aspect of having friendships, and increases isolation in the formative years of adolescence, perhaps a new definition of inclusive education needs to be considered.

The lack of natural peer socialisation is one of the themes that recurs the most in the interviews with participants, veering the conversation back to this topic a few times. This affirms studies by Spirito *et al.* (2001) and Skar (2000) that show that many young people with disabilities consort mostly with adults and have limited opportunities for peer relations due to parental and institutional constraints.

Extract 25 – Desire for peer relations

Stella FG2	I wish my mum would trust me. I am not a child anymore but that is how she treats me.
Crista IG1	My parents don't see how independent I have become. I want to catch the bus like my friends but they don't allow me. My sister is 3 years younger and they let her do all sorts of things.
Malcolm IG3	I really wanted to go out for the student Christmas meal. I am 17 now and even going for a pizza is too much. They told me that it's because I don't know how to use money.
Sina FG2	I hate it that many of my friends don't go out socially. They say they want to be independent but in reality they're scared or their parents don't let them. It's also laziness I think. They find a lot of excuses I think. Or because they don't know how to use the bus.

Some parents even encouraged their children to keep away from peers. Judy recounted how her mother used to scare her into thinking that all school children are mean and that she should keep away from them because they would hurt her.

Focus Group One
Extract 26 – Prescribed fears

Judy	My mother always told me to keep away from other children because they will hurt me because I am retarded…that I am not strong like the others, my mind is slow and so I have to stay home.

Ten of the 21 participants' most common leisure activity after school was watching television, listening to music and surfing the web. Besides Charles and Molly, who are a cohabiting couple, only four of the participants ever go out alone with their friends without supervision and this happened on rare occasions with strict rules to obey and early curfews. All the others went out only with their parents or adult relatives or attended social groups or activities that were adult-led.

Some of the participants never even asked their parents whether they could go out with their peers. Steph feels that if she asks them they would be angry at her for wanting to be with other people besides them. Caleb describes how he resents his parents for letting his 15-year-old brother go out alone while he can only go out with them. ‘And I don’t enjoy the places they go to. It’s very boring and I feel embarrassed that at my age [18] I am still hanging out with them’.

Four announced their boyfriend/ girlfriend to be their special friend and only one said that she has a circle of close friends. Sixteen of the participants said that they have lost contact with the friends they had in secondary/ special school and since they do not go out to socialise it is hard to meet new people. When they do meet new people at college or other social activities, they find it hard to maintain the relationship because they cannot go out alone. Many of the problems encountered are also financial. Since few of the participants earn an income, going out socially proves to be a big problem for most.

Martha feels that she is trapped in a vicious circle.

Interview Group One
Extract 27 – Financial barriers to leisure

Martha	I don't have money to go out so I just meet up with the others at the weekly support meeting and I attend the adult training centre. I can't really learn enough to get a job there and so I will never do the things I like.

Charles believes that people with disabilities are never looked upon as equal leading to further isolation.

Focus Group One
Extract 28 – Perceived inequality

Charles	We are either pitied, made fun of, bullied, underestimated or totally ignored. One way or another we are never seen as equal human beings and that really hurts. I need what everyone needs: love, respect, fun, dreams and first and foremost choice…yes I do need help to do a lot of this stuff but then again, doesn't everyone.
Abby	Well I can't find work so I don't have money to go out so I just meet up with the others at training. They also need help so we always have someone with us even to go to the games room in Embassy after training. I can't really learn like that…so I will always be…you know stuck.

Kieran attends the LAND (Learning Ability Not Disability) group, which is a social group run by volunteers. LAND organises social activities for young people with disabilities.

Focus Group Two
Extract 29 – Artificial socialisation settings

Kieran	I have some friends. We meet through LAND but we never keep in touch in between outings. All communication passes through LAND organisers but I wish I could meet the others without them watching us all the time.

6.3.3 Sexuality

Some of the participants mentioned their desire to have a relationship and in the future be married and have children. Charles and Molly are a cohabiting couple but they recount how difficult it was for them to move out with the support of their parents. Molly works but Charles is currently unemployed which makes it difficult for them to manage.

Interview Group Four
Extract 30 – Cohabitation and familial attitudes

Molly	At first his mother was very angry. She said we couldn't do it and only after the social workers intervened did we manage to move out.

Isolation experiences at school were frequently paired with a more general issue of loneliness and isolation in their life. The participants reported that the lack of friends at school was followed by a lack of friends in their leisure time. Fine *et al.* (2007) was cited in the literature review as stating that leisure cannot exist in the absence of education, work or other structured activities. Theories on development referred to in Chapter Two, (Mead, 1962; Erikson, 1969; Blos, 1967) point towards a substantial limitation posed on identity development for those adolescents who lack peer relationships and interactions in natural settings. A particular emphasis on emotional development in the literature mentioned the importance of dealing with sexuality and intimacy (Skar and Barron, 2002).

Azzopardi Lane (2012) maintains that in Malta, sexuality is one of the areas which are especially ‘hidden’ from people with disabilities. The opportunities for developing friendships or intimate relationships is greatly overshadowed by the lack of choice and the heightened dependency that many people with intellectual disabilities have on their parents or carers.

In my journal I had jotted down a comment about the image of many of the participants and more generally of people with intellectual disabilities. Something that is very overt and perhaps adequately shows how parents and carers view them is the clothes that they wear and how they are groomed. It is a definite concern that many of my students have admitted that their mother or primary care giver is the one who buys and chooses their clothes and often these are not age appropriate. The fact that they wear childish clothes makes them stand out in FE colleges, in some cases making them the butt of jokes by peers. This may stem from a traditional view of asexuality ascribed to them by society.

People with learning disabilities in Malta are more often than not disempowered when it comes to most decisions in their life and when it comes to relationships and sexuality, significant research mentioned in Chapter Two shows that they are generally thought of as asexual and only very few people with intellectual disabilities have effectively got married or even have intimate relationships (Azzopardi Lane, 2012).

6.3.4 Legal provisions

The introduction of the Guardianship Act in Malta (2014), as discussed in Chapter Four, has removed the need to use incapacitation and interdiction as a measure for parents to have full ownership of individuals with disabilities' life choices. The Guardianship Act also gave parents peace of mind in knowing that they were not required to care for their children all their lives as they could appoint a person of trust in their place.

One of the parents in this study spoke highly of this much awaited law.

Interview Group One
Extract 31 – Parental perceptions of the Guardianship Act

Parent 2	Guardianship is something I've been looking forward to seeing because my son has got rights. He's a person, a citizen, part of our family and the community. Words like incapacitation and interdiction hurt me… they remove his right to choose and I strongly believe that no matter how severe the impairment is, there is always something in there that allows the person to come up with some form of decision.

I do not think that anyone can contest the importance and validity of the UN convention and the resulting implementation of the Guardianship Act; however, this law has, in my view, a major flaw. The Guardianship Act is still reliant on parents/ carers to submit application for its adoption. This shifts the decision on whether or not to appoint a guardian away from the person with disabilities. In the case of parental reluctance, and unless there is direct access to professionals who might intervene, the law falls short of providing an adequate system of recourse. In the case of many of the participants in my study, I feel that only a very few of them have the means to make a decision about guardianship due to parental/ carer dependence or control. It is yet to be seen in the coming years whether the Guardianship Act will affect the quality of life of individuals with intellectual disabilities or whether it will reinforce the cultural attitudes of ableism that currently prevail.

Isolation is a tangible experience in the lives of people with disabilities. Even in such a small island with such a tight-knit community like Malta, the effects that cause this isolation are perhaps even more devastating. When one is surrounded by people, as in college, and more generally during adolescence, isolation may not be a phenomenon that one would consider to be so pronounced, especially in a time when technology is at your fingertips. The fact remains, however, that for young people with intellectual disabilities, peer input in the participants' lives is very limited and fragmented. This is in part due to the fact that parents/ carers also directly or indirectly control the choice of friends and leisure activities. It was noteworthy that participants' ages range from 15 to 44 but the experiences of isolation, although they seem to be more pronounced with age, are similar in content and severity.

The study shows that the participants have limited access to natural peer settings and friendships, possibly due to the restrictions placed upon them by their parents or carers. The desire for intimacy was expressed by some of the participants but this was coupled with a resignation that their relationships will always depend on what others decide is best for them. Socio-cultural notions of asexuality and disability as well as conservative, religious mentalities may be a barrier to inclusion in leisure arenas and opportunities for sexual expression. Despite recent legislative changes to allow for court-appointed guardians to take responsibility for certain decisions pertaining to people with intellectual disabilities, the application for a guardian is dependent on parental wish and may be seen as an extension of existing constraints.

6.4 Inclusion versus Integration

Over the past few decades, the education of students with disabilities has transitioned from separate special schools or separate classes to a more mainstream approach wherein students with disabilities are given the same opportunities to be in class with their non-disabled peers. Malta made a concerted effort towards including students with disabilities in mainstream education through the introduction of legislation such as the Equal Opportunities Act (2000) and Creating Inclusive Schools (Bartolo *et al.,* 2002). Questions on the validity of current practices in Europe have been increasing with the emergence of reports stating that the 'inclusion' being provided by educational institutions is too rudimentary and merely serves to increase visibility of numbers of enrolled students with disabilities in mainstream education (ANED, 2010). The stigmatisation of students with intellectual disabilities may be seen as reducing the standard of educational institutions due to increased pressure for competitiveness (Goode, 2007).

Integration is seen as being offered as a substitute for inclusion which points at the fact that the student with disabilities has to fit in with pre-existing structures, attitudes and an unaltered environment. The literature review produced ample documentation about the need for inclusive educational practices to include, among other things, adaptation of curricula (Reindal, 2008; Bartolo, 2009), pedagogy (Neubert *et al*., 2004; Thompson, 2003) and provision of trained staff (Jung, 2011; Pereira, 2012). It also collated studies that advocate the importance of teaching life skills which are important so that students with disabilities are better equipped in dealing with situations such as conflict and bullying (Bouck, 2010; Alwell and Cobb, 2009).

Interview Group One
Extract 32 – A forced inclusion?

Ina	The other students used to pick on me and when I told the LSA she used to…coz I used to stay with the other students with disabilities not with the other students and coz I used to stay with them the LSA used to ask me why and told me 'I want you to stay with the other students. I don't want you with ones worse than you' but I did that because the others used to push me away. I asked them if I could sit with them and they said, 'No we don't want people like you with us'.

6.4.1 Classroom participation and the LSA

My empirical research supports the studies cited in the literature review and implies that one of the most palpable failings of the inclusive educational system in Malta is that mainstream schools at all levels, focus primarily on academic achievement while not enough investment is made on the socio-emotional development of students with intellectual disabilities, which is intrinsic to a healthy and successful school experience. This draws attention to the fact that educational agencies in Malta still have a narrow view of inclusion and this may be manifested in negative attitudes by staff towards students with disabilities. This was voiced by six of the participants who claimed that they were largely ignored by the teachers and interacted almost solely with their assigned LSA.

Interview Group Two
Extract 33 – LSA as primary educator

Caleb	The Maltese teacher gave me some work sometimes but the others did not really talk to me much…Miss A (LSA) sat with me all the time and helped me understand.

It is the case that many Maltese teachers feel that the LSA is solely responsible for the student she is assigned to. In a piece of research on teachers' attitudes towards the Inclusive Education System in Malta, Bartolo (2010) described how the local government opted for a fast-track strategy for the integration of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. This went against what most traditional teachers wanted as they had insisted on a slow introduction to allow schools to prepare themselves for their intake. The Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) which is a very strong trade union, as a backlash to the fast introduction to the integration of these students, demanded that each student with special educational needs would need to be assigned an LSA. It followed that the LSA became the sole person responsible for the student to the extent that if the LSA calls in sick for work, the student is sent home (Bartolo, 2010). Spiteri (2005) also determined that the quick integration of students with disabilities did not allow for adequate training of teachers or specialisation which led to more teacher resentment and detachment from the system imposed on them.

The respondents in my research clearly expressed that their school life was not a very inclusive experience. It was made clear during a group discussion with FG2 that many of the participants spent a lot of their time at school outside of class doing an alternate programme of study. This was generally coordinated by the LSA and other students with disabilities would join this group.

Focus Group Two Extract 34 – Exclusive pedagogy in mainstream settings	
Stella	I did Maths and Maltese with X and Y [two other students with intellectual disabilities]. They were both younger than me but we got along well. Sina also came sometimes.
Kieran	My LSA took me out of class for every lesson except PE and PSD [Personal and Social Development]. We went to the library or in the yard.

Three of the participants said that their exclusion from the classroom contributed to the fact that they had no friends at school.

Interview Group Three Extract 35 – Justifying exclusion through academic difficulty	
Nadia	My mum told the headmistress that I wanted to be in class more and that would help the others see me as friend but she said the lessons were too hard as they were preparing for the 'O' levels.

6.4.2 Institutionalised abuse

During discussions with both focus groups situations of mistreatment by school staff was reported as being part of their experiences, although it varied in perceived seriousness. The participants who attended mainstream secondary schools mentioned being ignored by staff who showed little interest in students with disabilities.

Sometimes the treatment received from staff at school went further than neglect or lack of interest; the participants who attended special schools made some serious allegations of verbal and physical abuse against school staff.

Although there is very limited reference within literature of bullying by special school staff, such as teachers and LSAs, the respondents to my study bombarded me with recollections of incidents which were very distressing to hear. These ranged from unprofessional conduct to instances of corporal punishment.

Extract 36 – Institutionalised abusive practices in special schools

Ned FG2	She [LSA] used to hit me on the head or push my head down into the book and bang my head. I was embarrassed because the other boys laughed at me and called me stupid. She never once said anything nice about me and the teachers never stopped her.
Charles FG1	X used to kick me sometimes to shut me up. He also did this to others who can't speak you know, with autism…because he hated the noise of the band and he kept trying to get up to leave but he hit him with the metal rod and held him down.
Judy FG1	She used to make fun of us all the time and call us stupid…and she used to make us laugh at this girl from Mount Carmel [Mental Health Unit] because she had hand-me-down clothes that didn't fit her.

Oliver remembered how he was terrified of going to school due to the abuse suffered at the hands of a caretaker and some teachers and how he had to take anxiolytics to calm down.

Interview Group Four
Extract 37 – Abusive behaviour from mainstream school auxiliary staff

Oliver	...because I didn't want to go…because I was scared that they would shout at me again in front of everyone…or make me clean the toilet …because sometimes I dirtied the toilet seat with, excuse me [whispers] urine.
	Sometimes I stayed in class during break and sometimes I hid in the toilet until the bell rang to go back to class. Once he [the caretaker] found me and hit me with the broom.

The experiences of participants who were enrolled in FE, both in mainstream and in specialised courses did not mention any mistreatment from staff.

It is worth noting that the instances of physical abuse were reported mostly by the older participants and this might be due to the social norms in the 70s and 80s which sanctioned corporal punishment as a fair form of behaviour modification. This changed when Malta ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1990.

This section highlighted the problems with a partial endorsement of inclusive education in Malta. The situation reported by the participants shows that although they were enrolled in mainstream secondary schools, they were not truly included as they spent most of the time in a separate classroom and they were mainly taught by the LSA. The students who experienced special school at secondary level claimed mistreatment by staff which seemed to go unnoticed. This suggests institutionalised behaviour based on entrenched old-practice models for maintaining order and power.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored one of the three main emerging themes arising from the commentary of the participants. The school experiences of the participants focused on the negative aspects of bullying and isolation experienced, as well as the meaning of inclusion in Malta's educational system. I am suggesting that the negative experiences recounted by the participants stem from socio-cultural attitudes that are themselves responsible for the narrow understanding and implementation of inclusion.

Implementing campaigns to combat any type of social problem implies the existence of such a problem. Having campaigns to combat bullying and isolation of students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream education would perhaps lead society to question the validity and effectiveness of inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education in Malta and perhaps elsewhere. If students with learning disabilities are having such negative experiences within mainstream education that they are being put off continuing their schooling past compulsory age, is the system of inclusion working? Are the students really included or are they being short-changed for an inadequate and possible emotionally-jarring experience of integration?

Students who attended mainstream secondary schools experienced bullying from peers and lack of interest and neglect from teachers, while students who attended special schools did not report bullying by peers but mentioned serious incidents of abuse at the hands of staff. Participants in FE stated that although bullying instances were much less than in secondary school, they were still largely ignored by non-disabled peers. The FE students in specialised courses said that they made friends with other disabled peers and did not experience bullying from them but from others in the main campus areas.

Isolation was reported by most of the participants in their everyday life but only the students who were in mainstream education referred to feeling lonely at school. More than half of the participants said that the experience of not having friends was one of the greatest sources of unhappiness for them. The question of lack of choice and independence was a strong factor that led participants to experience loneliness and isolation both at school and in their everyday lives.

The older participants who were not in FE maintained that the difficulties in finding employment led to financial limitations which reinforced dependency on others and reduced their opportunities to socialise.

This study therefore, indicates that the secondary school years in mainstream environments are those that pose greatest challenges for students with intellectual disabilities. This may be due to developmental stages inherent in children at that age, as suggested by literature or it could stem from the reluctance of schools to provide a comprehensive learning environment that celebrates diversity and promotes zero tolerance to bullying.

The results of this study seem to open up the discourse on the effectiveness of mainstream inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta and whether there is still a case for offering separate and more specialised course for students with intellectual disabilities at both secondary and post-secondary levels.

The next chapter will look at other barriers that may cause students with intellectual disabilities not to pursue FE in Malta. In this chapter, however, the study will include the personal characteristics of the participants containing negative attitudes and belief systems that preclude accessing FE among other things.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Internalised Attitudes and Beliefs (Psychological Factors)

7.1 Introduction

The data collected from this study is being presented and discussed in three separate chapters. The previous chapter focused on school experiences which significantly affect whether or not students with intellectual disabilities pursue FE in Malta. Other factors, however, may be especially relevant to the small number of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta. This chapter will discuss how internalised attitudes and beliefs based on Maltese social and cultural norms also play a major role. This chapter will also give the accounts of participants voicing attitudes of passivity towards FE due to their belief that it will not result in meaningful employment and also beliefs that they are not capable of learning at that level.

This chapter is therefore a consideration of the emotional and psychological processes associated with participants' choices for their continued education. In some cases, the choice was not theirs to make. However, even if they are echoing other people's dominant position, this still gives the study insight on the forces at play and how decisions are taken in that situation. In the literature review many cited studies show that internalised attitudes and beliefs shape how young people manage their life and choices. Culture and, in Malta more specifically, religion play a significant part in the shaping of these attitudes but personal experiences, including those in schools and in the immediate community, also impress and mould individuals. Young people with learning disabilities are faced with added dilemmas as they grow up in an environment that is not all that accessible for them. A lot of their life is governed by others due to palpable paternalistic attitudes which strip them from making empowered and informed choices. The identities of people with disabilities are affected by social and cultural norms and standards which place value on success. Although the disability movement has been challenging these ideals, often the empowering discourse for change is inaccessible or unreachable for people with learning disability (French and Swain, 2012). The results of this study show that many of the participants had internalised notions of inadequacy and indifference, and that they displayed attitudes of fear and resignation. These may also give some insight into the reasons for such meagre narratives on the perceived benefits of FE by the participants.

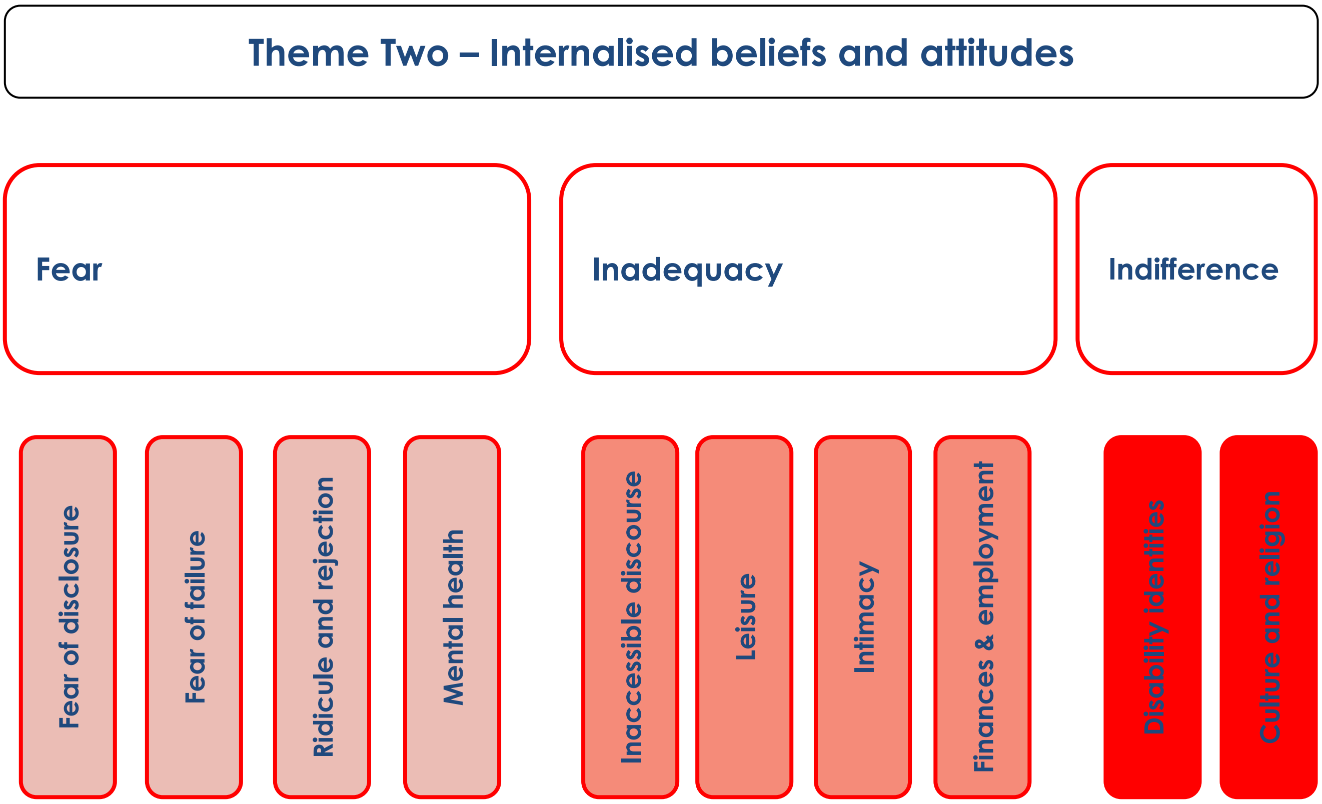


Table 14 Network analysis of theme two

7.2 Biża' – Fear

EFFECTS OF BULLYING AND ISOLATION

Some may argue that bullying is simply a harmless rite of passage that many students go through and get through unscathed; however, research shows that bullying can have a permanent negative effect on people which impacts a student's access to education and leads to long-term problems in the psychosocial development of the individual (Edwards Mcnamara, 2013; Rose *et al.*, 2009; Swearer *et al.*, 2012; Kim and Leventhal, 2008). In the literature review, I did not find significant studies on the predominance of bullying in disabled students' school experience so I did not pursue any searches on the effects of bullying in the literature review. However, since my study showed bullying and isolation as being one of the prime themes, I have looked into some more specific research on the resulting effects to try to uncover links between school experiences and ESL.

The main and direct consequences of bullying are school avoidance, decrease in grades due to inability to concentrate and loss of interest in academic achievement (Mishna, 2003). Studies by Carter and Spencer (2006) show that many students who are persistently bullied end up dropping out of school. This may be an indicator of the high rate of early school leavers in Europe and more specifically in Malta. As discussed in the literature review, Malta ranks poorly in the Eurostat survey of 2012 wherein at 22.6% it has the second highest rate of early school leavers (ESL). ESL is an 'obstacle to economic growth and employment, reduces productivity and competitiveness, and fuels poverty and social exclusion' (Eurostat survey report, 2012). It is therefore a possibility that the reason for such poor FE attendance by students with intellectual disabilities in Malta is the level of isolation and bullying they experienced in secondary school which discouraged them from extending their academic and vocational education.

Young people who leave school early are bound to lack qualifications and skills and will, therefore, face serious challenges in accessing the labour market, leading to social exclusion. This is true for all young people but those who also have a disability will find it even more of a challenge due in part to socio-cultural misconceptions held by employers.

The phrase ‘I fear’ (nibża) was used often in the responses offered by the participants, especially in relation to their experiences within the school system. Feelings of fear may relate to fear of disclosure, failure, judgement or rejection.

Interview Group One
Extract 38 – Fear as a result of bullying

Conrad	Before I came in I was very afraid that I will be bullied again or that it would be hard you know doing lessons and the older students would laugh at me.

Fear is also transposed through the fears held by carers and parents. Participants in this research echoed repeatedly statements told to them by others about why and what they have to be afraid of; in many cases the cited situations included most of the things inherent in growing up and social and emotional development.

Interview Group Two Extract 39 – Projected fears from others	
Ina	For example my mum said that I was scared of dogs and that's why I couldn't go to MCAST. Also because she didn't want me to get the bus. Now I know how and I come on my own but only after X convinced her. It took a long time.

Malcolm described how he retaliated when he was afraid and that got him in trouble with the school.

Interview Group Three Extract 40 – Challenging behaviour due to fear	
Malcolm	I was scared that they would keep hurting me so I started growling like a lion. They are brave and strong. I bit X on the arm and he had to have an injection. Everyone was very angry and I got punished.

Fear is sometimes masked by other emotions such as passivity, anxiety or anger and these can in turn be seen as challenging behaviours with students possibly being subjected to disciplinary action or prescribed medicine unnecessarily. This was apparent during the document interrogation I did as part of the preparation for this study. The prescribed medication list of the 13 document packs revealed that ten were under the care of a psychiatrist and six were prescribed medication for anxiety and depression.

In the previous chapters some of the participants' commentaries describe how sometimes they were made to do unruly things by their peers. This was identified in the literature review by Lockhart *et al.* (2010) who state that some students with disabilities may resort to challenging behaviour either to gain peer acceptance or to mask emotions that they think would make them look more vulnerable. In cultures like Malta some people with intellectual disabilities internalise societal projections of angelic and infantile attributes of people with disabilities and often this leads to a self-belief of being fundamentally incapable of doing wrong. A possible reluctance by parents and society to discipline children with disabilities may be the cause of challenging behaviour that is less acceptable in adolescents and adults with disabilities and that may result in further stigmatisation. I have observed such behaviours frequently in my career and I believe further research is warranted to provide more insight into patterns of behaviour in young people with intellectual disabilities in Malta.

7.2.1 Fear of disclosure

Studies on disclosure were numerous in the literature review and showed how for many students with disabilities, accessing FE proved problematic due to the need of disclosing the disability to gain the required support arrangements (Johnson, 2006; Barnard-Brak *et al.,* 2010; Torkelson-Lynch and Gussel, 2006). The fact that they would be entering a new school means that they could also start afresh with a new identity that may or may not include the disability. The participants currently in FE mentioned that sometimes they try to hide the extent of their difficulties from teachers and peers, especially when it comes to academic ability. The reason for this being more pertinent to students in FE as opposed to those still in secondary school is perhaps that In FE they do not have an LSA with them on an individual basis nor do they have supervision around the campus.

Interview Group Two
Extract 41 – Strategies for masking illiteracy

Mina	I did not want my new classmates to know that I cannot read...I can but only a bit. We are older now and they will think I am stupid eh! I tell my sister to write text messages for me.

Unlike the participants of studies by May and Addison Stone (2010) and Goode (2007), the participants in my study did not really mention disclosure to the college as being a barrier upon entry, which is probably due to the fact that they were not directly involved in the negotiations for support, but rather they seemed to have some difficulty in pronouncing their needs more generally. I only realised this at a later stage in my research when I became conscious that during the empirical process and to a certain extent more pronouncedly during the focus groups. It seemed that very few of the participants would say the word 'disability' and only three of the participants could name their disability or effectively share their specific needs. Disclosure during the focus group may have been more testing as they had to talk about disability in front of others. Stella captured this difficulty perfectly during the focus group.

Focus Group One
Extract 42 – Self-awareness of disability

Stella	My mother [foreign has always told me that having ADHD and epilepsy make me need more help and that I need to know how to ask for it and what to ask for. These kids don't seem to know what they have because I asked them repeatedly.

After Stella's somewhat 'rude' outburst the focus group participants scrambled for some words to describe what they thought they 'had' but there was some confusion and tiptoeing around words like autism and Down's syndrome. The discomfort experienced by the participants during this particular conversation was very visible with averted gazes and fidgeting in their seats. Two of the participants who were sitting directly opposite, looked at me with blank faces and eventually one of them spoke up. The extract below shows a part of the conversation that ensued.

Extract 43 The discomfort of talking about disability
Focus Group 2 dated 12 March 2013

Participant	Quote	Thick Description
Ned	*You know I don't know exactly maybe I should go to see someone.*	
Stella	*It's in your file I am sure because they write it all down. Ask them... I already told you and even you Caleb.*	
Caleb (looking embarrassed)	*What? What are you saying? I don't need to ask anyone. I just need help with reading. I am slow... (Looks at me for reassurance and then back at Stella).*	
Stella (a bit animated)	*You all have a disability …like me. That's ok though!*	
	Room fell silent and Kieran starts fumbling with his bag to find his mobile. He mumbles something under his breath.	The non-verbal communication seemed to show that the participants were uncomfortable and perhaps experienced shame. This could be due to either lack of knowledge about the disability or having the disability itself
Me	*Kieran would you like to share something about this topic?*	
Kieran	*Because she [Stella] is right eh! I am now in level 2 and if I wish I knew more about what I have. I don't want the teachers or the guys to think I am stupid or lazy. It's mental…a disorder but that's what I heard.*	

The discomfort experienced by the younger focus group was also apparent during one of the interviews where the parent accompanied the student. During the conversation the mother lowered her voice to a whisper and switched to English so her daughter would not understand to tell me about the result of the daughter's psychological report, which included her diagnosis of autism. The daughter did not exhibit any reaction to this and merely waited for her mother to switch back to Maltese, showing that this was something she was used to experiencing. This echoes many other such instances in my career when both parents and professionals omit saying disability-related words or names of particular impairments in front of people with intellectual disabilities. Sometimes people even offer a general or somewhat diffused version of the ‘offending’ word such as ‘special’, and ‘slow’. It is often the case that this is seen as a protective gesture; however, this lack of exposure may be the reason why so few of the participants could voice their needs and describe their impairment.

Disclosure in my research, therefore, takes on a different perspective than the one in the literature review and may come from a cultural discomfort with disability discourse and disclosure even among people with disabilities themselves. Being exposed to disability-affirmative environments and practices had a positive impact on disability identity as is seen through the literature (Sitlington and Neubert, 2004; Callus, 2009) and also from the commentary from FG1.

There was a marked difference between the participants in the self-advocacy group (FG1) and the other participants when it came to disability awareness. The latter had little to no awareness of their disability while the rest could name and explain their disability and needs.

Interview Group One
Extract 44 – Explaining disability

Ina	Up until I was 8 years old I was in a vegetative state, I did not talk, move or walk you know, then they took me abroad and found out I have Dopa-responsive Dystonia. With treatment I miraculously started walking and doing everything but because I started so late I have been living with intellectual disability. This means that I learn in a slower and different way to most people. Before I joined *Flimkien Naslu* no one had ever told me anything about my disability. It was a taboo I think so I stopped asking.

Darling (2003) stated that parents may hide or ignore the difficulties faced by their son/ daughter to avoid being stigmatised. Goffman (1963) and many others have shown that people with visible or obvious disabilities have occupied a devalued social status and as a result they have historically tried to 'pass themselves off' as normal. I have experienced this very often in my career as an educator for students with intellectual disabilities, frequently to the detriment of students who do not get the support arrangements required. This happens especially with students who do not have a 'visible' disability. How the student and parents/ carers perceive the disability affects their life choices and whether they try to hide or just deny the existence of the disability, the result is still the same. The student will go through life practically experiencing many of the challenges faced by others with intellectual disabilities but without the access to support afforded to those who disclose their needs. This relates strongly to Darling's model of disability identity types as she distinguishes between the families who experience 'normalisation' through having access to the disability subculture versus the families who are excluded from support in a ‘resignation’ adaptation stemming from a lack of accessible options (Darling, 1979).

The normalisation model is based on the theory of anomie (Merton, 1949), that all people in society have the same goals. However, Swain and French (2000) suggest that society is moving to a disability-affirmative model and rejecting the normalisation typology identified by Darling (2010). They claim that the disabled society is rejecting social norms and embracing a disability pride that does away with the assumption that people with disabilities want to be other than as they are. In a more recent article, Darling (2003) updated her model of disability identities to include a more affirmative ideal but she claims that the tragedy model is still present in many societies and for a typology to be truly representative it needs to include all segments of the disability community.

There is a general lack of knowledge about intellectual disability since it is largely invisible. The understanding of disability for some is limited to more visible disabilities such as physical and sensory impairments and Down’s syndrome (Johnson, 2006).

My study revealed that in fact Malta, as purportedly a more conservative and insular parts of Western society, still upholds traditional views of disability. Darling suggests that one of the reasons for the resignation typology is lack of access to disability-affirmative models due in part to illiteracy. This may be a reason why people with intellectual disabilities more specifically are more prone to be excluded from the disability movement and therefore less likely to move along ‘career paths’ to a more affirmative type (Darling, 2003).

In my personal observations I saw three students who are unable to read, or unable to read in English, pretend they are reading mobile phone texts or magazines both during interviews and during focus groups. This was probably a gesture to ease the tension during difficult parts of conversations; however, it also shows how the fear of being ‘found out’ leads them to develop coping mechanisms and strategies to conceal their impairment. This was also found in a study by Denhart (2008) where students with intellectual disabilities created practical ways to conceal their impairments and blend in with general campus students.

Another commonly observed coping strategy is to develop gregarious personalities to hide their difficulties and divert others’ attention from their lack of skill. The latter also may be seen to cover other inadequacies such as a hyperactivity disorder.

7.2.2 Fear of failure

Fear of failure may keep students with intellectual disabilities from even attempting FE in a bid to avoid situations where they are required to read or write. Research has shown that some people with intellectual disabilities lack the basic functional reading and writing skills required for academic and job successes, due to cognitive limitations and inadequate learning environments (Barnard-Brak *et al.*, 2010; Uditsky and Hughson, 2012).

During one of the meetings of FG1, the group was evaluating an IT training course they had attended and they were discussing it between them. The conversation included reasons why they thought students with intellectual disabilities were reluctant to participate in FE and there was general consensus that they thought it was out of fear of failure and of being victimised.

Interview Group Four
Extract 45 – Academic difficulty as perceived barrier to FE

Martha	They are scared of the lessons for sure; they think it would be too difficult.

Society gauges success through very distinct and inflexible measures pertaining mostly to affluence and capitalist notions of personal worth. In an age where our lives are punctuated with the expectation of achievement, mainly in the form of materialistic goods and social positionality, the standards are very high.

Focus Group One
Extract 46 – Inequality entrenched in rigid educational systems

Ina	They do not see that for one guy it takes ten months to get to a spot and for the other it takes 10 minutes. They don't care about the effort they just care about the results. You know…it's the same for us!

Emotional rewards are pegged to the acquisition of goods through media and other social structures, including schools. Having standard measures for success for everyone makes for inequality in society and is a result of ableist mentalities. Considering the fact that the concept of equality dominates many political and social arenas, we are still plagued by deep inequalities through ableism.

Although anxiety about failing can be paralysing, some of the participants in the focus group said it motivates them to work even harder to succeed.

Focus Group One
Extract 47 – Group support

Martha	I used to be afraid of things even going out but now with the help of the group and X [group founder] I feel better and I am not afraid anymore because we are a group and we help each other cope. I know what self-advocacy is and I do my best.

The focus group with younger participants also initiated discussion on the possibility of starting a self-advocacy group on campus. This shows a desire to improve their situation when it comes to empowerment and self-determination. This tallies with research by Gerber *et al.* (2012): many people with intellectual disabilities develop innovative strategies to learn and solve problems in order to cope with the vocational, social and educational demands in their everyday lives. This learned creativity and ability to come up with these strategies often helps them overcome their fear of failure. The term emotional intelligence is being used significantly in many spheres of life and is being included in teaching curricula and also as part of desired skills for employees. Emotional intelligence, unlike IQ, can be improved upon to make one more in tune with ones feelings and those of others.

7.2.3 Ridicule and rejection

People with disabilities may frequently fear the ridicule of others. Sadly, these fears often develop after the individual has been routinely ridiculed by teachers, classmates or even family members. Twelve interview participants reported being made to feel stupid through criticism related to perceived lack of intelligence or unfair judgments about the person's degree of motivation or ability to succeed. The following are some such comments mentioned by the participants:

Focus Group Two
Extract 48 – Verbal demotivation

Kieran	They used to tell me ‘You'll never amount to anything’ or ‘You could do it if you only tried harder’ but I was really trying and they didn’t believe me.

Such negative comments have enormous emotional effects on individuals with intellectual disabilities and may continue to affect their emotional well-being into their adult years. It is not uncommon for adults to internalise the negative criticisms and view themselves as dumb, stupid, lazy and/or incompetent (Wendell, 1996; Garland Thomson, 2009). This is exemplified in the narrative by one of the focus group participants.

Focus Group One
Extract 49 – Internalised notions of inadequacy

Charles	How many times do you have to hear that you are stupid to finally start believing it? My headmaster in primary school refused to let me in class so he sent me with the janitor every day and only let me join the students for mass and prayer.

Studies show that people with intellectual disabilities frequently fear rejection if they are not seen to be as capable as others (Thomas, 2012). They may also fear that their social skill deficits will preclude them from building meaningful relationships with others and may lead to social rejection.

Interview Group Two
Extract 50 – Social inadequacy

Caleb	I never know what to say to girls. I always think they will not want to even be friends because of the way I am...because of my speech maybe. I want a girlfriend.

Prior experiences of rejection will likely intensify this sense of fear.

Interview Group One
Extract 51 – School rejection

Parent 1	My daughter was in a church school but the nuns did not allow her to wear the school uniform because she was hyperactive and they did not want people to think they accepted 'naughty' students in their school.

7.2.4 Mental health

The participants' reports show that students with intellectual disability tend to be excluded from conversations about their disability. In some cases the only direct messages they receive about their difficulties come from their peers and, as seen in Chapter Six, they are often negative and abusive. It is therefore not unexpected that students with intellectual disabilities are left with significant psychological difficulties that affect their self-esteem and mental health.

Many respondents described intense depressive episodes as a consequence of the conflicting messages received from society. The main concerns cited were all associated with lack of control over their lives and feelings of hopelessness about the future ever being any different.

Extract 52 – Hopelessness	
Judy FG1	It gets bad sometimes and I know that one day I will be alone and no one will help me because I have no friends except the ones in this group. What happens when I am old?
Caleb FG2	There was a time when I was so depressed my mum took me to a doctor and he gave me pills to feel better. They were making me sleepy at school. I would have felt happier if I had a better life… with real friends and a girlfriend.

7.3 *Mhux Xorta*! – indifference

Broer *et al*. (2005) state that learned helplessness and social avoidance are coping mechanisms adopted by those whose social reality has included regular experiences of failing and underachieving. These manifest themselves in attitudes of indifference and passivity which are defined as the belief that one's own behaviour does not influence outcomes or results. For example one of the participants in the study described this through his story of his SEC exams.

Extract 53 – Closure in learning	
Abby IG4	No matter how hard I studied for tests I always got bad grades. They were too hard. I told my mum that I would not take anymore, not even my SEC.
Caleb FG2	I didn't even try [to take the test] because I knew I was not clever enough. I really studied hard though.

This passivity in school may be linked to generally poor grades and to behavioural problems, what Thomas (2012) describes as a 'closure in learning'. Students who experience repeated failure are mostly prone to develop such a passive and defeatist response. Denhart (2008) and Hen and Goroshit (2012) show that these attitudes seem to contribute to academic failure experienced by many students with intellectual disabilities. In a never-ending cycle, students with intellectual disabilities frequently experience school difficulties over a period of time and across myriad tasks and settings and with different teachers. Some students may have this belief reinforced through a system that lets them progress from one year to the next despite failing assessments. This may make students feel complacent and non-invested in their learning.

Interview Group Three
Extract 54 – Complacency

Steph	I was out of class with my LSA most of secondary school and we only did Maltese and Maths. I did adapted papers in the yearly exams and even though I never passed I still moved onto the next year.

A situation recounted by four of the interview participants was that their work was done for them either by parents or more notably by their own LSA. This situation is something that I have frequently experienced in my career and is probably a result of a desire for student work to be of a better academic level. This may be to improve prospects for furthering education or a less honourable reason is for the LSA to portray an inflated picture of the student's progress which in turn promotes a positive job appraisal. This situation may also lead to students with intellectual disabilities becoming reliant on unnecessary support and developing a passive and indifferent attitude to education or possibly to other aspects of life more generally.

Interview Group Four
Extract 55 – Passivity

Abby	If I don't work I can stay home and watch TV all day.

The role of the LSAs in the Maltese educational system has become essential for the implementation of inclusive practices in mainstream schools. The sheer number of LSAs employed by the local government shows that the demand for this type of student support is ever increasing. Some local criticism by Ghirxi (2013), however, has targeted this as being unnecessary and a political card used by politicians as many parents insist on their child's right to have individual support even when not required. Bartolo (2009) agrees with the findings in the Ghirxi (2013) report and argues that many parents see the LSA as someone who can give their child free individual attention even if the child may not require it. The constant presence of an LSA in the student's life has perhaps increased the levels of dependence of the student and reduced the opportunities for socialisation with peers who may see the adult's presence as a deterrent. In many cases recounted by the participants, the LSA was the sole educator for them and was given full responsibility of the learning process which often happened outside of the classroom. This situation bears some resemblance to Warnock's description of what is happening in UK mainstream schools:

> Too often the price of students with special needs being admitted to mainstream schools, was that they were taught almost entirely by teaching assistants who were not fully qualified, and therefore they did not benefit from the best teaching. (Warnock, 2005, p. 12)

7.3.2 Jien min Jien? – disability identities

Society has moved from a disability orientation based on the medical model (Solnit and Stark, 1961) to the more recent social model of disability (Oliver 1995), but disability identity is still being manifested in different types depending on socio-cultural factors. These types of disability identities are discussed in some detail in the literature review and include normalisation, crusadership, affirmation, situational identification, resignation, apathy and isolated affirmation (Darling, 2003). In a later study, Darling (2010) suggests that individuals with disabilities may move along from one type of identity to another over time as they face diverse and new situations. However, her study showed that people with intellectual disabilities and their families tend to adopt a resignation or apathy type identity due to significant socio-cultural barriers present in most societies, which prevent them from achieving normalisation or affirmation. Darling states that these are the people who are more likely to be exposed to the majority culture rather than the disability pride subculture. She maintains that this population is the least studied group of people with disabilities.

Three of the participants mentioned that their parents were too busy with other family matters to be involved in their education while others stated that parents had difficulties in literacy so could not help them in that area.

Focus Group Two
Extract 56 – Social issues as a barrier to family involvement

Caleb	My parents were always busy with working the fields and taking care of my younger brothers. They never attended any of the seminars and talks for parents. Maybe they would have also understood more.

My findings align with those of Darling and show that in fact most of the participants, excluding those in the FG1 self-advocacy group, had little awareness of disability culture. The exposure to self-advocacy training and involvement in activism as well as their older age are the factors that probably have the greatest influence on their disability identity.

Researchers such as Swain and French (2000) have garnered support from the disability movement through their notion of the affirmation model discussed in the literature review. This model rejects the notion, based on anomie theory, that everyone in society accepts the dominant cultural norms with regards to ability and appearance. They believe that this model is replacing older views that label disabilities as failings or family misfortunes. This unfortunately does not hold true in all Western cultures and it is my belief that cultures with a strong religious influence, such as Malta, have certainly struggled with taking on a more positive view of disability, especially intellectual disabilities.

Despite the growing awareness of the 'disability pride' movement (Linton, 1998), in Malta there has been little effort at grassroots level to eliminate stigma-based identity models. The work that is being done is mainly on socio-political agendas and is, therefore, largely inaccessible and not easily transposed, especially to those who are not involved directly.

7.3.3 Culture and religion

In Chapter Six I discussed how external factors such as bullying and being isolated can lead to early school drop-out. The identified feelings of fear, indifference and inadequacy come from socio-cultural experiences and in Malta one cannot ignore the influence of the Church on society.

As discussed in the chapter on cultural context, Malta is deeply religious and although the Church was instrumental in providing the first services to people with disabilities, the concept of charity towards 'those less fortunate' may have led to defeatist and passive attitudes that permeate the psyche of many people with intellectual disabilities. The socio-cultural messages that people with disabilities receive are for the most part also influenced by Malta's Christian doctrines and although things have been progressively changing over the last two decades through changes in legislation and policy, a strong paternalistic attitude still may be shaping the experience and opportunity available in the day-to-day lives of people with disabilities.

The parents who were involved in the study and many others whom I have interacted with along the course of my career, frequently made reference to divine intervention and used language to show that they believe that their children were given to them to prove their faith in God, that they were their 'cross to bear' and they would be assured a place in the kingdom of heaven for all eternity. Some parents referred to their children as 'a gift from God'; however, this was generally coupled with a resignation that whatever happens is God's will. Religious discourse featured very strongly in the study narratives. This belief is evident even in the words and religious phrases used by some of the students who associated life's difficulties to tests sent by God that would pave their way to the kingdom of heaven.

Extract 57 – Religious inferences

Caleb	God will not give you burdens you cannot carry.
Molly	What he takes from you in this world he will give back to you in the next.

These proclamations were generally used in the conversations to solidify arguments that one must accept his fate and 'bear the cross'. Some of the students recounted how both at home and at school (mostly in the special schools) they were required to recite the rosary three times a day. This was their main 'task' and seems to have been common practice due to the assigned virtue and purity placed on people with intellectual disability in Malta as referred to in Chapter Four. This belief, therefore, places more value on prayers recited by children with intellectual disabilities as opposed to other people.

Journal Entry 6	
Charity	The charity model is so ingrained in Maltese society that even in the everyday lives of people with disabilities random people will give them money and food without being asked, assuming that they are in need. The lack of understanding about disability and the different types of impairments leads to embarrassing situations in the imposition of prayer or rituals such as the signing of the cross, sometimes coupled with tears of pity, which on countless occasions was 'bestowed' on my students when out on educational or vocational outings.

These social messages are very present in Maltese society and play a distinctive part in establishing attitudes and beliefs about people with disabilities. These attitudes and beliefs provide significant barriers to people with disabilities when it comes to their academic and social development.

Opposing messages from disability rights movements seldom reach the right audience and are sometimes in themselves inaccessible.

7.4 *Ma nafx!* Inadequacy

Feeling inadequate was identified as being an internalised notion expressed by participants in both of the focus groups and in most of the interviews. It is worth noting that the students who were accompanied by their parents did not mention lack of choice or sexuality. The main areas linked to feeling inadequate that were reported were mainly about not having choice.

Most of the research participants stated they experienced a very high level of parental control when it came to most choices in their lives. As mentioned in the literature review, the developmental stages of every individual require a certain degree of increase in independence. As a child grows up it is expected that to reach developmental milestones one needs to separate gradually from parents or primary caregivers and reach a stage of individuation during puberty (Mahler, 1979). If the pubertal stage of separation does not happen or happens under scrupulous parental guidance, the transition might not be as objective and individualised as it should be. Few parents, given the opportunity, would not take control over their sons' or daughters' lives out of fear and desire to protect them; however, this fact is accentuated in the case of children with disabilities. An important aspect of the adolescent phase is being able to make choices, especially in relation to socialisation including leisure, friendships and intimacy (Mead, 1962; Erikson, 1969).

The areas of concern mentioned were for everyday things such as media access, leisure and peer relationships. Following an intense debate in both focus groups an emerging protest arose against the fact that they were often not involved in conversations about their own life, even though they were old enough and could understand. These situations and experiences lead to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority as seen in some of the statements by participants.

Extract 58 – Feelings of inferiority

Larry	Why should I bother with lessons or playing with them [other students]...I think...it is always the same. I don't want to be made fun of because I am not as good as them so I don't go out during break.
Nathan	I wish I lived somewhere where we were all the same, you know, all good at school and we were all friends together. I don't think I can have friends because I am different.

7.4.1 Inaccessible disability discourse

In section 7.2.1 one may see that many of the participants of this study had little to no knowledge about their disability and could not really explain their needs well. Besides the fact that in many local situations people with intellectual disabilities are kept away from talk about disability, it is also the case that in many instances the language used is inaccessible through difficult vocabulary and language choice (Kraus, 2008). The following excerpt from FG1 shows that this is an experience that is often encountered.

Extract 59 The difficulty in understanding disability discourse

Focus Group dated 1 June 2013

Participant	Quote	Thick Description
Ina	*They talk difficult and so we don't know what they mean*	Participants in this focus group were showing visible signs of pride in themselves and the fact that they are able to speak up about their needs. This shows that the scope of the group (which is self-advocacy) has reaped significant benefits and the members are aware of their right to accessible options.
Oliver	*Yes like doctors so no one understands a thing pff I tell them now you know!*	
Abby	*[stands up]*	
Ina	*[Claps and laughs excitedly]*	
Martha	*Yes we learned how to ask people to speak in an easy way...even teachers I tell them. But others don't!*	
Ina	*Yes of course we tell them. I tell them even to speak Maltese as I don't know English…only a bit.*	
	Its big words that are a problem but I always ask for what they mean. Everyone should do that especially for important things.	

The document interrogation completed for the preparatory stage of the study highlighted the pervasive problem of literacy experienced by people with intellectual disabilities. The illiteracy problem in Malta is significantly higher than the EU average, as shown in Chapter Four, and this is magnified in the population with intellectual disabilities, possibly due to the cognitive impairment but also to inadequate accessible educational scenarios.

Chapter Four also highlights the issue of illiteracy in the English language. This is due to the fact that in Malta, despite having both Maltese and English as official languages, in the vast majority of cases only one language is taught to students with intellectual disabilities. This is most often Maltese since it is the primary language used in most families. English is, however, used more frequently in written media channels and in learning material in schools. This provides a significant barrier for those who were not given the opportunity to learn the language.

Illiteracy in people with learning disabilities is one of the main barriers to opportunities for self-growth and shifting to other identities (Darling, 2010). It is human nature to move from one orientation to another as identities are not static and are likely to change over time, depending on our social interactions (Cooley, 1964).

Identity change can be a healthy readjustment of self-definitions and, according to authors such as Becker (1963), result in an eventual commitment to a role or concept of self that is solidified through social feedback. This means that the identity of people with disabilities rests upon their opportunities and experiences; people who have access to disability-affirmative environments have a chance to shift to a more positive frame of mind.

This opportunity to shift to a more empowered disability identity through experiences of self-advocacy and self-determination is seen in some of the conversations of FG1. Out of the total number of participants, the only few who had clear responses on what it means to have a disability were the ones from the self-advocacy group. They also verbalised positive attributes to having a disability which reflect the affirmation model by Swain and French (2002).

Focus Group One
Extract 60 – Hope and positive disability identity

Oliver	I know I have a disability but it does not stop me from living my life to the full. It is society that does that and we should speak up every time this happens.
Ina	I always felt like I was in a cage and then I started coming to this group and now I learnt what to say to get what I need, even from important people.

There seemed to also be a discrepancy between students who were still in secondary school and those who were in FE courses. The students in the first group had no or little knowledge of their disability or their support needs and regarded themselves as being dependent on their parents or LSAs for general everyday choices as well as more important ones. The other participants, who were following a specialised FE course for students with intellectual disabilities, stated that they first discussed disability during citizenship lectures. The students who were in mainstream courses did not discuss such matters since the curriculum included only one hour a week on personal development and the topics covered were generic.

Focus Group Two
Extract 61 – Being taught about disability

Caleb	I remember the first time someone ever spoke about disability. It was at Pathway during a lecture on identity and everyone had to talk about what they thought disability meant. Most of us said being blind or using a wheelchair. I never knew anything about intellectual disability; I just thought I was stupid.

The literature review identified how people with disabilities who are aware of their difficulties and are able to express their needs are generally more successful in FE and in coping with life's challenges (Wehmeyer, 2007). The lack of self-awareness may be another intrinsic barrier which affects students with intellectual disabilities in Malta and this may in turn influence choices for continuing education. Their lack of knowledge about their disability may lead to them not accessing disability services or support mechanisms available to them. Self-awareness and self-determination gives people with learning disabilities a foothold when it comes to asserting themselves in society as well as providing them with links to services and support (Sitlington and Neubert, 2004; Bouck, 2010; Alwell and Cobb, 2009).

7.4.2 Leisure

One important difference between leisure and other activities is that adolescents presumably choose their leisure activities while school and work are dictated by others, usually adults. Not all socialisation that occurs in adolescents' leisure is aimed at teaching adult roles and, according to Hendry *et al.,* (1999), leisure also plays an important role in exposing adolescents to elements of popular culture and to youth culture in particular. Jeffs and Smith (2000) believe that 'leisure is the period when different lifestyles can be tried and exchanged'. Young people may well have acquired initial stereotypes and role knowledge in childhood but during adolescence they have yet to explore the implications, demands and constraints that society has for them; leisure activities are an essential medium for them to do so.

Out of all the research participants only a few went out socially unaccompanied by a parent/ carer. Most attended adult-led social and/ or religious groups.

Extract 62 – Restrictions on leisure	
Caleb FG2	On Sunday and some evening during the week I go to the MUSEUM but I wish to go out with my friends, you know maybe go to Paceville [the club district] but my mum won't let me.

Ina FG1	I tell everyone how much I want to go out with my friends. It is impossible as my mum will not let me go and I am 21 now. At least she finally allowed me to go to college. There I meet friends who have a disability like me and during break we go around campus. There I feel like I…you know like I am free.

The participants of the study expressed that they wished they had more choice on who to spend their leisure with and how to spend it but above all they wanted to have leisure opportunities.

Focus Group Two
Extract 63 – Restrictions on leisure activities

Stella	I would like to go to Paceville too where all young people go on the weekend but my curfew is 9pm so it would still be empty by the time I have to catch the bus home.
Caleb	My mum still doesn't let me go out even though I am soon going to be 19. My younger brother who is 15 goes out with his friends and I just go to help the parish priest in our village with the preparation for mass. I have friends now from MCAST but she doesn't want me to go out with them, maybe to Valletta to watch a film.

Studies by Hendry and Percy (1991) have shown that much of the adolescents' free time is spent in the company of some form of mass medium, so considering the fact that many young people with disabilities spend even more time indoors than the average adolescent, it is not surprising to find a pronounced impact of mass media on adolescents with disabilities.

Watching television and listening to music seems to be one of the favourite available leisure activities for the participants. One could argue about the disadvantages and advantages associated with indoor leisure; however, this takes on a new perspective when one sees that for many of the participants this might very well be the only form of leisure available and easily accessible to them. Access to media and youth culture is also censored by parents/ carers in a protective gesture to detach them from what others consider unsafe or inappropriate activities.

Interview Group Three
Extract 64 – Restrictions on media access

Nathan	I am not allowed to use the internet because my dad says that it is not safe but the other kids at school play games on it and they ask me to join them.

In this day and age some may argue that not having access to the internet is considered a great disadvantage as it has become a big part of our social and economic interactions. The participants who did not use the internet spoke about reasons such as lack of support to use it, lack of finances to pay for the service and being fearful of its negative aspects. Many also claimed that they were forbidden or actively discouraged from using it for safety reasons.

Extract 65 – Restrictions on internet use

Ned FG2	The carers in our home tell us that we can get in trouble if we chat to the wrong person and you cannot trust anyone who you can't see. Anyway I need help to type and they will never help me.
Steph IG3	I used to have internet and used Facebook for a while but now I don't have enough money to pay for it anymore and my mum won't pay as she is scared of the internet.

Three of the female respondents complained that even their choice of outfits was regulated by their mother and did not reflect their choices. One of the participants said that her mother still bought her clothes usually worn by younger children.

Interview group Three
Extract 66 – Lack of autonomy in personal care

Mina	I want jeans but she just buys me track suits like the kids at kindergarten.

The other two participants mentioned that their clothes were too conservative and made them look older. The fact that clothes are chosen by parents shows the lack of choice in everyday things and the fact that the clothes are not age appropriate may reflect the socio-cultural attitudes towards disability in Malta. Camilleri (2010) and Callus (2009) both refer to strong Maltese paternalistic attitudes towards people with disabilities often translating into internalised feelings of inadequacy.

Studies by Skar and Barron (1995) suggest that young people in situations of high parental involvement often lack control over their lives and have difficulties to develop their identity, which in turn leads to problems in education and employment, developing intimate relationships and friendships, among other things.

7.4.3 Intimacy

Many respondents claim that they are not 'allowed' to have a boyfriend/ girlfriend. The ones who are in a relationship are always accompanied by an adult. Also many of the participants were told that they cannot get married or have a family. The urge for intimacy is very present in all the participants; however, the participants seem to have been brought up to associate various feelings of guilt and shame with intimacy and sexuality.

Extract 67 – Sexuality

Ina IG4	My parents do not want me to have a boyfriend. My father found out that I met X at MCAST because my mum looked through my phone and saw some messages. If you did not intervene he would have beaten me and locked me up. My mum told me so…then no more school…no more anything! I was very ashamed after that.
Tristan IG1	I wish we had more lessons about boyfriends and sex. I had biology in secondary schools but we just saw a cartoon about it. It was not real. Now it's better at Pathway. But if I told my mum about the lessons on condoms she would faint [laughter].

The participants in my study identified a lack of sex education in mainstream environments, along with a general reluctance from society including family and schools to accept their need and right for intimacy. This matches results of other Maltese studies mentioned in the literature review which state that Maltese people with disabilities feel excluded from any talk about sexuality and feel that they are still thought of as asexual. However, although some individuals with intellectual disabilities comply with these beliefs others resist or reject them (Azzopardi Lane, 2012; Azzopardi Lane and Callus, 2014)

The process of individuation encompasses being capable of having intimacy (Mead, 1962) which is an important developmental milestone and includes integrating feelings of affection and attachment to others outside the family. Fine *et al.* (2007) state how obstacles arise if the opportunities for these relationships are limited due to adult supervision or parental constraints.

A Maltese study on sexuality and intellectual disability by Azzopardi Lane in 2012 found that parents of people with intellectual disabilities tend to prefer that their children remain chaste. Besides providing barriers to achieving individuation, the societal and familial pressures not to marry and to remain chaste permeates other negative feelings in young people with disabilities.

Participants constantly receive opposing messages from society. On the one hand there is the message that any good Christian should aspire to get married and raise a family and on the other hand there is the message that persons with disabilities should steer away from aspirations of marriage and intimacy.

Interview Group Four
Extract 68 – Perceived differences between countries about disability and Sexuality

Molly	I can compare Malta to Australia. Here things are outdated. When my boyfriend and I wanted to move in together many people thought it was a scandal and that we wouldn't manage on our own. They thought we couldn't make a decision like that.

7.4.4 Finances and employment

Another area mentioned in the focus groups and interviews where participants expressed inadequacy and concern over lack of control was in the management of personal finances. This linked significantly to expressed unease about employment prospects and having enough income to be independent.

Interview Group Four
Extract 69 – Financial barriers and employment

Oliver	Finding jobs is very rare so we are stuck living at home and living with our parents so we can never be independent. Even if you have a job like me, the money is not enough so even going out is hard.
Ina	My mum takes my FE stipend and she never lets me buy anything for myself. I hate that she treats me like a child but I have nowhere else to go.

Advertisements are rife with peer pressure to acquire the latest designer wear, IT equipment and attend the best clubs. Both the size of the adolescent population and the fact that they save up less money than any other age group, makes adolescents an attractive target of businesses (Fine *et al.*, 2007). The upshot of it all is that in spite of the fact that many of the participants do not have such choice over their leisure time, their exposure to media pressures is still very high. This in itself creates an even greater strain on young people with disabilities, who recognise the messages from mass media but who have no opportunity to exercise choices over the purchases they would like to make. To a large extent participants are still highly regulated by the way in which their parents perceive what is best for them.

From the responses in this study it is evident that the participants are lacking coaching and opportunity in being able to make even the simplest of choices for themselves. In time this seems to lead to lack of self-confidence and self-esteem and a perennial state of having others making decisions. Therefore, it becomes all the more difficult for young persons with disabilities to take the plunge and try to make it in the working world. Consequently, this signifies that they are not able to become self-sufficient and aspire to or even attain the same levels of independence that their able-bodied counterparts take for granted. From the six participants who were not in full-time education, only two were employed and these were employed on a part-time basis Judy as a laundry worker and Oliver as an office hand. Molly stated that she did some ad hoc work as a cleaner in neighbours' houses.

For many of the participants, having an income is synonymous with becoming independent. In fact, unless one has an income it is very hard to have leisure and without leisure the development of identity is fraught with difficulties. This becomes a vicious circle as certain social skills required by many employers are lacking unless one experiences through certain developmental paths.

Interview Group Four
Extract 70 – Financial struggles and leisure

Molly	We struggle with money because he doesn't work and even though we get help from our families we rarely have money to go out. In these meetings we cannot afford to buy burgers like some of the others. We ate canned soup before we came today.
Oliver	I wish we could have the money to watch a film or buy nice clothes but I cannot afford it on my salary.

The above quotes come from the participants who are in employment so the financial difficulties experienced by the others may be even more significant.

Adolescents in contemporary society are exposed to a larger number and variety of adult role models, both in school and elsewhere. As our society has become more diverse, the number of social roles and choices available to adolescents has increased dramatically. Yet Maltese society has few role models with disabilities, which is congruous with studies by Shuttleworth (2000) who found that students with intellectual disabilities feel the lack of role models in the media and in everyday life. They had various misconceptions of what they could achieve reflecting a closed culture, full of barriers, which include structural but mostly attitudinal barriers. This can be seen also from the fact that social messages received by participants were very negative and resulted in very low self-esteem and perceived competence in what they could achieve in their lives.

In summary, the participants have been socialised to be dependent. They were and are still exposed to the youth culture but they are not part of it. They watch and listen to mass media from the perspective of an audience but they cannot experience the real world. They live according to the rules laid out for them by their parents and society at large which include working towards a paternalistic concept of independence that has its roots in the medical model rather than the social model of disability. Isaacson Kailes (2001) describes this as false independence.

The concept of false independence leads to the conjecture of my personal theory that the concept of inclusion in Maltese schools is based on an erroneous model of integration. The rationale for the investment in educational inclusion policies is twofold. The first is to give equal opportunities to students with disabilities to attend mainstream schooling and the second, a political motivation, is to support the same students to become employable through the acquisition of qualifications and skills required to gain and maintain employment. This is the same motivation as found in the European investment in the prevention of early school leavers (ESL) to aid economic growth through employment and reduce strain on social welfare systems (Europe, 2020).

My findings reveal that Malta has some failings when it comes to the desired result of having inclusive educational systems since the rate of students with disabilities accessing FE and employment is very low, despite some recent national efforts to address this. This low rate may be attributed in part to the negative experiences of students within mainstream schools. This means that even though students with intellectual disabilities are enrolled in mainstream schools they are not really being included in the whole school experience. There has to be recognition of the distinction between integration and inclusion. It is my opinion that what is currently available locally is 'false inclusion' wherein students with intellectual disabilities are enrolled in mainstream schools but are not part of the school community. They are still segregated through separate learning environments, and have separate educators and a general negative experience which amplifies their differences and difficulties. This will be discussed fully in the next chapter in this thesis along with a revisiting of the concept of specialised learning environments for students with intellectual disabilities.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the commentary and conversations of study participants in relation to feelings of fear, indifference and inadequacy which may be factors in determining whether they pursue FE. The participants' experiences of school, and messages received through the lack of choices in such things as leisure and sexual expression, as well as finances and employment, remain a strong predictor of internalised identity constructs of fear, indifference and inadequacy. An enduring narrative on lack of choice suggests that whether or not students access FE is also reliant on parental decisions which are largely considered to be based on traditional and often religious beliefs on disability.

The Maltese community still grapples with a religious culture that places emphasis on disability as a tragedy. Darling's (1979) typology of disability identities is used in this chapter to provide an explanation of how people with disabilities internalise affirmative or resignation attributes depending on their opportunity and access to disability subcultures. Illiteracy and poverty are factors that prevent people with disabilities and their families from moving along a 'career path' to normalisation. In this sense, normalisation includes proper health care and educational instruction, along with employment, housing and leisure opportunities. In Malta illiteracy is a very real problem in the general population and even more so in students with disabilities. This may be an explanation as to why many of the participants show very limited understanding of their impairment and their support needs. Religious ideologies still permeate Maltese society and may be a determining factor in the disempowerment of individuals with intellectual disabilities as culturally they are treated like 'angels' and 'perpetual infants'. These assigned roles may be internalised by people with intellectual disabilities and form into an identity of defeatist indifference. Many of the participants either show limited understanding of their lack of choices and the resulting effects or they are very conscious and resentful of their lack of power but do not know what to do about it. This resignation and absence of rebellion or pro-action may be something that they have been socialised into and it affirms the notion that internalised beliefs and attitudes are a barrier to them pursuing life choices such as FE.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Contribution of Educational Systems – Institutional Factors

8.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have analysed and discussed my respondents' comments. The conclusion drawn is that some of the reasons for a poor representation of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta are previous negative school experiences resulting in fear, internalised attitudes, beliefs of inadequacy and indifference. I have concluded from my analysis that these emerging themes are based on the cultures and traditions inherent in Maltese society.

The social model of disability advocated by disability activism worldwide has yet to take on a wider acceptance in Malta as the current understanding of disability is still linked to both the medical model that views disability as a fixable condition, as well as the charity model evolving from traditional Christian doctrines of viewing the person with disability as needy and 'childlike'. The delay in the paradigm shift to a more disability-affirmative society has allowed for some significant shortcomings to be experienced by students with intellectual disabilities both in the school environment and in society more generally.

The emerging themes identified in this study, directly or indirectly point to significant barriers in the Maltese inclusive educational system with participants reporting areas of concern that are categorised into three main sub-sections. These are inserted in table 15 below.

This chapter offers a discussion pertaining to research questions one, four and five. The final emerging theme of the study is a consideration of the contribution of the educational system to the exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta. This includes participants' views on areas of concern in the transition process to FE as well as how they envision an ideal FE scenario. The latter will be summarised in a final executive summary for distribution. The diagram below is a display of the network analysis for the third and final emerging theme and sub-themes, on which this chapter is based.

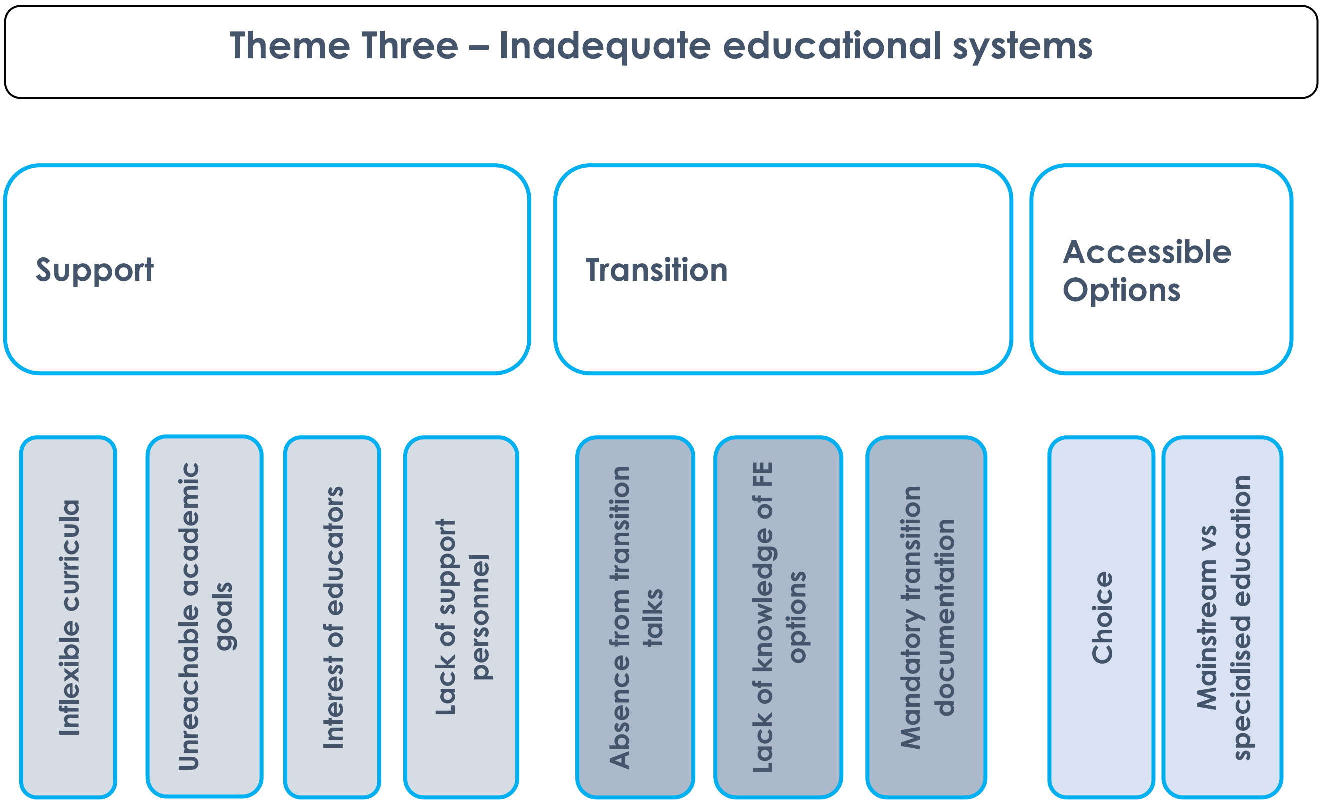


Table 15 Network analysis of theme three

8.2 Transition

Research shows that including students with learning disabilities brings with it specific challenges to FE institutions that seek to offer inclusion (Goss, 2001; Tagayuna *et al.*, 2005). Even when policies are in place they often lack the specifics required which results in oppressive practices. It appears that too little attention has been given to the crucial transition between school and FE.

8.2.1 Absence from the transition process

One specific practice that may be seen as oppressive is the transition planning measures adopted by schools at the end of compulsory education. In Malta these are generally combined with the MAPS sessions in form five. However, participants in this study claimed that they were merely observers in these meetings and their opinion was never asked for, especially when it came to important decisions. Many, if not all, the participants said that they could not understand most of what was being said.

Focus Group One
Extract 71 – Exclusion from transition talks

Ina	People came to the school in form five to talk about where we [students with disabilities] could go but I was not included in these talks and neither were the others. Only our parents attended.
Abby	My mother decided it was best for me to go to the day centre. They never asked me and there the other people were very old. I was 17 then so I would have liked to be at MCAST instead. Maybe at Pathway like my sister.

8.2.2 Lack of knowledge of FE options

From my personal experience of delivering talks about MCAST options to statemented students in the last year of compulsory education, I have been met with audiences made up predominantly of parents instead of the students. This is comparable to the experiences recounted by participants of being kept away from discussions and decisions about them by schools.

Many of the participants felt that the decision to further their education was not theirs to make. The general understanding of the options available to them was very limited with only three students mentioning more than one option.

Extract 72 – Knowledge about FE options

Ina IG4	For example my mum sent me to a special school after form five but I had wanted to go to MCAST Pathway as I had heard about it. Then Ms A and Mr G [KNPD] had arranged for me to leave the special school but my mum used to be so scared. She still does not let me go out.
Caleb FG2	A woman came to speak to us about MCAST. Another student didn't want but I came. Then I came and did the tests and the interview and I did well. I don't know of other schools.

8.2.3 Mandatory transition documentation

Some of the students mentioned that they struggled to provide the required documentation to apply for support at MCAST. A recent psychological report is one of the documents required and may cost up to Euro 800 when done privately. The Maltese government provides this until the age of 16 but the waiting list for this service is very long.

Interview Group two
Extract 73 – Required documentation for FE access

Crista	I filled in the application from the local council and we had to get some documents. The psychological report. We had to do another one as the one we had was old. It was very expensive for us because my brother has a lot of medical problems.

The literature review included significant research on the validity of requesting such documentation and furthermore on the use of these reports as a baseline for the provision of accommodations and support arrangements in FE. The document interrogation done as part of the preparatory phase of the empirical research of this study showed that psychological reports vary drastically depending on the educational psychologist writing it. IQ testing was present in all the reports surveyed and formed the diagnostic standard for identifying intellectual disability.

This section showed that the transition process can include exclusion factors when students are not involved and when information about available options is filtered. The transition to FE is also marred due to required documentation that is considered costly to procure.

8.3 Support

More than half of the 23 participants who experienced FE claimed that they had problems with FE access and a lack of adequate support mechanisms in mainstream FE courses. The parents in the study said that while mainstream secondary schools had a good level of staff support, there seemed to be reluctance from teachers to be directly involved in the learning process of students with intellectual disabilities. In both cases their children's FE school experiences lacked important elements to sustain their learning, such as sufficient staff support or baseline support mechanisms. These mainly include that they were not involved in decisions on where and how they wanted to be educated. This was especially experienced negatively during the time when they were finishing compulsory education as participants felt they were old enough to make decisions. Much was said about struggles within both separate and mainstream education, a lack of comprehensive life skills curricula and suitable educators.

8.3.1 Inflexible curricula

Most of the participants said that their academic achievements were not significant in secondary school mostly due to the high bar set for them by the schools. The Maltese national minimum curriculum has been criticised for being loaded and inflexible (Bartolo, 2009; Ghirxi, 2012). It is these types of curricula that raise unintended barriers to learning; students who are 'on the margins' such as students with disabilities or those who are gifted are especially affected. Furthermore, even students identified as 'average' may not have their educational needs met because of inadequate and regimental curricula.

> Curriculum is concerned with the messages that institutions transmit about knowledge and culture through its rules and social practices, as well as with the formal content of lessons. This notion of curriculum implies that selections are made from existing cultures, values and canons of knowledge at all levels, thus involving the drawing of boundaries and the assigning of differential spaces to different groups. These boundaries and spaces are both literal (the particular schools, institution, classroom) and symbolic (their culture and curriculum) and they sustain each other. Underpinning both are the processes and

> procedures involved in selection and demarcation in the curriculum. (Armstrong, 1999, p. 82)

In educational institutions individual variability is the rule not the exception so when curricula are designed for the imaginary average they fail to address the reality of this individual variability; therefore, they fail in providing fair and equal opportunities to all.

The best approach may be a curriculum with flexible goals, methods, materials and assessments that empower both educators and students to meet their different needs. Such a framework encourages creating flexible designs from the start that have customisable options, which allow all learners to progress from where they are and not where we would have imagined them to be. The options for accomplishing this are varied and robust enough to provide effective instruction to all learners.

8.3.2 Unreachable academic goals

One of the main fears cited by participants of FE was that the lessons would be too difficult. English literacy was frequently mentioned since many students find this subject very daunting. In Malta FE programmes for students without 'O' levels all have key skills included in the curriculum which means that students are required to have lessons in Maltese and English literacy, Mathematics and ICT.

During one of the focus groups the issue of unreachable academic levels was brought up repeatedly and was reported as being one of the main reasons why students with learning disabilities are reluctant to pursue FE.

Extract 74 – Perceptions about FE academic difficulty

Oliver IG4	If I was not good at primary and secondary school I would definitely be kicked out of college as there the lessons are much harder and you have to write long assignments.
Ned FG2	I don't know how to read and write so I never thought I could go to school after form five.

The specialised course for students with intellectual disabilities at MCAST has an option for the key skills to be embedded in other vocational or life skills subjects. This option is generally for students who are illiterate and has been received well by students.

Despite having a flexible curriculum, some students with disabilities will nevertheless find it very difficult to follow an academic curriculum. Much debate has been going on as to whether there should be a provision of a life skills curriculum instead of an academic one (Bouck, 2010; Alwell and Cobb, 2009). In the past most students with disabilities, especially those who were in special schools, were not really taught any academic skills but rather were given hands-on projects such as crafts and art. The reasons for this, speculatively, may have been either that teaching staff were not trained or were unwilling to be flexible in their teaching style. As a backlash from this, students were then moved to mainstream schooling with the sole focus on academic skills taught for the most part in the traditional way. There may be a happy medium adopting a merged model of teaching with both academic and life skills through an embedding system.

8.3.3 Interest of educators

A reported reason for participants preferring a school environment with mostly disabled students was that they felt that teaching staff were more inclined to support them with their needs and less likely to resent them. Martha stated very passionately that she believes that teachers have to 'be interested in us. That makes all the difference'. Molly and Judy both agreed that they always felt that their teachers and schools generally treated them as a burden imposed on them.

Interview Group Four Extract 75 – Inadequate and separate classrooms in mainstream secondary Schools	
Molly	I spent many days in a room with another girl doing nothing. Some days, however, they did read us stories but it was in English so I could not really understand.

Judy also had similar experiences of being cast aside during lessons.

Focus Group One Extract 76 – Mainstream and separate environments	
Judy	My mum complained to the school because I spent the days outside of class but the headmistress said that they were not equipped to deal with me. I dropped out of school in form three and then I went to Guardian Angel Special School. At least there I made friends and I stayed in class.

Even in FE students claimed that some lecturers seemed very disinterested in them and replicated the system found in secondary schools where they expected the LSA to 'deal' with the students.

Interview Group One
Extract 77 – FE and LSA support

Crista	We are alone a lot but we have an LSA called Ms. M and she helps us when she is there.

8.3.4 Lack of support personnel

Support from counsellors and other staff was seen as lacking in schools and this may be due to the support staff feeling inadequately trained for the needs of students with disabilities. This may be based on misconceptions of communication difficulties or inability to express insights on feelings.

The literature review, however, shows that professionals such as counsellors, psychologists and occupational therapists are very important in helping and mentoring students with disabilities in FE (Hick, 2005; Pereira, 2012). The reluctance from professionals to provide the service in Maltese schools is evident through one of the focus groups:

Focus group Two
Extract 78 – Support staff reluctance

Nadia	They [referring to school counsellors and medical staff] don't want to see us because they think we can't talk properly and we take too long. I cannot help my stammer and then time up.

8.4 Accessible Options

The literature review includes an overview of the international legislation pertaining to Western countries in relation to inclusion and people with disabilities amongst other minorities. These have been transposed from rights-based principles inherent in UN, UNESCO and OECD reports, treaties and declarations. Such legislation has enforced the right of students with disabilities to be included in mainstream schools. O'Brien *et al.,* (1999, p. 21) assert that it is the 'essence of inclusion that students can sit beside their peers without disabilities in the same class, undertaking the same activities, adapted where needed, to meet their teaching and learning needs'.

8.4.1 Choice

Although this statement goes a long way in interpreting inclusive practice in school, I would extend its meaning to include recognition of the individual's choice. My research seems to indicate that in the Maltese educational system the choice of educational institution falls well away from the actual student. Inclusion must essentially lead to a more empowered state for the individual and this is not necessarily achieved through 'forced' inclusion but through the opportunity for students with disabilities to be able to choose amongst various different types of good quality educational options, especially at post-secondary level. As described in the literature review, such options could include the three models by Hart *et al.* (2006) which offer varying degrees of student integration with non-disabled peers according to student wishes and needs.

Having choice is meant to play a central part in adolescent development but my study shows that autonomy is rarely experienced by the participants. The entrenched paternalistic attitude towards people with intellectual disabilities in Malta is possibly being transposed into socialisation agencies such as schools and colleges who replicate this disempowering model by not including students with intellectual disabilities in discussions and choices related to their education. This detachment was reported in both secondary schools and FE as well as mainstream and separate provisions.

Participants who attended special schools said that their experience seems to be pretty similar when it comes to students being involved in decisions about where they want to be educated. One of the students in the study mentioned how it was made very difficult for him to leave his special school because the headmaster did not want to 'lose' students for fear of then having his staff transferred elsewhere due to the resulting discrepancy in the student-staff ratio enforceable in government schools.

Focus Group Two
Extract 79 – Inflexible transition opportunities from special schools to Mainstream

Ned	I was in a special school for 15 years. I should not have stayed there for that long but they kept me there to keep the numbers up. I was scared of the reading mostly in English. I thought I would not be good enough. I don't know how to read English at all.

8.4.2 Mainstream versus specialised education

In the literature review many studies were cited stating the comparative difference between mainstream versus separate education and also between life skills and academic curricula. The ANED reports (2011) were used substantially in the literature since they present the situation of inclusive special education in all European countries. The reports show that many countries are still relying heavily on special schools with some injecting some recent and substantial investment in them. The global movement to mainstream education for all students spearheaded in a way by the UN convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) has advocated closing down special schools. However, there is still an argument for the potential benefits of specialised educational units. My study shows that some students with intellectual disabilities have a significant preference for a separate environment if this holds good educational standards.

Interview Group One
Extract 80 – Student choices on mainstream or separate education

Ina	I would definitely prefer being with other students with intellectual disability just like me because we understand each other and would never pick on one another because of the disability we have. It is only when I was in places with other people like me that I ever made any friends. At the other schools I was always lonely and picked on.

Osborne (2003) states that if the actual point of inclusion is based on equality and freedom to choose one's life course then it follows that there should be various options both for types of schools and for different types of curricula which students can choose from without judgement.

There are some groups of people with disabilities who have striven for separate social existence, such as the deaf minority. Barton and Armstrong (2001) report how this group identifies itself as a linguistic minority and supports separate provisions for education and other facilities. It is therefore possible for students with other disabilities to wish for separate but effective educational provision.

Although many of the participants could not aptly describe their disability and support needs, they all knew they needed an LSA. This may be because of their experience of having that kind of support. Three interview participants mentioned that if they had to choose a learning environment, they would choose a mixed-ability one but where students with disabilities are in the majority or in equal numbers. As one of the respondents put it ‘for a change I would not be the different one but I would be just like the rest’ (Kieran).

Being taught in a separate environment for some of the respondents, however, meant that they would not be given proper lessons. Those in special schools said that it was common practice for lessons to be based on crafts while those in mainstream mention that they were segregated from their class mates and sat for individual sessions.

Focus Group Two
Extract 81 – Perceptions of being a burden to teachers in mainstream

Caleb	It’s true that I never asked the teachers if I didn’t understand something, but I never had a mark higher than 40 and I still passed from one year to the next without anyone ever telling me anything or trying to help me. Everyone wanted to get rid of me I guess.

Ina is the only one of the participants who experienced both mainstream and special education in the secondary years and even in FE. She states that moving to a specialised course within a mainstream FE campus helped her get acclimatised to the environment as well as make friends with other students with intellectual disabilities.

Extract 82 – Benefits of moving from FE separate courses to mainstream

Ina IG1	I told my mentor that I didn't want to go into level one [mainstream FE] because I would be with the other [non-disabled] students and I was scared because they would make fun of me. They would ridicule me. Then I spoke to mum… if I see that other students from Pathway [specialised course] apply for level one and they put us in a class together I would go. If I were alone I would not have applied.
Sina FG2	When I finish Pathway I want to go for another course with my friends.

Like Ina, six other participants who are attending FE strongly believe that moving from their mainstream secondary school to a specialised college course was a good option for them rather than going immediately into a mainstream course. The main reason cited was it allowed them to gradually transition from an environment with individual or shared support to a much larger college campus.

Interview Group Two
Extract 83 – Perceptions of mainstream FE

Kieran	The level one courses are harder and they don't have an LSA in class with them all the time.

The specialised programme of study was seen by the participants as a stepping stone to other courses, both academically and socio-emotionally. The social aspect of making friends was mentioned as a benefit of FE by all the interview participants and both focus groups, as well as the safety of an environment that was more sheltered than mainstream courses.

Focus Group Two
Extract 84 – Benefits of separate FE courses

Ned	At first I stayed with the teachers a lot because that's what I was used to then you spoke to me about it and I made an effort to speak to students. Now I am happy that I made friends with people my own age. I think if I went straight to the foundation course I would not have found enough people to help me in this big step from 15 years in a special school (Ned).

The account indicated that students who attended the specialised course in the FE mainstream campus felt a sense of belonging, possibly due to the experience of being in a smaller nucleus within a very large campus. There was reference to having 'safety in numbers'.

Extract 85 – Benefits of specialised FE courses for students with intellectual Disabilities

Mina IG2	It was the first time I felt I belonged instead of always being pushed away.
Caleb FG2	Pathway does not find jobs but helps us find them. The teachers do not speak for the person but helps us speak for ourselves.
Ina IG4	This course for example helps you and understands you. Communication is very good. So if I didn't understand they explained to me even four times.

Asked why so many students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream FE courses drop out, the response in the focus groups was of a decrease in support from academic and support staff. Being isolated from peers and instances of verbal bullying in the FE general campus areas were also mentioned by four interview participants and in FG2. The participants reiterated that they never experienced physical bullying but were often the butt of jokes or taunting and friendships were limited to other students with disabilities.

Interview Group One
Extract 86 – Perceptions of FE mainstream courses

Tristan	I know the students at level one [FE mainstream] and they are very nasty to us. There is a lot of teasing and no one does anything about it. The teachers don't have time and breaks are unsupervised.

8.5 The ideal campus

Successful Further Education Experience

Support and Safety

Better Transition Planning

More Educational Options

Pedagogy and Learning Material

Table 16 Diagram of the main areas identified for successful FE

Asked what elements are important for successful learning, the participants from Flimkien Naslu had the clearest and most comprehensive answers. This may be an indication of the lack of information and ability to express needs of the other participants.

8.5.1 Adequate support and safety measures

When asked about how they think the educational system should change, all the participants gave many ideas. These revolved around schools being safer and for everyone to be friends; this reflects the experiences of bullying and isolation mentioned in Chapter Six. Many respondents felt that the way to solve this ‘problem’ would be to have more students with disabilities than other non-disabled students. This ties in with the affirmation theory mentioned in Chapters Two and Seven which is the basis of the disability pride movements and strives to do away with oppressive notions of disability being a burden and replacing it with affirmative notions of disability as an important and enriching part of the diversity of human identities. This perspective, therefore, places value on choice and empowerment, including choices of where and with whom one wants to be educated.

8.5.2 Better transition planning

It was very clear that participants were not generally included in talks about their transition plan when these happened. The focus group participants in particular were very vociferous about their need to be wholly included in talks and decisions that affect them directly, including in transition talks between and within schools and colleges.

8.5.3 More educational options

One of the studies mentioned in the literature review stated that for inclusion to be effective there needs to be viable entry and exit points in the various options of education (Osborne, 2003). The fact that students in secondary and special schools are not given information about other options for FE may be a reflection of a lingering institutionalised culture that oppresses the students through the omission of important information about their life choices. Having the option to attend a mainstream college may increase their prospects for the acquisition of skills and knowledge for employment.

Some of the participants believe that having the option of both a specialised and mainstream course helps because you can transition from one to the other as you grow older and gain more self-confidence. Making friends is easier in courses with others with disabilities so the progression to mainstream courses together reduces some of the challenges of starting a new course.

Extract 87 – Differing opinions on mainstream versus separate education

Conrad IG1	Where I am now [mainstream] it is better than Pathway [specialised] because we are not in the same five rooms and I meet more different people. We still stay together [ex-Pathway students] and we go to the Unit [Pathway] sometimes if we have a problem or just to see the teachers.
Ina IG4	I wish Pathway was longer you know maybe three or four years. I loved it because I could really learn….even how to deal with bullies and how to be independent. It's good that it is there as it makes it easier after to go to level one [mainstream].
Ned FG2	I always wished to be a part of a group…you know….people like me who need extra help. I was always laughed at, at school so I

	stopped talking and just waited until it finished and I never found the group I wanted until I was told about Pathway.
Nadia IG2	Sometimes someone picks on me but it's not the same as before. Here we all have something in common so we stick together.

8.5.4 Empowering pedagogy and learning material

Another change that the participants mentioned was that they would have different types of lessons and not 'Maths, Physics and English as they are very difficult for me' (Larry). Devlin and Pothier (2006, p. 241) call these 'peripheral ways of learning' and suggest that the language of policy needs to change to reflect non-ableist and inclusive values. The focus groups both came up with valid ideas for a more adequate curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities. The ideas that emerged relate to models of learning including life skills, self-advocacy and disability awareness. Although the participants in FG1 understandably mentioned specifically self-advocacy and disability awareness, the younger group also said that the life skills lessons they had in the specialised programme of study should be included also in mainstream courses.

A specific suggestion that was raised was for role play to be included so they know what words to use in certain situations, such as verbal bullying or even to ask for support. This was proposed as one of the factors that could help students deal with conflict and challenges in FE. One of the research participants believes that the high rate of school drop-out and failure to gain and maintain employment is due to a lack of self-advocacy and ability of people with intellectual disabilities to speak up.

Focus Group One
Extract 88 – About self-advocacy

Oliver	Also because we don't know how to explain our difficulties. The problem is that many people with disabilities need to explain and educate people. We are closed within ourselves and are ashamed to speak up or don't know how.
Martha	Other people also have to do something to help us… to talk to us and understand. We have to open up and show who we truly are and what we deserve. Teachers have to be truly interested in us...in our disabilities.

One of the changes that participants suggested to improve the school experience for them and which resonated with me was that they wished there were more role models within school academic staff. Chapter Seven includes reports from participants saying that they were always discouraged from spending time with other students with disabilities, both by their families and by the schools. This reinforces beliefs of people with disabilities being somewhat of lesser value. This goes back to the cultural aspects that shape attitudes in Malta which have an effect also on people with disabilities and their families. The attitude that interacting with people with disabilities somehow minimises or taints ones social credentials is perhaps a very strong component of this discriminatory attitude.

Students with physical or sensory impairments have many difficulties to contend with; however, there is much less chance of their cognitive ability being questioned whereas students with intellectual disability have the added challenge of their ability to make decisions being used as a justification for choices being made for them. No one questions why the deaf community for the most part prefers separate social environments because it is inherently their right to choose. In the same way, students with other disabilities and within other minorities should equally have a right to be taught in the environment that they themselves deem to be the best for them.

Access to FE experiences for young people with intellectual disabilities is an important threshold in the process of full inclusion. This level of education nowadays is deemed a necessary experience for many young people because it sustains knowledge and skill development, and also the relationships that promote financial and social success as well as civic participation (Blumberg *et al.,* 2008). It is, however, still the case that many people underestimate what students with learning disabilities can achieve and where and how they can be supported to learn and be included successfully. These low expectations have affected results and have, as described in this chapter, in many cases been internalised by people with disabilities themselves.

8.5.6 The pace of change

I also think that there is another misconception about the speed with which changes need to take place. This is affirmed by Uditsky and Hughson (2012) as they maintain that progress is sometimes stalled because of a belief that change has to happen incrementally. In Malta the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) had tried to stall inclusion from moving from primary schools onto secondary schools using arguments that we did not yet have a comprehensive strategic system in place for us to move to the next level (Bartolo, 2009). This is happening once more, as we move now to inclusive education provisions for students with intellectual disabilities at FE level. Although policy has in some ways informed and nudged schools into improving ways in which students with disabilities can find their position in the school society, the emphasis and investment is still mainly on designing apparatus to get to the same unachievable academic goals. An alternative could be to shift focus onto other more achievable goals for future employment opportunities, such as developing friendships and social networks which could potentially translate to job opportunities. Research in fact shows that more people find jobs through personal connections than any other way (Malta ETC Report, 2014). This is especially true in small communities such as Malta. If the fundamental goal of further and higher education is to access employment opportunities, then it is worth giving prominence to these social alliances.

The exercise done with the participants to imagine the ideal campus resulted in some interesting ideas including better support and transition mechanisms, having different study options available as well as a pedagogy and educators that endorsed empowering curricula.

8.6 Conclusion

The argument of what constitutes an adequate educational system ties in with what society construes as a successful life. Western society increasingly puts greater emphasis on intelligence and material possessions as symbols of success and power. Hence the ability to learn becomes an indispensable tool for success. The neo-liberal agenda also raises the bar on academic success which in turn provides barriers to students with intellectual disabilities who attempt to reach these standards.

The instrumentalist view of education, which I have argued is the dominant view in Malta, sees the primary aim of education as giving students the knowledge and skills required to become an independent and substantive member of society. This roughly translates to being able to get a stable job, pay taxes and make purchases to keep the economy going. Taking this view, it follows that those students who do not get a stable job and instead go into the benefit system would not only have 'failed' in becoming an effective citizen but also would have wasted the money the government invested in their education, leading to the additional cost of benefits from social welfare.

One could argue that there are a set of self-perpetuating beliefs here: young people with disabilities are encouraged into a system which fails them yet the attitudinal consequence is that they, themselves, are labelled as ‘failures’ according to the understanding of education and educational outcomes predominantly held in Maltese society.

The study participants had different scholastic backgrounds. However, some commonalities were apparent that show that there are gaps and barriers in the current system in Malta that significantly impede students with intellectual disabilities from being successful in their educational career. The concept of success in schools is still very much determined through the achievement of standard grades in academic subjects. This has meant that students with intellectual disabilities are placed in a position next to their non-disabled peers and subjected to the same achievement markers. This discrepancy is felt more in secondary school as the gap between achievements of students widens. Some participants described that the way schools dealt with this was either having a separate environment for teaching an adaptation of the curriculum or to turn their back on them and their learning needs.

Researchers such as Barnes *et al.* (2002), Hart and Grigal (2010) and Blumberg *et al.* (2008) did extensive research on the subject of post-secondary inclusion for students with learning disabilities and although there is general agreement that inclusion has to be an accessible and viable option, there is also suggestion that other more specialised environments need to be available to widen the choices for this student cohort. In Malta the options for FE, as described in Chapter Four, are limited and more work has to be done for the available options to improve. There also need to be initiative to make other Maltese FE and even higher education institutions more accessible, perhaps by providing courses on self-advocacy and support such as mentoring.

This study has shown that perhaps the barriers to accessing FE for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta include an institutional rigidity based on entrenched ableism. Despite efforts by vocational FE colleges to include students with disabilities within the campuses, the actual investment in inclusion in its truest sense remains in question. The participants in this study reported on their secondary school experience in mainstream environments as being closer to a basic integration measure suggesting a barely inclusive educational system.

This trend is possibly being replicated in FE in Malta and this may be a definite factor affecting the lack of enrolment of students with disabilities as the experience of inclusive education in mainstream environments remains wanting.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

In this study I have investigated the factors affecting the low number of students with intellectual disabilities accessing FE in Malta. The five research questions posed related to how people with intellectual disabilities themselves view their experience of school and what benefits and barriers they attribute to FE. Although the qualitative nature of this study cannot make way for generalisations, it gives some significant insight into the situation. My contribution to knowledge was developed through the emerging themes and points towards a wider discussion on the identity of people with intellectual disability in Malta. My findings and analysis reveal that the way Maltese society views people with intellectual disability is still entrenched in a traditional charity model stemming from Catholic influences. These attitudes seem to also feed off the medical model that sees people with disabilities as being ‘unwell’ and therefore needing treatment. The collective religious conscience moves Maltese society to pity and donate but coupled with this attitude is the rejection of disability within socialisation structures seen to be reserved for the non-disabled. These include education and employment.

Central to much of the narrative was the lack of freedom of choice in the lives of the participants and this, by and large, means that whether or not people with intellectual disabilities access FE is largely dependent on what parents or carers decide. This study was an exploration of a gap in research on inclusion in Malta, specifically students with intellectual disabilities and post-secondary education. The results show that the reasons for such low participation of this student cohort are multiple and varied; however, it seems that disability identity plays a significant part in shedding light on this issue. People with intellectual disabilities seem to have no access to most choices in their lives and, therefore, whether or not to pursue FE is not a choice that was dependent on them. A resonating barrier, however, was definitely the negative school experiences faced during secondary school years in mainstream education. This was reported as being the main factor affecting the decision taken by parents and students as to continuing education.

9.2 What changes? Charting the Progress of the RQs

The research questions were adapted after the first two focus groups as it was evident from the feedback that the questions were too abstract to be understood by the participants. The aim was for the research questions to be answered by people with intellectual disabilities to establish their subjective experiences in relation to inclusive FE in Malta. During the first focus groups, feedback was given to amend the original set of questions to make them more easily answered and understood by participants. The reason for rearranging the research questions, therefore, was that I wanted all of the questions to be more accessible to the research participants. Another reason was that in the first set of questions there was a quantitative element that did not conform to the emancipatory and inclusive research paradigm that I wanted to adhere to.

One important change in my own personal beliefs about educational systems came from my experience with the participants and has led to a shift in what was essentially a driving force behind projects I was involved in during my career. The question of a 'forced' type of inclusion has emerged from the results as being what is currently in practice in Malta. The paternalistic local culture ascribes passive roles to people with intellectual disabilities, who are denied opportunities to make informed decisions on matters that concern them, including their education. The location and content of their FE is something that is decided upon by others, both at a micro level and also on a national level through the limited or lack of provision of different suitable options.

I have now come to realise that it is this lack of choice and lack of opportunity to exert choices that makes for the current situation of invisibility of students with intellectual disabilities in FE. Students with intellectual disabilities need to be given the choice to be educated in whichever environment suits their needs be it mainstream, separate or shared enrolment, with suitable and clear transition pathways in between if required. My belief about inclusion has changed to encompass as a foundation the right to choose whether or not to be included in mainstream environments.

9.3 Summary of Findings and Research Questions

The issue of exclusion of students with intellectual disabilities in FE is of central importance for our understanding of ESL in Europe since this cohort remains the most notably absent. Despite this, little attention has been paid to investigating the factors that affect this discrepancy, with most studies focusing on disability more generally. In my research I set out to offer some insight on the matter as well as identify implications for research and practice.

The issue of FE exclusion for students with intellectual disabilities in Malta was investigated to determine the factors affecting the situation. In an attempt to uphold inclusive research principles, the empirical research used direct testimonials with individuals and groups of people with intellectual disabilities.

Although the participants had different life situations, some common concerns were reported in three main areas, namely past school experiences, internalised attitudes and beliefs as well as inadequate educational systems. These emerging factors indicate that Malta has yet to embrace a philosophy of inclusion that gives individuals with intellectual disability genuine choice over the directions their lives will take. The entrenched paternalistic attitude dominating Maltese culture is amplified when it comes to people with intellectual disabilities, as society holds on to notions of charity based on traditional, religious beliefs. These relegate people with intellectual disabilities into passive roles that are often internalised into a resigned disability identity that further reinforces these same social beliefs.

9.4 A Question of Identity

The findings of this project support the idea that socio-cultural traditional attitudes towards intellectual disability lead to the formation of disability identities in the individual that are not congruent with the interpersonal aptitude required for successful integration into FE and employment. The issue of disability identity is of central importance to our understanding of FE and inclusive education in Malta.

This study confirms earlier work by Darling (2010) which found that people with intellectual disabilities have a stronger link to the resignation and apathy model present in smaller communities and this is mainly due to lack of access to disability-affirmative models. Moreover, my study suggests that the concept of inclusion in Maltese educational systems (both compulsory and FE) seems often to be rooted in tokenism, and based on integration numbers and not effectiveness of belonging. The lack of adequate transition to and support systems within FE in Malta also emerges as a main factor in the low number of students with intellectual disabilities in FE in Malta. It can be concluded that Malta has yet to establish itself as an active and determined participant in the struggle for equality and inclusion in Europe.

9.5 Limitations to the Study

The first limitation concerns the fact that all the participants were either in FE, transitioning to FE or attending a self-advocacy group. The cohort is therefore made up of students with mild intellectual disabilities who have relatively good expressive skills. Thus, the findings of the current study may be viewed as not transferable to individuals with intellectual disabilities with more severe cognitive impairment. This limitation, however, somewhat made possible the extent of reporting that emerged and helped shed some light on the situation of FE exclusion for students with intellectual disability. The same problems with inclusion may be more pronounced for students with even higher support needs.

The second limitation of my study concerns the FE institution where the research was conducted. Using only one particular college limited the scope of the study but was done mainly due to lack of other viable options. This meant that the results do not show the experience of access into other FE institutions which I acknowledge would have provided additional depth and richness of data.

Limitations pertaining to my personal involvement in the process and my relationship with the student participants may have led to some of the narrative being affected in a bid to state what they thought I wanted to hear. Many of the participants were students that I taught at some point during my career within the college so although this may have affected the honesty of their responses in some cases, this issue is moderated by the fact that they may have been more open because I already had a trust relationship with them.

Despite the limitations, a rich and wide array of information was obtained. The use of an interpretative approach enabled an understanding of what the participants believed to be the factors affecting inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities from FE in Malta. The use of direct testimonials in itself served to challenge one of the emerging concerns from the narrative: the non-involvement of people with intellectual disabilities in conversations about their lives and choices. This study, if nothing else, showed that given opportunity many people with intellectual disabilities have the ability to voice their thoughts and opinions. I should add the caveat, though, that despite the substantial amount and quality of the narrative, caution should be exercised in generalising these findings to the broader field of exclusion and inclusion in FE.

9.6 Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations are separated in sections to mirror the three main emerging themes.

A suggested recommendation would be to follow a cohort of students with intellectual disability over a period of time to address the stability of the findings outlined in my study due to its interpretative nature.

Further work needs to address the accessibility of both further and higher education for students with different disabilities in Malta. Studies are still very scarce on the educational career paths of students with different educational needs and these may be done within different local contexts and comparatively with other countries. Evaluation of current inclusion models would be a good start to ascertain whether inclusive educational practices are successful and will aid revision of policy and procedure in establishing types of options both for physical location and content of learning.

Research on the provision of a different curriculum that places value on affirmative disability identities will open up the discussion of what still seems to be seen as a taboo subject by schools, by parents and by Maltese society in general. A curriculum based on a more applied model of learning, such as vocational education and how this affects employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, is needed in Malta and elsewhere in Europe as industry increases demand for skilled labourers at recruitment.

Research on the specific role of LSAs in Malta and how transition from secondary to FE are negotiated, would be of value to determine the role of dependency and reinforcement of dependency. It would also be interesting to study the role of academic and support staff, such as counsellors and career advisors, in aiding students with intellectual disabilities in FE. This would shed some light on pervading attitudes on disability and possible widening job roles to include added support mechanisms.

It would be interesting to conduct research on the experiences of bullying and isolation of students with disabilities in Maltese secondary schools, including a consideration of variables such as gender, age, visibility of disability and whether the school is church-run, state or independent.

Disability and mental health is also a subject that warrants further research due mainly to the double stigma and fragmentation of service provision attached to this co-morbidity in Malta.

9.7 Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Given the range of views around the issue of students with intellectual disabilities and FE exclusion in Malta, the evidence from this research suggests some recommendations for practice. It is understood that these recommendations are not founded in knowledge about the realities of implementation of policy; rather, they are presented here in an attempt to highlight possibilities for consideration by relevant authorities.

PAST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

ANTI-BULLYING STRATEGY

It is recommended that the existing Maltese anti-bullying strategy is revised to place additional focus on the bullying of students with different disabilities, highlighting the awareness of visible and non-visible disabilities. Joining the European Anti-bullying Network (EAN) would also be necessary. The EAN has been established to combat the bullying phenomenon due to the need of an organised and collective action-plan to deal with this problem on a European level. Despite the significant amount of initiatives taken, mostly on a national level, there has not been a united and common European solution. Malta becoming involved in this network would mean more access to resource sharing, funding and collaboration with key actors in anti-bullying from across Europe.

INCLUSION NOT INTEGRATION

My research implies that policy should tend to favour a less general/ generic outlook of inclusion. The challenges faced by students with intellectual disabilities may be different from those faced by students with physical impairments. Using non-specific references to the adoption of inclusive measures is seen to be leading to provisions that are mostly based on physical access.

Policies on access and successful participation in FE could be re-written and widened to accommodate a model of success that gives accreditation to emotional IQ, personal skills and qualities of self-determination, and inherent positive qualities such as independence and a good work ethic. This will allow for an increase in the success stories for many individuals with intellectual disabilities.

From the results of this dissertation I would suggest that an ideal scenario that caters for the needs of all individual students with intellectual disabilities in Malta would be to provide a variety of options when it comes to learning environments, especially at FE level.

INTERNALISED ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

MORE FEHE OPTIONS

It is being recommended that other local FEHE institutions offer accessible programmes of study to students with intellectual disabilities. These could be provided as optional credits and taught alongside non-disabled peers with the experiential benefit of learning about disability from people with disabilities themselves. An example of course focus could be self-advocacy and self-determination.

CURRICULUM

The participants from the self-advocacy group stressed the importance of life skills training and lessons that included self-advocacy and self-determination training as well as a pedagogy that was in itself empowering. The recommendation is for curricula to be more flexible to allow the addition of soft skills and life skills which are seen to be of benefit to all students.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

FE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

It is also suggested that entry procedures are revised so a recent psychological report is no longer an entry requirement, thus removing a financial barrier for student applicants.

BASELINE SUPPORT

A recommendation based on the feedback obtained from the study participants is for FE institutions to offer a baseline support structure that would benefit all students and reduce the impact of providing individual support for students with intellectual disabilities. A primary example of baseline support structures is the provision of accessible course material including material provided in the Maltese language rather than in English.

EVALUATION

An important recommendation is for current inclusive education practices to be evaluated correctly and regularly to establish effectiveness and areas that require improvements.

TRANSITION

A transition section is to be added to IEP templates used by schools and emphasis has to be placed on students being completely involved in the transition process, including having options explained to them in a manner that they can understand.

The first meeting on post-secondary pathways has to start in form four (UK year 10) to establish a plan for the final year of secondary school. The plan is to include a programme for the final term which incorporates orientation days within the different options of study available. Psychological assessments are a requirement for entry into FE in Malta and this has been identified as a financial burden on students with disabilities and their families. The early start of the transition process may help in obtaining free psychological assessments available through government departments. The extensive waiting time for these assessments means that an early application is required to have the reports in hand by the time students apply for FE enrolment.

Transition programmes are also needed for students moving within FE institutions such as MCAST. The transition support is required for students moving between levels in mainstream courses and between specialised courses such as the Pathway Certificate in Vocational Skills and mainstream courses.

9.8 Concluding Remarks

I believe that my study has provided a significant contribution to knowledge particularly through its exposure of an aspect of Maltese society which directly and indirectly sanctions the exclusion of people with intellectual disability. The socio-cultural norms are based on a traditional and religious model of disability which places those with intellectual disability in a static position of 'holy innocents' and therefore not eligible to participate fully in civil society. It is hoped that the results of my study help to raise awareness of both the exclusionary structures within the Maltese educational system but also on the less obvious cultural forces that come into play in our day to day life particularly when it comes to inaccessible or absent social discourse surrounding disability. An open, disability-affirmative dialogue is necessary to establish an empowered position for people with intellectual disability in Malta and this can be done in practical ways for example by amending curricular frameworks within educational institutions.

One hopes that the findings of this study help people with intellectual disabilities gain unconditional freedom from the oppression of socio-cultural constraints on their development which exist in Malta more than in other EU countries. The contrast between these constraints is particularly marked between Malta and those countries that have been at the vanguard of the inclusion movement, such as the Scandinavian countries and the UK.

It is also hoped that researchers in this field are encouraged to use interpretative and inclusive disability research principles to gain understanding of disability. The most compelling and direct social evidence of the barriers created by ableism arises from individual and collective accounts of people with intellectual disabilities themselves. This study included the personal testimonies of Maltese individuals with intellectual disabilities who have articulated the challenges in attempting to negotiate a further step in lifelong education.

The themes that emerged point towards an ascribed disability identity that is forged through negative school experiences framed within a cultural attitude of 'charity'. The strong religious influences in Maltese society have both shaped perceptions about people with intellectual disabilities as needing to be taken care of and assisted in entrenching the notion in Maltese culture that they are 'unfit' to participate in important social fora such as FE and employment. A strong paternalistic culture also makes for the lack of choices in areas such as friendship and leisure reported by the participants.

This study portrays the social reality experienced by people with intellectual disabilities in Malta as they negotiate FE. The psychological and socio-cultural barriers that limit inclusion into FE are a reflection of disabling barriers throughout Maltese society which in turn lead to institutional limitations.

REFERENCE LIST

AAIDD (2010) *Intellectual Disability: Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports.* *11th edn.* (Available at: http://aaidd.org/publications/bookstore-home/product-listing/2014/06/13/intellectual-disability-definition-classification-and-systems-of-supports-(11th-edition)-e-pub#.VgO49suqqko (Downloaded: 21 April 2012).

ABA – Anti-bullying Alliance (2011) *Bullying and Disability*. Available at: http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/media/2242/bullying-and-disability.pdf (Accessed: 23 September 2014).

Adams, K. S. and Proctor, B. E. (2010) 'Adaptation to College for Students with and without Disabilities: Group Differences and Predictors', *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 22 (3), pp. 166-184.

Aldgate, J. and McIntosh, M. (2006) *Looking after the Family: A study of children looked after in kinship care in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Social Work Inspection Agency.

Alwell, M., and Cobb, B. (2009) 'Functional Life Skills Curricular Interventions for Youth with Disabilities: A Systematic Review', *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 32, pp. 82-93.

ANED (2010) Country Reports on Inclusion, Available at: http://www.disability-europe.net/content/aned/media/Report%20on%20equality%20of%20educational%20and%20training%20opportunities%20for%20young%20disabled%20people%20-%20Austria.pdf (Accessed: 20 September 2014)

Ansberry, C., (2010). 'Erasing a Hurtful Label from the Books'. Available at: http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704865104575588273153838564 (Accessed: 4 December 2012).

Armstrong, F. (eds.) (1999) *Disability, Human Rights and Education*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Armstrong, F., Armstrong, D., and Barton, L. (2000) *Inclusive Education: Policy, Contexts and Comparative Perspectives.* London: Fulton Publishers.

NDA – National Disability Authority (2002), *Ask me guidelines*. Available at : http://nda.ie/nda-files/-Ask-Me-Guidelines-for-Effective-Consultation-with-People-with-Disabilities1.pdf (Downloaded: 30 May 2014).

Aspis, S (2001) In Barton, L. (2001) *Disability, Politics and the Struggle for Change,* London: David Fulton.

Attard, M. and Callus, AM. (2003) 'Mainstreaming equality and diversity in different national context: implications for policy and practice', ESRC Seminar, *Equal Opportunities in Malta: a southern European perspective*, 10 June 2005.

Azzopardi-Lane C. (2012) 'Sexuality and People with Learning Disability in Malta: Realities and Potential', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent.

Azzopardi - Lane, C., Callus, A. M. (2015) 'Constructing Sexual Identities: People with Intellectual Disability Talking about Sexuality', *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 43 (1), pp. 32-37.

Ballard, K. (2004b) 'Children and disability: Special or included?' *Waikato Journal of Education*, 10 (1), pp. 315–26.

Ballard, K. (2013) 'Thinking in another way: ideas for sustainable inclusion', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17 (8), pp. 762-775.

Barbour, R.S., and Schostak, G. (2005) In Somekh, B. and Lewin, C., (Eds.), *Research methods in the social sciences,* London: Sage Publications.

Barnard- Brak, L., Sulak, T., Tate, A., and Lechtenberger, D. (2010), 'Measuring College students' Attitudes toward Requesting Accommodations: A National Multi Institutional Study. *Assessment for Effective Intervention,* 35, pp. 141-147.

Barnard-Brak, L. (2010) 'Accommodation strategies of college students with disabilities', *The Qualitative Report*, 15 (2), pp. 411-429.

Barnes, C., (2002) 'Emancipatory disability research: project or process?, *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 2 (1), pp. 23-39.

Barnes, C., (2012) *Understanding the social model of disability.* Available at: http://www.hso.se/Global/Projekt/Fr%C3%A5n%20forskningsobjekt/Forskning/Anteckningar%20Colin%20Barnes%20091118.pdf (Downloaded: 26 July 2013)

Barnes, C., Oliver, M., and Barton, L. (2002) *Disability Studies Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Barnes, C., and Mercer, G. (1997) *Breaking the Mould? An introduction to doing research*. Leeds: The Disability Press.

Barnes, C. (2003) 'What a difference a decade makes: reflections on doing 'emancipatory' disability research', *Disability & Society*, *18 (1)*, pp. 97-122.

Bartolo, P.A. (2001) 'How disciplinary and institutional orientation influences professionals' decision-making about early childhood disability', *Educational and Child Psychology*, 10 (9), pp. 12-23.

Bartolo, E. (2009) *The history of education in Malta* (Ministerial speech) Audio recording. Available at: http://www.tvm.com.mt/mt/programmes/dissett/ondemand/ (Accessed on: 17 March 2013).

Bartolo, P.A. (2010) 'The *process* of teacher education for inclusion: the Maltese experience', *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 10 (1), pp. 139-148.

Bartolo, P.A. (2011), 'Why school psychology for diversity?' *School Psychology International*, 31 (6), pp. 567-580.

Bartolo, P.A., and Borg, G. (2009), 'The development of inclusive education in Malta', *Inclusive Education*, 9 (2), pp. 14-19.

Bartolo E. (2014) Public Speech of the Maltese Education Minister on Further and Higher Statistics Report – Early School Leavers and Europe 2020 of the National Commission for Higher Education. Available at: http://www.tvm.com.mt/mt/programmes/dissett/ondemand/ (Accessed: 23 December 2012).

Barton, L. and Armstrong, F. (2001) *Disability, education and inclusion: Cross cultural issues and dilemmas*. In Handbook of disability studies, Edited by: Albrecht, G.L. pp. 693 – 710. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders*. New York: Free Press

Benz M. R., Lindstrom L. E. and Yovanoff P. (2000) 'Improving graduation and employment outcomes of students with disabilities: predictive factors and student perspectives', *Exceptional Children*, 66, pp. 509–529.

Berg, B.L. (2005), *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. 6th edn., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Bernert D. J. (2007) ‘Sexuality and disability in the lives of women with intellectual disabilities’, *Sexuality and Disability* 29, pp.129–41.

Berry, R.S.Y., (1999) Collecting data by in-depth interviewing, Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Sussex at Brighton. Available at: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001172.htm (Accessed: 5 May 2103)

Bettettini, A. (2005) Religion and the Secular State in Malta. Available at http://www.iclrs.org/content/blurb/files/Malta.pdf, (Accessed: 15 May 2015)

Bezzina, F. (2007) ‘Rights not Charity: Guidelines towards an inclusive society and a positive difference in the lives of Maltese and Gozitan disabled people’, Available at http://knpd.org/pubs/pdf/dritijietmhuxkarita_e.pdf. (Accessed: 4 July 2013)

Bezzina, F., Callus, A. M. and Cardona, G. C. (2009) ‘The Quality of Life of Disabled People: Some Answers from Census 2005, Malta’. Available from: http://www.knpd.org/pubs/pdf/census2005_knpd_2009.zip. (Accessed: 4 July 2013).

Blacher, J. and McInthyre, L. (2006) ‘Syndrome specificity and behavioural disorders in young adults with intellectual disability: cultural differences in family impact’, *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 50 (3), pp. 184–198.

Black, L. A., Roberts, P. and Black, L.A. (2009) ‘People with a Learning Disability as Trainers: Evaluation of a Values Based Pilot Training Programme’, *British Journal of Learning Disabilities,* 37, pp. 129-137.

Blacker, D. J. (2013) *The falling rate of learning and the neoliberal endgame,* Winchester: Zero Books.

Bliss, J., Monk, M., and Ogborn, J. (1983) *Qualitative data analysis for educational research : a guide to uses of systemic networks*, London : Croom Helm.

Blomqvist, K. B., Brown, G., Peerson, A., and Presler, E. P. (1995) ‘Transitioning to Independence: Challenges for young persons with disabilities and their caregivers’, *Orthopaedic Nursing*, pp. 27-35.

Blos, P. (1967) *The second individuation process of adolescence: the Psychoanalytic study of the child*. New York: International Universities Press.

Blumberg, R., Carroll, S., and Petroff, J. G. (2008) 'Career and Community Studies: An Inclusive Liberal Arts Programme for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities', *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 12, pp. 621-637.

Bogdan, R., and Taylor, S. (1975) *Introduction to qualitative research methods: a phenomenological approach to the social sciences*, London: Wiley-Interscience.

Bolt, D. (2004) 'Disability and the Rhetoric of Inclusive Higher Education', *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 28, pp. 353-358.

Booth, H. (1996) *Clients' perceptions of counselling in general practice,* (unpublished work). Available at UoB Main Library Thesis Store (DISS.S21.B96)

Bonnici, P.A. (2005) Providence House Archives. Available at: http://www.bdlbooks.com/religious/496-id-dar-tal-providenza.html (Accessed: 7 August 15).

Bouck, E. C. (2010) 'Reports of life skills training for students with intellectual disabilities in and out of school', *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research,* 54, pp. 1093-103.

Braddock D. (1999) 'Occupational Employment Projections', *Labour Review*, pp. 51-77.

Braithwaite, D.O. (1991) 'Just how much did that wheelchair cost? Management of privacy boundaries by persons with disabilities', *Western Journal of Speech Communication,* 55 (3), pp. 254-274.

Bray. A. (2003*) Work for adults with an intellectual disability*, Available at http://www.donaldbeasley.org.nz/assets/Uploads/publications/NHC-Work.pdf (Accessed: 23 May 2014).

Broer, S.M, Doyle, M.B., and Giangreco, M.F. (2005) 'Perspectives of Students with Intellectual Disabilities About Their Experiences With Paraprofessional Support', *Council for Exceptional Children*, 71 (4), pp. 415-430.

Brolin D. E. and Loyd R. J. (2004) *Career Development and Transition Services: A Functional Life Skills Approach,* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Brown, S.E. and Roberts, F.D. (2007) ‘Mentoring Individuals with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education’, *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 23 (2), pp. 98-111.

Brown, M. and Ryan, J. (2005) ‘Just for them to understand better: The impact of learning difficulties at university’, *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 10 (1), pp. 19-24.

Buggie Hunt T. (2007) Psychosocial and Disability Identity Development among College Students with disabilities, (Available at ProQuest Digital Dissertations: UMI 3282934) (Accessed: 12 September 2015).

Burgess, G. (1984) In the field : an introduction to field research. London : George Allen & Unwin.

Burke, G., and Wolbring, B. (2010) ‘Beyond Education for All: Using ableism studies lens and the BIAS FREE framework’, Development, 53 (4), pp. 535–539.

Callus, A.M. (2012) ‘Learning difficulties and sexual vulnerability: a social approach’, Disability & Society, 27 (2), pp. 296–299.

Callus, A.M., and Bezzina, F. (2004) Self-advocacy: we decide our own lives. St.Venera, Malta: KNPD.

Callus, (2012) Becoming self-advocates: people with intellectual disability seeking a voice. Available at: http://site.ebrary.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=10690878 (Accessed: 16 April 2014).

Cameron, L., and Murphy, J. (2007) ‘Obtaining consent to participate in research: the issues involved in including people with a range of learning and communication disabilities’, British Journal of Learning Disabilities, 35 (2), pp.113-20.

Camilleri, J., and Camilleri, K. (2009) ‘Do I belong? Psychological perspectives and educational considerations of students with disabilities’ school experiences’, Malta Review of Educational Research, 6 (1), pp. 64–79.

Camilleri, J. (1998). ‘Disability: a personal odyssey’. Disability and society, 14 (6), pp. 845– 853.

Camilleri, J., and Callus, A.M. (2000). ‘Out of the cellars: disability, politics and the struggle for change: the Maltese experience’. In L. Barton (ed.), Disability, politics and the struggle for change, pp. 79– 92. London: David Fulton.

Camilleri, J. (2010). ‘Message from Joe Camilleri, Chairman, KNPD, Indaqs unpublished document, pp. 2– 3.

Camilleri, J.M., and Callus, A.M. (2001) ‘Out of the Cellars - Disability, Politics and the Struggle for Change: The Maltese Experience’, London: Fulton Publishers.

Campbell, J. and Oliver, M. (1996) Disability Politics: Understanding our Past, Changing our Future. London: Routledge.

Camilleri, J. (2006) ‘The Genesis of Disability Studies in Malta: From a Colonial Past to an Independent Future?‘, Disability Studies Conference, Lancaster, September 2006. Available at: http://www.knpd.org/pubs/opus/0609_lancaster_camilleri.pdf. (Accessed: 12 December 2014).

Carnevale, A.P., and Desrochers, D.M. (2003) Connecting Education Standards and Employment: Course-taking Patterns of Young Workers. Available at: http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/0EF43EF9-9179-481A-9ADB-8E0D67CA5C01/0/ADPWorkplaceStudy_20050415.pdf (Accessed: 2 December 2014).

Carnevale, A. P., and Fry, R. A. (2000) ‘Crossing the great divide: Can we achieve equity when generation Y goes to college?’ Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Carroll, S. Z., Petroff, J. G. & Blumberg, R. (2009) ‘The Impact of a College Course where Pre-Service Teachers and Peers with Intellectual Disabilities Study Together’, Teacher Education and Special Education, 32, pp. 351-364.

Carroll Chapman, S.L. and Wu, L.T. (2009) ‘Substance abuse among individuals with intellectual disabilities’, *Research on Developmental Disabilities*, 33 (4), pp. 1147-56.

Carter, E.W., and Lunsferd, L.B. (2005) ‘Meaningful Work: Improving Employment Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders’, *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 49 (2), pp. 63-69.

Carter, B.B., and Spencer, V.G. (2006) 'The Fear Factor: Bullying And Students With Disabilities', *International Journal Of Special Education*, 21(1), 11.

Casha, S. (2009) Disability and Barriers to Sexual Access, (Masters degree unpublished work), Oxford Brookes University, UK.

Cassar, R. and Bondin, R. (2012) *The Shipwreck of St Paul*, Malta: Miranda Publishers.

CEDEFOP (2012) Country reports on Vocational Education and Training, Available at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports (Accessed: 12 August 2015).

Cefai, C. (2013) *Promoting Resilience in the Classroom, E-book* Available at: http://site.ebrary.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=10251462 (Accessed: 9 April 2014).

Census Malta (2011) Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_01/Methodology_and_Research/Pages/Census-in-Malta.aspx (Downloaded: 12 December 2011)

Chaplin, E., Gilvarry, C. and Tsakanikos, E. (2011) 'Recreational substance use patterns and co-morbid psychopathology in adults with intellectual disability', *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 32 (6), pp. 2981–2986

Cherney, J.L. (2011) 'The Rhetoric of Ableism', *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 31(3), pp. 29-36.

Cobb, R. B., and Alwell, M. (2007) 'Transition Planning/Coordinating Interventions for Youth with Disabilities: A Systematic Review,' *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 32, pp. 70-81.

Cohen, L., and Manion, L. (2000) *Research methods in education.* 5th edn. London: Routledge.

Colmar, S.R. (2006) 'Intervention for Disadvantaged Children with Language Difficulties', *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 30 (1), pp. 79-90.

Cook, T., and Inglis, P. (2009) 'Making our Own Decisions: Researching the Process of 'Being Informed' with People with Learning Difficulties', *Research Ethics*, 5 (2), pp. 55-64.

Cook, B. G., Gerber, M. M., and Murphy, J. (2007) 'Backlash against the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in higher education: Implications for transition from post-secondary environments to work', *Work,* 14, pp. 31-40.

Cook, T, Swain, J. and French, S. (2001) Voices from segregated schooling: Towards an Inclusive Education System. *Disability and Society*, 16(2), 293-310.

Cooley, C.H. (1964) *On Self and Social Organization*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cooper, S. A., Smiley, E., Morrison, J., Williamson, A. and Allan, L. (2007) 'Mental ill-health in adults with intellectual disabilities: prevalence and associated factors', *British Journal of Psychiatry,* 190, pp. 27-35.

Colmar, S., Maxwell, A. and Miller, L. (2006) 'Assessing Intellectual Disability in Children: Are IQ Measures Sufficient, or Even Necessary?' *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counselling,* 16 (2), pp. 177-188.

Copenhagen Declaration (2002) Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen- declaration_en.pdf (Accessed: 25 July 2013).

Corbett, J., and Slee, R. (2000) *An international conversation on inclusive education,* in F. Armstrong, D. Armstrong and L. Barton (Eds.), Contexts and Comparative Perspectives. London: David Fulton.

Corby, D., Cousins, W., and Slevin, E. (2012) 'Inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary and higher education: a review of the literature', *Lifelong Learning Community Development,* pp. 69-86.

Cordina, G. (2012) '*Skills mismatch, rather than lack of jobs*', Available at: http://www.mbb.org.mt/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx?ArticleId=3147&Section=newsroom (Accessed: 15 June 2014).

Colleroso, B. (2002) *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander.* New York: William Marrow.

Bartolo, P.A., Agius Ferrante, C., Azzopardi, A., Bason, L., Grech, L., and King, M. (2002) *Creating Inclusive Schools*. Available at: https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/329 (Accessed: 12 December 2014).

Cronin, M.E. (1996) 'Life Skills Curricula for Students with Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Literature', *Journal of Learning Disability,* 29, pp. 53-68.

Cummings, N.A., and Rogers, H. W. (2005*) Destructive trends in mental health: the well-intentioned path to harm,* New York: Routledge.

Cuschieri, I. (1995) in Barton, E. *Disability Politics and the struggle for Change-the Maltese experience*, London: Routledge.

Darling, R. B. (1979) *Families against Society: A Study of Reactions to Children with Birth Defects*, Beverly Hills. California: Sage.

Darling, R. B. (2003) 'Towards a model of changing disability identities: a proposed typology and research agenda', *Disability & Society*, 18, pp. 881-895.

Darling, R. B., and Heckert, D. A. (2010a) 'Activism, models, identities, and opportunities: A preliminary test of a typology of disability orientations', *Research in Social Science and Disability,* 5, pp. 203–229.

Darling, R. B., and Heckert, D. A. (2010b) 'Orientations toward disability: Differences over the lifecourse', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 57 (2), pp. 131-143.

Day, J.C. and Newburger, E.C. (2002) 'The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings', *US Census Bureau*.

DBRS (2015) *European economic growth performance 2010-2015.* Available at: http://www.dbrs.com/research/270545/analyst-rotation-policy-for-europe.pdf (Accessed: 6 July 2015).

Defur, S. H., Todd-Allen, M., and Getzel, E. E. (2003) Parent Participation in the Transition Planning Process. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 24, pp. 19-36.

Deguara, M., Jelassi, O., Micallef B., Callus A. (2012) How we like to live when we have the chance, *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 40 (2), pp. 123-127.

DePoy, E., and Gitlin, L. (1998) *Introduction to research: Understanding and applying multiple strategies.* St. Louis: C. V. Mosby.

Denhart, H. (2008) 'Deconstructing Barriers, Perceptions of Students Labelled With Learning Disabilities in Higher Education', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 41 (6), pp. 483-497.

DES (2006) Malta case study report: Changing Inclusive and Special Education. Available at: http://www.epasi.eu/CaseStudyMT4.pdf (Accessed: 23 March 2013).

DES (2014) Department of Educational Services, Report on Student Maintenance Grant Regulations. Available at https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/195720/LN_372_of_2005_amended.pdf (Accessed: 19 May 2014).

Devlin, D., and Pithier, R. (2006) *Critical Disability Theory: Essays in Philosophy, Politics, Policy, and Law*, British Columbia: UBC Press.

Disability Discrimination Act, UK (1995) Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/contents (Accessed: 28 January 2013).

DSM V (2013) - *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th edn. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.

Dwyer, R., McLoud, L. and Hodson, N., (2010) 'Debt and Graduation from American Universities', *Social Forces*, 90 (4), pp. 1133-1155.

Dye, D.E., Glasson, E.J. and Bittles, A.H. (2004) 'The triple challenges associated with age-related comorbidities in Down syndrome', *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 58 (4), pp. 393-398

EADSNE (2002) *Transition from School to Employment*. Denmark: Middelfart.

EAN (2012) *Cultural value orientation and authoritarian parenting as parameters of bullying and victimization at school.* Available at: http://www.antibullying.eu/digital-library?language=en&field_year_tid=All&field_file_type_tid=All&field_free_tags_tid= (Accessed: 13 January 2013).

EAN(2013)Cyber-bullying. Available at: http://www.antibullying.eu/sites/default/files/cyber-bullying._bullying_in_digital_age.pdf (Downloaded: 13 January 2013).

Ebersold, S. (2011) 'Inclusive Education For Young Disabled People In Europe: Trends, Issues and Challenges', Report on ANED document C165, Human European Consultancy.

EC – European Commission (2014) *'Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support'*, Available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf (Accessed: 23 July 2014).

Education for All (2013)UNESCO Global Monitoring Report. Available at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/gmr2013-thematic-notev2.pdf.pdf (Accessed: 9.2.2013)

Edwards McNamara, B. (2013) *Bullying and Students with Disabilities*, California, US: Corwin.

EHEA (2000) *Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Available at: http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/2015%20Implementation%20report_20.05.2015.pdf (Accessed: 2 March 2015).

Eight European Forum on the Rights of the Child (2013) Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/rights-child/european-forum/eighth-meeting/index_en.htm (Accessed: 3 January 2014).

Einfeld, S.L., Ellis, L.A., and Emerson, E. (2011) 'Comorbidity of intellectual disability and mental disorder in children and adolescents: A systematic review', *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 36 (2), pp. 137-143.

Eiesland, N.L. (1994) *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Elliott, J. and Lukes, D. (2008) 'Epistemology as ethics in research and policy: The use of case studies', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 42(1), pp. 87-119.

Endow. J. (2012) *Learning the Hidden Curriculum: The Odyssey of One Autistic Adult*. Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Equality Act UK (2010). Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf (Accessed: 30 May 2012).

Equal Opportunities and Industrial Relations Act – Malta (2000) Civil Code Chapter 452.

Erikson, E. (1968) *Identity, youth and crises.* London: Faber.

Erten, O. (2011)' Facing challenges: Experiences of young women with disabilities attending a Canadian university', *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 24 (2), pp. 101-114.

ETC- Employment and Training Corporation (2012) Annual Report. Available at:http://etc.gov.mt/Resources/file/Resources/Annual_Report_2012.pdf (Downloaded on 21 March 2015).

ETC- Employment and Training Corporation (2014) Annual Report. Available at: https://secure.etc.gov.mt/homedir/temp/ETC_Annual_Report_2014.pdf (Downloaded on 21 March 2015).

ETC- Employment and Training Corporation (2015) Annual Report. Available at: https://secure.etc.gov.mt/homedir/temp/ETC_Annual_Report_2015.pdf (Downloaded on 21 March 2015).

Etscheidt, S. (2006) 'Issues in transition planning: legal decisions', *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 29, pp. 28–47.

EU Charter of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (2000) Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default_en.htm (Accessed: 29 May 2007).

EU Literacy Report (2012). Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf (Accessed: 23 July 2013).

EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme Report (2005) *Access to Education and Employment for People with Intellectual Disabilities.* Hungary: Open Society Institute.

EU Poverty Report (2012). Available at: http://www.inclusion-europe.org/images/stories/documents/policies/SocInc_EUPovertyRreport.pdf (Accessed: 20 July 2015).

Europe 2020 (2010) Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm (Accessed: 2 December 2012).

European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (2010). Available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF (Accessed: 2 December 2012).

EUROSTAT (2012) *School enrolment and early leavers from education and training.* Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/School_enrolment_and_early_leavers_from_education_and_training (Accessed: 3 April 2013)

EUROSTAT (2015) *Report on Unemployment*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6862104/3-03062015-BP-EN.pdf/efc97561-fad1-4e10-b6c1-e1c80e2bb582 (Accessed: 20 May 2015)

EU Report on Domestic Violence against Women (2010). Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_344_en.pdf

EU Treaty on the Function of EU (2012). Available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2012:326:TOC (Accessed: 5 June 2013).

Evans M., (2014) 'Malta and Supported Employment', *Conference on Supported Employment in Malta*, 12 June 2014, Floriana, Malta.

Falzon, M.A, (2009) What about the Church? (Unpublished PhD thesis) University of Malta Archives.

Fan, H.L., and Orey, M. (2010) 'Multimedia in the Classroom: It's Effect on Student Writing Ability', *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 33 (5).

Fesko, S.L., Temelini, D., and Graham, A. (2004) 'Unrealized Potential: Differing employment outcomes for individuals with mental retardation and other disability groups', Research to Practice Institute for Community Inclusion.

Fine, G.A., Kent S., and Martin, D.D (2007) *Symbols, Selves and Social Life: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Sociology and Social Psychology*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury.

Fink, M. (2014) 'Disability Disclosure in/and Higher Education', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies,* 8 (2), pp. 219-223.

Finn, D., Getzel, E.E., and Mcmanus, S. (2008) 'Adapting the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction for College Students with Disabilities', *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 31, pp. 85-93.

Fletcher J. M. (2007) *Classification and Identification of Learning Disabilities*, in Wong, B., and Butler, D. *Learning about Learning Disabilities.* London: Academic Press.

Foucault, M. (1980A) "Prison Talk," Interview by J. Brochier in C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings* 1972–1977, Pantheon Books, New York, pp. 37–54.

French, S., and Swain, J. (2001/2), *Researching together: a participatory approach*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinann.

French, S., and Swain, J. (2002) *Across the disability divide: whose tragedy. In Fulford, K. W. M., Dickenson, D. L., and Murray, T. H. (eds) Healthcare Ethics and Human Values: An introductory text with readings and case studies*. Oxford: Blackwell.

French, S. (2008) *Understanding disability: a guide for health* professionals. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone Elsevier.

Gadamer, H. G. (1960) *Truth and Method*. Edinburgh: A&C Black.

Garland Thompson, R. (2009) *Staring: How we look*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gates, B. (2003) 'Reflections on conducting focus groups with people with learning disabilities: Theoretical and practical issues', *Journal of Research in Nursing,* 12, pp. 111-126.

Gaumer E. A. S., Noonan, P.M., Zheng, C., and Brussow, J.A. (2015) 'The relationship between self-determination and academic achievement for adolescents with intellectual disabilities,' *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 36, pp. 45-54.

Geerz, C. (1983), *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.

Gerber, F., Bessero, S., Robbiani, B., Courvoisier, D.S., Baud, M.A., Traore, M.C., Blanco, P., Giroud, M., Carminati, and Galli, G. (2011) 'Comparing Residential Programmes for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Intellectual Disability: Outcomes of Challenging Behaviour and Quality of Life', *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 55 (9), pp. 918-932.

Getzel, E.E., and Thoma, C.A. (2006) 'Experiences of College Students with Disabilities and the Importance of Self-Determination in Higher Education Settings', *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 31, pp. 77-84.

Ghirxi, J. (2013) *Exam Access Arrangements in Malta*. Available at: https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Resources/Further-Resources/Documents/EAA_Consultation_Document.pdf (Accessed: 2 December 2013).

Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma*. London: Penguin.

Gonzi, M. (1995) *See me, Listen to me! Children's perspectives,* Office of the Commissioner for Children, Malta.

Goode, S (2007) 'Managing disability: early experience of university students with disabilities', *Disability and Society*, 22 (1), pp. 35-48.

Gorard, S. (2013) *Overcoming disadvantage in Education*. London: Routledge.

Gormley, S., Hughes, C., Block, L., and Lendman, C. (2005) 'Eligibility assessment requirements at the postsecondary level for students with learning disabilities: A disconnect with secondary schools?', *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability,* 18, pp. 63–70.

Goss, D., Goss, F., and Adam-Smith, D. (2001) 'Disability and employment: a comparative critique of UK legislation', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 11 (4), pp. 807-821.

Grantley, J. (2000) 'Towards inclusion in university of people with intellectual disabilities, Proceedings of the International Special Education Congress', University of Manchester, School of Education, Manchester (UK). Available at: http://www.isec2000.org.uk/abstracts/papers_g/grantley_1.htm (Accessed: 2 March 2012).

Gregg, N. (2012) 'Increasing access to learning for the adult basic education learner with learning disabilities: evidence-based accommodation research', *Journal of Learning Disability,* 45, pp. 47-63.

Greenholtz, J. F. (2005) 'Does intercultural sensitivity cross cultures? Validity issues in porting instruments across languages and cultures', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, pp. 73-89.

Grieveo, A., McLaren, S., and Lindsay, W.R. (2007), 'An evaluation of research and training resources for the sex education of people with moderate to severe learning disabilities', *British Journal of Learning Disabilities, 35, pp.* 30-37.

Grigal M., and Neubert D.A., (2004) ‘Parents’ in-school values and post-school expectations for transition-aged youth with disabilities’, *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 27, pp. 65–81.

Grigal, M., Hart, D., and Migliore, A. (2011) ‘Comparing the Transition Planning, Postsecondary Education, and Employment Outcomes of Students with Intellectual and Other Disabilities’, *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals,* 34, pp. 4.

Grixti, J. (2004) ‘Broadcasting and the Young Adult Consumer: Local and Global Media Influences on Maltese Youth Culture’, Broadcasting Authority, Malta

Griffin, M.M., McMillan, E.D., and Hodapp, R.M. (2010), ‘Family perspectives on post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities’, *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 45, pp. 339-346.

Guardianship Act, Malta (2013), Civil Code Chapter 24. Laws of Malta.

Hammersley, M. (2010), ‘Reproducing or constructing? Some questions about transcription in social research’, Qualitative Research, 10 (5), pp. 553–569.

Hampton G., and Gosden R. (2004) ‘Fair play for students with disability’, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management,* 26, pp. 225–238.

Hart D., Mele-McCarthy J., Pasternack R.H., Zimbrich K. and Parker D.R. (2004) ‘Community College: a pathway to success for youth with learning, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities in secondary settings’, *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities,* 39, pp. 45–53.

Hart, D., Grigal, M., Sax, C., Martinez, D., and Will, M. (2006, ’Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities’, *Research to Practice*, 45.

Hart, D., and Grigal, M. (2010) *Think College! Postsecondary Education Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

Hartup, W. (2002) *The company they keep: Childhood social developments.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Harvey, M. W. (2012) ‘The Efficacy of Vocational Education for Students with Disabilities Concerning Post-School Employment Outcomes: A Review of the Literature’, *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education,* 38, pp. 25-44.

Hassouneh-Phillips, D., and McNeff, E. (2005) '"I thought I was less worthy": Low Sexual and Body Esteem and Increased Vulnerability to Intimate Partner Abuse in Women with Physical Disabilities', *Disability and Sexuality,* 23 (4), pp. 227-240.

Heath, N., Roberts, E., and Toste, J.R. (2011) 'Perceptions of Academic Performance: Positive Illusions in Adolescents with and Without Learning Disabilities', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 46 (5), pp. 402-12.

Hebron, J. and Humphrey, N., (2014) 'Exposure to bullying among students with autism spectrum conditions: A multi-informant analysis of risk and protective factors', *Autism*, 18 (6), pp. 618-630.

Hen, M., and Goroshit, M. (2012) 'Academic Procrastination, Emotional Intelligence, Academic Self-Efficacy, and GPA: A Comparison between Students with and without Learning Disabilities', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 47 (2), pp. 1-13.

Hendry, L.B. and Percy, A. (1981) *Pre-adolescents' television Style and* Leisure In 'Growing up and Going Out'. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

Hendry, L. B., Shucksmith, J., Love, J.G. and Glendinning, A. (1999). *Young People's Leisure and Lifestyles*. London: Routeledge.

Hetherington, S.A, Durant-Jones, H., Johnson, K., Kolan, K., Smith, E., Taylor-Brown, S. and Tuttle, J. (2010) 'The Lived Experiences of Adolescents with Disabilities and Their Parents in Transition Planning', *Focus: Autism and other Developmental Disabilities*, 25 (3), pp. 163-172.

Hick, P. (2005) 'Supporting the Development of More Inclusive Practices Using the Index for Inclusion', *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 21, pp.117-122.

Hogan, D. P., Sandefur G. D., and Wells T. (2001) 'The Transition to Adulthood among Young Persons with Disabilities', *Annual Review of Sociology* 12, pp. 109-30.

Camilleri, I (2013) 'Malta outshines EU with special needs students', *Times Of Malta,* 29 January. Available at: *http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20130129/local/Malta-outshines-EU-with-special-needs-students.455288* (Accessed: 20 June 2015).

Humphries T. (2011) Small island mentality. Available at: http://www.smh.com.au/it-pro/a-seam-of-racism-lives-under-our-blokey-mateship-20110630-1gsv3.html#ixzz3hMKiOdPM (Accessed: 29 July 2012).

Hustler, F. (2005) cited in Somekh, B., & Lewin, C. (2005), *Research methods in the social sciences*, Sage.

Hutcheon, E.J., and Wolbring, G. (2012) 'Voices of "disabled" post-secondary students: Examining higher education "disability" policy using an ableism lens,' *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 5*, pp. 39-49.

Iacono, T. (2010) 'Ethical challenges and complexities of including people with intellectual disability as participant in research', *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 31, pp. 173–179.

ICEVI (2012) *Europe Report on Inclusion*. Available at: http://www.icevi-europe.org/tt/ttw3/topic5.html (Accessed: 29 March 2013).

Idan, O. and Margalit, M. (2012) 'Socio-emotional Self-Perceptions, Family Climate, and Hopeful Thinking Among Students With Learning Disabilities and Typically Achieving Students From the Same Classes', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23 (9), pp. 2-16.

IDEA (2004) *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*, Pub. L. No. pp. 108-446.

Isaacson Kailes, J. (2001) 'Can disability, chronic conditions, health and wellness coexist?', *National Center on Physical Activity and Disability*. Available at: http://dps.sagepub.com/content/17/4/230.short (Accessed: 29 March 2013).

Izzo, M., and Lamb, M. (2002) 'Self-determination and career development: Skills for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment'. Available at: http://www.ncset.hawaii.edu/publications/pdf/self_determination.pdf (Accessed: 6 December 2012).

Janiga, S.J., and Costenbader, V. (2002) 'The Transition from High School to Post-secondary Education for Students with Learning Disabilities', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 35 (5), pp. 462-8.

Jensen (2013) ‘Championing Person First Language’, *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 19 (3), pp. 146-151.

Johnson, A.L. (2006) *Students with disabilities in post-secondary education: Barriers to success and implications for professionals*. Available at: http://www.counselingoutfitters.com/Johnson.htm (Accessed: 2 Dcember 2014).

Joshi, G., Petty, C., Wozniak, J., Henin, A., Fried, R., Galdo, M., Kotarski, M., Walls, S. and Biederman, J. (2010), ‘The heavy burden of psychiatric comorbidity in youth with autism spectrum disorders: a large comparative study of a psychiatrically referred population’, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders,* 40, pp. 1361-70.

Jung, W.S. (2011) ‘Preservice Teacher Training for Successful Inclusion’, *Education*, 128 (1), pp. 2-12.

Kauffman, J.M., and Hallahan, D.P.(Eds.) (2005) The illusion of full inclusion: A comprehensive critique of a current special education bandwagon. 2nd edn. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Kaufman, J.M., and Hung, L.-Y. (2005) ‘Special education for intellectual disability: current trends and perspectives’, *Current opinion in psychiatry,* 22, pp. 452.

Kearney, A. (2009) ‘Exclusion at School: What Is Happening for Students Who Are Disabled?’, *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations,* 7 (6), pp. 219–227.

Kell, P. (2004) ‘*A teacher’s tool kit: Sociology and social theory explaining the world’* in Allen, J. (ed). Sociology of education: Possibilities and practices. South Melbourne: Thomson Social Science Press.

Kim, Y.S. and Leventhal, B. (2008) ‘Bullying and suicide: A review,’ *International Journal of Adolescent Medical Health,* 20 (2), pp. 133-54.

King, Bartolo, Borg *et al*, (2000) ‘Experiences and aspirations of Maltese adolescents with Down syndrome’, *News and views*, 25, pp. 28– 33.

Kitzinger, J. (1995) ‘Introducing Focus Groups’, *British Medical Journal*, 311(70), pp. 299-302.

KNPD (2004) Disability, Inclusion and Human Rights. Available at http://www.knpd.org/pubs/opus/0709_disabilityinclusionhumanrights.pdf (Accessed: 23.3.2014)

KNPD, (2012) Work Report. Available at: http://www.knpd.org/pubs/pdf/KNPD%20AR%202013%20EN.pdf (Accessed: 23 March 2014).

KNPD, (2013) Report on Poverty and Social Exclusion. Available at: http://www.knpd.org/pubs/pdf/Employment%20Policy%20EN.pdf (Accessed: 23 March 2014).

Kohler, P.D., and Field, S. (2003) 'Transition-Focused Education: Foundation for the Future', *Journal of Special Education*, 37 (3), pp. 174-183.

Konrad, M., Fowler, C.H., Walker, A.R., Test, D.W., and Wood, W.M. (2007) 'Effects of Self-Determination Interventions on the Academic Skills of Students with Learning Disabilities', *Learning Disability Quarterly,* 30 (2), pp. 89-113.

Kraus, A. (2008) *The socio-political construction of identity: A multidimensional model of disability*. Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations. (UMI 3297966).

Larner W., and Craig D. (2005) *After Neoliberalism? Community Activism and Local Partnerships.* Basingstoke: McMillan

Lewis, S., and Kellett, J., in Fraser, S. (2004) *Doing research with children and young people*. London: Sage.

Lewis, A., and Porter, J. (2006) *Research and Pupil Voice*. Available at: http://eprints.bham.ac.uk/281/1/Lewis_(16).pdf (Downloaded: 7 July 2015).

Lewis T.J., Stacey E.L., Jones, A., Robert H., Horner H., and Sugai F. (2010) 'School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support and Students with emotional/Behavioral Disorders: Implications for Prevention, Identification and Intervention', *Exceptionality*, 18 (2), pp. 82-93.

LDPride (2012) *Report on Learning Disability and Accessible Information.* Available at: http://www.ldpride.net/learningstyles.mi.htm (Accessed: 24 March 2014).

Liamputtong, P. (2007) *Researching the vulnerable*. London: SAGE.

Linton, L. (1998) *Claiming Disability, Knowledge and Identity*. NY: NY University Press.

Linton K.F., and Adams Rueda, H. (2015) 'Dating and Sexuality among Minority

Adolescents with Disabilities: An Application of Sociocultural Theory', *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 25 (2).

Lockhart, K., Guerin, S., Shanahan, S., and Coyle, K. (2010) 'Expanding the Test of Counterfeit Deviance. Are sexual knowledge, experience and needs a factor in the sexualized challenging behavior of adults with intellectual disability?', *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 31, pp. 117-130.

Lofgren-Martenson, L., (2004) '"May I?" About sexuality and love in the new generation with intellectual disabilities', *Sexuality and Disability,* 22 (3), pp. 197-207.

L-Orizzont (2013) 'Thousands raised in aid of the angels of Siggiewi (Providence House)', L-Orizzont, 2 January.

L-Orizzont (2013), 'Annual fundraiser for Dar Tal-Providenza: From our hearts to the angels', L-Orizzont, 13 March.

Lugnehard, T., Hallerback, M.U., and Gillberg, C. (2011) 'Psychiatric comorbidity in young adults with a clinical diagnosis of Asperger syndrome', Research on Developmental Disabilities, 32, pp. 1910-7.

Mahler, M., Pine, F., and Bergman, A. (1975). *The psychological birth of the human infant*. New York: Basic Books.

Malta Business Bureau (2013) Examining employment trends in Malta. Available at: http://issuu.com/malta_business_bureau/docs/business_agenda_issue_13 (Accessed: 7 August 2015).

Malta Civil Unions Act (2013) Civil Code Chapter 530, Laws of Malta

Malta Data protection act (2011) Civil Code Chapter 440, Laws of Malta.

Malta Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Characteristics Act (2014) Civil Code Chapter 540, Laws of Malta.

Malta Kurja (2006) *Dokument Annwali*. Available at: http://ms.maltadiocese.org/WEBSITE/2013/PRESS%20RELEASES/114%20KUMMISSJONI%20AMBJENT%20MLT.pdf (Accessed: 7 August 2015).

Mansell J. (2009) *Active support: enabling and empowering people with intellectual disabilities*. London: Kingsley.

Marcotte, D.E., Thomas, B., Carey, B. and Greg S. K., (2005) 'The Returns of a Community College Education: Evidence From the National Education Longitudinal Survey', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 27 (2), pp. 157-175.

Marshak, L., Van Wieren, T., Raeke Ferrell, D., Swiss, L., Dugan, C., (2010) *Exploring Barriers to College Student Use of Disability Services and Accommodations*. Indiana: University of Pennsylvania.

Martin, J.E., Greene, B.A. and Borland, B.J. (2004) 'Secondary Students' Involvement in Their IEP Meetings: Administrators' Perception', *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 27(2), pp. 177-188.

Martin, J., Marshall, L. and Sale P. (2004) 'A 3-Year Study of Middle, Junior High, and High School IEP Meetings', *Exceptional Children*, 70 (3), pp. 285-297.

Mason, H. (2002) Definition of Integration and Inclusion, ICEVI- Europe Report. Available at: http://www.icevi-europe.org/tt/ttw3/topic5.html (Accessed: 23 November 2013).

Matheson, C., Olsen, R.J. and Weisner, T. (2007) 'A good friend is hard to find: friendship among adolescents with disabilities', *American Journal of Mental Retardation,* 112 (5), pp. 319-29.

Matson, J.L. and Shoemaker, M.E. (2011) 'Psychopathology and intellectual disability', *Current Opinion Psychiatry*, 24 (5), pp. 367-71.

May, A.L., and Stone, C.A. (2010) 'Stereotypes of individuals with learning disabilities: views of college students with and without learning disabilities', *Journal of learning disabilities,* 43, pp. 483.

Mayo, E. (1945) *The social problems of an industrial civilization*. US: Harvard University Press.

MCAST Student Support Services Committee; Report on Students with disabilities (Unpublished report, 2012).

McConkey, R. and Mezza, F. (2001) 'Employment Aspirations of People with Learning Disabilities Attending Day Centres', *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 5 (4), pp. 309-318.

Macdonald, D., Kirk, D., Metzler, M., Nigles, L.M., Schempp, P. and Wright, J. (2002) 'It's all very well, in theory: Theoretical perspectives and their applications in contemporary pedagogical research', *QUEST*, 54, pp. 133–156.

McDougle, C.J. (2003) 'Risperidone for the Core Symptom Domains of Autism: Results from the Study by the Autism Network of the Research Units on Paediatric Psychopharmacology', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 162 (6), pp. 1142-1148.

McGaw, S., Shaw, T., and Beckley, K. (2007) 'Prevalence of psychopathology across a service population of parents with intellectual disabilities and their children', *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities,* 4 (1), pp. 11-22.

McGee, J.J., and Glick, S. (1998) Gentle Teaching. Available at: http://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels2/pdf/80s/84/84-GT-JJM.pdf (Accessed: 12 January 2015).

McMurray, A., Pace, W., and Scott, D. (2004) *Research: A common-sense approach*. London: Cengage Learning EMEA.

Mead, G.H (1934) *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Merton, R.K. (1949) *Social Theory and Social Structure*. NY: Free press.

Merton, R.K. (1957) *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Revised). US: University of Chicago Press.

MGRM – Malta Gay Rights Movement (2009) SR Report. Available a: http://www.maltagayrights.org/publicationsselected.php?title=Sexual%20Orientation%20Discrimination%20in%20Malta (Accessed: 23 January 2015)

MGRM – Malta Gay Rights Movement (2013) LGBT Discrimination in Malta. Available at: http://www.maltagayrights.org/publicationsselected.php?title=LGBT%20Discrimination%20in%20Malta (Accessed: 23 January 2015)

Miles, M.B, and Huberman, A.M. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis*. 2nd edn. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mishna, Faye (2003) 'Learning disabilities and bullying double jeopardy', *Journal of learning disabilities,* 36 (4), pp. 336-347.

Mitchell, K. (2006) 'Neoliberal Governmentality in the European Union: Education, Training and Technologies of Citizenship', *Environment Planning and Development*, 24 (2), pp. 3389-407.

Mittler, P. (2000) *Working towards Inclusive Education: Social Contexts*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Mittler, P. (2002) 'Educating Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities in England: Thirty Years On', *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education,* 49, pp. 145-60.

Mittler (2010) *Building bridges between special and mainstream services*. Available at :
http://www.hiproweb.org/fileadmin/cdroms/Education/BuildingBridges.pdf
(Accessed: 15 July 2015)

Moore, M., Bach, G., and Rioux*, M. (1998), Researching Disability*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Morgan, D. L., and Krueger, R. A. (1993) *When to use focus groups and why*. In D. L. Morgan (Ed.), *Successful focus groups: Advancing the state of the art*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Morgan D.L. (1997) Focus groups as qualitative research. 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Mull, C. A., and Sitlington, P. L. (2003) 'The Role of Technology in the Transition to Postsecondary Education of Students with Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Literature', *Journal of Special Education,* 37, pp. 26-32.

Nansel, T., Overpeck, M.P., Romani S., Ruan, W.J., Simons-Morton, B. and Scheidt, P. (2008) 'Bullying behaviours among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285 (16), pp. 2094-2100.

Nash, J. and Nash, A. (1981) *Deafness in Society*. NY: Lexington Heath**.**

Neubert D. A., Moon M. S. and Grigal M. (2004) 'Activities of students with significant disabilities receiving services in postsecondary settings', *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities,* 39, pp. 16–25.

Nevala, A.M., Hall, J. (2011) *Reducing early school leaving in the EU*. (Conference notes: European Parliament).

Neville-Jan, A. (2004) ‘Selling your soul to the devil: An auto-ethnography of pain, pleasure and the quest for a child’, *Disability & Society*, 19 (2), pp. 56-67.

Newman, L., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., and Knokey A.M. (2009) ’*The Post-High School Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities up to 4Years after High School. A Report of Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)’*. Available at: http://www.nlts2.org/reports/2009-04/index.html (Accessed: 1 December 2013).

Newman, L. (2001) ‘Changes in Postsecondary Education Participation of Youth with Disabilities’, *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education,* 27, pp. 30-38.

Nierse, C.J., and Abma, T.A. (2011)’Developing voice and empowerment: the first step towards a broad consultation in research agenda setting’, *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 55 (4), pp. 411-21.

No Child Left Behind (2002) Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425.

NSO Malta census document (2011) Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/nso/Sources_and_Methods/Unit_01/Methodology_and_Research/Pages/Census-in-Malta.aspx . (Accessed: 7 December 2014).

NSO Malta (2014) *Malta in Figures*. Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Pages/Publications-by-Date.aspx. (Accessed: 7 December 2014).

NSO Malta census document (2005) Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/nso/Sources_and_Methods/Unit_01/Methodology_and_Research/Pages/Census-in-Malta.aspx. (Accessed: 7 December 2014).

NSO Total Population (2015) *Demographic Review*. Available at: https://nso.gov.mt/en/publicatons/Pages/Publications-by-Date.aspx. (Accessed: 2 July 2015).

O'Brien, P., Shevlin, M., O'Keefe, M., Fitzgerald, S., Curtis, S. and Kenny, M. (2009) ‘Opening up a Whole New World for Students with Intellectual Disabilities within a Third Level Setting’, *British Journal of Learning Disabilities,* 37, pp. 285-292.

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) *Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Tertiary Education and*

Employment. Available at: http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/48189110.pdf. (Accessed: 29 May 2015).

Oliver, M. (1995) *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice.* Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

Oliver, M. (2009), The Social Model in Context, in Titchkosky, T. and Michalko, R., *Rethinking Normalcy*. Toronto, CA: Canadian Scholars Press.

Osborne, M. (2003) 'Increasing or Widening Participation in Higher Education? – a European overview', *European Journal of Education,* 38 (1), pp. 5-24.

Owen, K., Butler, G., Hollins, S. (2004) *A New Kind of Trainer: How to Develop the Training Role for People with Learning Disabilities*. London: RCPsych Publications.

Parahoo, A.K. (1997) *Nursing Research, Principles, Process, and Issues*. London: MacMillan.

Parker, A., and Tritter, J. (2006) 'Focus group method and methodology: current practice and recent debate', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 29 (1), pp. 23-37.

Pereira, R.B. (2012) 'The potential of occupational therapy services for students with disabilities within tertiary education settings', *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal, 59*, pp. 393-6.

Peters, S. (2003) 'Is There a Disability Culture? A Syncretisation of Three Possible World Views', *Disability & Society, 5(4),* pp. 583-561.

Peters, S. (2010) 'The heterodoxy of student voice: challenges to identity in the sociology of disability and education,' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31 (5), pp. 591-602.

Phelps L.A., and Wermuth T.R. (1992) *Effective vocational education for students with special needs: A framework*. Berkeley: University of California, National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Pinker, S. (2003), *The Blank Slate*. London: Penguin.

Pollock, N. (2007) 'The Meaning of Work and Play for young People with Disabilities', *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy,* 2, pp. 25-31.

Powell, R.A., and Single, H.M. (1996) ‘Focus Groups’, *International Journal of Qualitative Health Care*, 8 (5), pp. 499-504.

Prince, D. and Jenkins, P. (2005) *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice From a Longitudinal Student Tracking Study, Columbia University Academic Commons*. Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10022/AC:P:19300. (Accessed: 1 January 2015).

Proctor, B. and Prevatt, F. (2003) ‘Agreement among four models used for diagnosing learning disabilities’, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 36 (5), pp. 459-66.

Quick, D., Lehmann, J. and Deniston, T. (2003) ‘Opening Doors For Students With Disabilities on Community College Campuses: What Have We Learned? What Do We Still Need To Know?’, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 27, (9-10), pp. 815-827.

Ramcharan, P., Grant, G., and Flynn, M. (2004), *Emancipatory and participatory research: How far have we come?. The international handbook of applied research in intellectual disabilities, Emerson, E., Hatton, C., Thompson, T., and R. Parmenter, T. Chichester*. England: Wiley. pp. 83–111.

Rao, K., Dowrick, P.W., Yuen, J.W.L., Boisvert, P.C., and Yuen, J.W.L. (2009) ‘Writing in a Multimedia Environment: Pilot Outcomes for High School Students in Special Education’, *Journal of Special Education Technology,* 24.

Raskauskas, J., and Modell, S. (2011) ‘Modifying Anti-Bullying Programs to Include Students With Disabilities’, *Teaching Exceptional Children,* 44 (1), pp. 60-67.

Reid, C. (1992) ‘Advancing women’s social justice agendas: a feminist action research framework’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3 (3), pp. 235-256.

Reindal, S.M. (2008) ‘A social relational model of disability: A theoretical framework for special needs education?’, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 23 (2), pp. 135–146.

Reiss, F. (2010), ‘Socioeconomic inequalities and mental health problems in children and adolescents: A systematic review’, *Social Science & Medicine*, 90, pp. 24–31.

Riddell, S., Tinklin, T., and Wilson, A. (2005) *Disabled students in higher education: perspectives on widening access and changing policy*. London: Brunner-Routledge.

Robinson, C., and Kellett, M. (2004) *Doing research with children and young people*. London: Sage.

Rogers, C. (2012) 'Inclusive education and intellectual disability', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17 (9), pp. 988–1002.

Rose, C., Espelage, D., and Monda-Amaya, L. (2009) 'Bullying and victimisation rates among students in general and special education: A comparative analysis', *Educational Psychology*, 29, pp. 761-776.

Rubin, S. E., Chan, F., and Thomas, D.L. (2003) 'Assessing changes in life skills and quality of life resulting from rehabilitation services', *Journal of Rehabilitation,* 69, pp. 4–9.

Ryndak D.L., Moore M.A., Orlando A. and Delano M. (2009) 'Access to the general curriculum: the mandate and role of context in research-based practice for students with extensive support needs', *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities,* 33/34, pp. 199–213.

Safstrom, C.A. (2003) 'Teaching Otherwise', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 22 (1) pp.19-29.

SABE (1991) *Self-advocates becoming empowered*. Available at: http://www.sabeusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/39_-Self-Determination.pdf . (Accessed: 27 December 2014).

Salkever D.S., (2000) 'Activity status, life satisfaction and perceived productivity for young adults with developmental disabilities', *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 66 (3), pp. 4-13.

Salvador-Carulla, L., Reed, G.M., Vaez-Azizi, L.M. (2011) 'Intellectual developmental disorders: towards a new name, definition and framework for "mental retardation/intellectual disability" in ICD-11', *World Psychiatry,* 3 (10), pp. 175–180.

Schalock, R.L., Luckasson, R.A., Shogren, K.A., Borthwick-Duffy, S., Bradley, B., Buntinx, W.H.E., Coulter, E., Craig, M., Gomez, S.C., Lachapelle, Y., Reeve, A., Snell, M.E., Spreat, S., Tasse, M.J., Thompson, J.R., Verdugo, M.A., Wehmeyer, M.L., and Yeager, M.H. (2007) 'The renaming of Mental Retardation: Understanding the change to the term Intellectual Disability', *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 45(2), pp. 116-124.

Schalock, R.L., Luckasson, R., Bradley, V., Buntinx, W., Lachapelle, Y., Shogren Shogren, K., Snell, M E., Thompson, J.R., Tasse, M., Verdugo Verdugo-Alonso, M.A., and Wehmeyer, M.L. (2012). *User's guide to accompany the 11th edition of Intellectual Disability: Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports: Applications for clinicians, educators, organizations providing supports, policy makers, family members members and advocates advocates, and health care professionals.* Washington, DC: American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

Shaffir, W. Stebbins, R. and Turowitz, A. (1980) *Qualitative Research*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

Shah, S (2005), *Career Success of Disabled High-flyers*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Shevlin, M., Kenny, M. and McNeela, E. (2004) 'Participation in higher education for students with disabilities: an Irish perspective', *Disability and Society,* 19 (1), pp. 15-30.

Shuttleworth, R. P. (2000). The search for sexual intimacy for men with cerebral palsy. *Sexuality and Disability* 18 (4), pp. 263-282.

Singh, D. K. (2005) 'Students with Disabilities and Higher Education', *Journal of American College Health,* 53, pp .210.

Sitlington, P. L. and Payne, E. M. (2004) 'Information Needed by Postsecondary Education: Can We Provide It as Part of the Transition Assessment Process?' *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal,* 2(2), pp.1- 14.

Sitlington P. L., Neubert D. A. (2004) 'Preparing youths with emotional or behavioural disorders to adult life: Can it be done within the standards-based reform movement?' *Behavioural Disorders*, 29, pp. 279–288

Skar, L. and Barren, S. (1995) *Friendships*. Stockholm: Wahlstrom & Widstrand.

Skar, L., and Tamm, M. (2010), 'My assistant and I: Disabled children's and adolescents' roles and relationships to their assistants', *Disability and Society*, 16, pp. 917- 931.

Skar, L. (2000) *What is it like to be an Adolescent with Disabilities*?. London: Sage.

Slee, R. and Allen, J. (2005) *Excluding the included: a reconsideration of inclusive education, Policy and Power in Inclusive Education*. London: Routledge.

Smalley K. (2001) 'Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and the Roman Catholic Church', *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, 5 (3), pp. 99-102.

Smith P.K., Cowie, H., Olafsson, R.F., Liefooghe, A.P., Almeida, A., Araki, H., del Barrio, C., Costabile, A., Dekleva, B., Houndoumadi, A., Kim, K., Olafsson, R.P., Ortega, R., Pain, J., Pateraki, L., Schafer, M., Singer, M., Smorti, A., Toda, Y., Tomasson, H., Wenxin, Z. (2012) 'Definitions of bullying: A comparison of terms used, and age and gender differences, in a fourteen-country international comparison', Child *Development*, 73 (4), pp. 1119-33.

Solnit, A.J., and Stark, M.H. (1961) 'Mourning and the Birth of a Defective Child', *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,*16, pp. 523-637.

Sparks, R., and Lovett, B. (2009), 'Objective criteria for classification of postsecondary students as learning disabled', *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42, pp. 230-239.

Sparks, R., and Lovett, B. (2014) 'Learning Disability Documentation in Higher Education: What Are Students Submitting?', *Learning Disability Quarterly,* 37 (1), pp. 54-62.

Spirito, A., DeLawyer, D.D., and Stark, L.J., (1991) 'Peer Relations and Social Adjustment of Chronically Ill Children and Adolescents', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 11, pp. 539-564.

Spiteri, L., Borg, G., Callus, AM., Cauchi, J. and Sciberras, M. (2005) Inclusion and Special Education Review (Printed Material).

Student Support Services MCAST Report (2012) Exit Interview Documents (Printed Material)

Stodden, R.A., and Mruzek, D.W. (2010) 'An Introduction: Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment of Persons With Autism & Intellectual Disabilities', *Focuson Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities,* 25 (3), pp. 131-133.

Suler, J. (2002) 'The online disinhibition effect', *Cyberpsychology and Behaviour*, 7 (3), pp. 321-326.

Sursock, A., and Smidt, H. (2010), *Trends 2010: A decade of change in European Higher Education.* Brussels: European University Association.

Swain, J., and French, S. (2000) 'Towards an affirmation model of disability', Disability and Society', *Disability and Society*, 1 (2), pp. 2-12.

Swain, J., and French, S. (2012) 'Towards a personal non-tragedy view of disability', *Disability and Society*, 15 (4), pp. 569-582.

Swearer, S.M., Wang, C., Maag, J.W., Siebecker, A.B. and Frerichs, L.J. (2012), 'Understanding the bullying dynamic among students in special and general education', *Journal of School Psychology*, 50 (4), pp. 503-520.

Swinton, J. (1997) 'Restoring the image: Spirituality, faith, and cognitive disability,' J*ournal of Religion & Health*, 36, pp. 21.

Tagayuna, A., Stodden, R. A., Chang, C., Zeleznik, M.E. and Whelley, T.A. (2005) 'A two-year comparison of support provision for persons with disabilities in postsecondary education', *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation,* 22 (1), pp. 13-21.

Taylor, A. (2010) 'Uncertain outlook', *Learning Disability Today,* 10 (5), pp. 10-11.

Taylor, J.L., and Seltzer, M.M. (2010) 'Employment and post-secondary educational activities for young adults with autism spectrum disorders during the transition to adulthood', *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders,* 41, pp. 566-74.

Test D.W., Fowler C.H., Richter S.M., White, J., Mazzotti, V., Walker, A.R., (2009) 'Evidence-based practices in secondary transition', *Career Development for Exceptional Children,* 32, pp. 115–28.

Thomas, G., (2009) *How to do your Research Project.* London: SAGE Publications.

Thompson, S. A., (2003) 'Subversive political praxis: supporting choice, power and control for people with learning difficulties', *Disability and Society,* 18 (6), pp. 719-736.

Times of Malta (9 Feb 2014) 'A secular society and a move to a distinct separation of church and state'. Available at: http://www.timesofmalta.com/archive. (Accessed: 26 March 2014).

Times of Malta (2 January 2015) ‘Providence House’s new director appeals to the public to help residents out of a belief in their right to autonomy and individuality and not out of pity’. Available at: http://www.timesofmalta.com/archive. (Accessed: 22 January 2015).

Times of Malta (27 September 2014) ‘Gap between child and adult mental health services’. Available at http://www.timesofmalta.com/archive. (Accessed: 29 September 2014).

Torkelson Lynch, R., and Gussel, L. (1996) ‘Disclosure and self-advocacy regarding disability-related needs: Strategies to maximize integration in postsecondary education’, *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 74, pp. 352-357.

Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) Article 13. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/treaty/pdf/amst-en.pdf (Accessed: 2 December 2012).

Uditsky, B., and Hughson, E. (2012) ‘Inclusive Postsecondary Education - An Evidence-Based Moral Imperative’, *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 9 (4), pp. 298–302.

UK Further and Higher Education ACT (1992) Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/13/contents (Accessed: 2 December 2012).

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) Available at http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml. (Accessed: 12 January 2013)

UNESCO (2000) Education for all, Dakar Convention. Available at http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/wef_2000/. (Accessed on 30 May 2013)

UNESCO (1994) The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action. Available at http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF. (Accessed on 30 May 2013)

UNESCO (2005) Measuring School Exclusion. Available at http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF. (Accessed on 20 May 2013)

University of Malta (2013) Special Examination Arrangements. Available at http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/204419/accessbooklet2013.pdf. (Accessed on 27 December 2013)

UNICEF (1998) Education Update. Available at http://www.unicef.org/education/files/vol2disabileng.pdf. (Accessed on 11 November 2012)

Van der Wende, M. C
(2000) 'The Bologna Declaration: enhancing the transparency andcom petitiveness of European higher education', *Higher Education in Europe*, 25 (3), pp. 305-310.

Vedi, K., and Bernard, S. (2012) 'The mental health needs of children and adolescents with learning disabilities,' *Current Opinion Psychiatry,* 25, pp. 353-8.

Vickerman, P., and Blundell, M. (2010) 'Hearing the Voices of Disabled Students in Higher Education,' *Disability and Society,* 25, pp. 21-32.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Levine, P. and Marder, C. (2007) 'Perceptions and Expectations of Youth with Disabilities. A Special Topic Report on Findings from the National Longitudinal Study-2 (NLTS2): Chapter 6--Youth's Expectations for the Future,' *Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education,* 30, pp. 18-27.

Walmsley, J., and Johnson, K. (2003) *Inclusive Research with People with Learning Disabilities: Past, Present and Futures*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Walmsley, J. (2004) Inclusive Learning Disability Research: the (nondisabled) researcher's role In British Journal of Learning Disabilities, 32 (2).

Warnock Report. Department of Education and Science (1978) *The Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (Cmnd 7212)*. London: HMSO.

Warnock, M. (2005) *Special Educational Needs— a new look*. Philosophy of Education, Society of Great Britain.

Wehmeyer, M. (2007) *Promoting Self-determination in Students with Developmental Disabilities*. NY: Guilford Press.

Wendell S. (1996) *The Rejected Body: Feminist philosophical perspectives on disability*. London: Routledge.

WHO (2011) *World Report on Disability*. Available on: http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf (Accessed: 30 May 2014).

Wild, A., and Sundaram, V. (2011) 'Investigating the value of vignettes in researching disabled students' views of social equality and inclusion in school,' *Race Equality Teaching Journal*, 29(1), pp. 40-45.

Williams, V. (2005), *Disability and Discourse*. NY: Wiley Blackwell.

Wilson, J.C., and Lewiecki-Wilson, C. (2001) *Embodied Rhetorics: disability in language and culture*. Carbondale: Southerend Illinois University Press.

Wolbring, G. (2008) 'The Politics of Ableism', *Development,* 51 (2), pp. 252-258.

Wolfensberger, W. (1972) *The principle of Normalization in human services*. Toronto, ON: National Institute on Mental Retardation.

Wolfensberger and Thomas (1972) 'An Analysis of the Client Role From a Social Role Valorization Perspective', *The International Social Role Valorization Journal*, 1 (1), pp. 3-8.

Woods, M. (2007) 'Contrasting Adult Literacy Learners With and Without Learning Disabilities', *Learning Disability Research Practice*, 29 (3), pp. 133–144.

World Sex and Disability Conference (2009) Available at: http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/srh_for_disabilities.pdf. (Accessed: 23 June 2014).

Zafft, C., Hart, D. and Zimbrich, K. (2004) 'College Career Connection: A Study of Youth with Intellectual Disabilities and the Impact of Postsecondary Education', *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities,* 39 (1), pp. 9.

Zammit Mangion, J. (1992) *Education in Malta*, Valletta, Malta: Studia Editions.

Zarb, G. (1992) 'On the Road to Damascus: First steps towards changing the Relations of Research Production', *Disability, Handicap, & Society*, 7 (2), pp. 125- 38.

APPENDIX ONE - RISK ASSESSMENT

Hazards	**Risks**	**Precautions to minimise risk**
Use of face-to-face interviews	Interviewees could be upset by interview and become aggressive or violent toward researcher	Consider: How will contact with participants be made - i.e. do not give out personal mobile no., home number or home email, etc. Location of interviews – to be held in a safe environment, e.g University building, workplace What support will be available, i.e. will anyone else be available to assist if you call for help, etc. e.g. colleague knows where interview to take place and telephoned when completed and safe-what action to take after certain time if not phoned
Use of face-to-face interviews Participants could become upset by interview and suffer psychological effects		Consider: What initial and subsequent support will be made available for participants or interviewees? What to do if researcher uncovers information regarding an illegal act? What/who will be used to counsel distressed participants/ interviewees, what precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening?
Sensitive data	Exposure to data or information which may cause upset or distress to Researcher	Consider: What initial and subsequent support will be available to the researcher
Sensitive issues i.e. Gender / Cultural	Exposure to vulnerable situations/	Consider: Use of chaperones/ Translators.

e.g. when observing or dealing with undressed members of the opposite sex Children	sensitive issues that may cause distress to interviewer or interviewee	What initial and subsequent support will be made available for participants or interviewees? Adhere; to local guidelines and take advice from research supervisor

APPENDIX TWO – RESEARCH EXPLANATION SHEETS

PhD Research Information Sheet

RESEARCH TITLE: Further Education for Students with Intellectual Disability in Malta

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

- The aim of the research is to identify the barriers faced by students with intellectual disability when they finish compulsory education and wish to further their education. The benefits of this research will be that the results can identify areas of difficulty in access to education which may then be rectified.
- The project is being funded by the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme.
- The main participants of this study are students and adults with intellectual disabilities, parents, disability activists, educators and representatives from college management teams at both secondary and post-secondary levels.
- If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sit for an audio-recorded interview and/ or focus group for a maximum of one hour at the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). These will

take place at the end of the 2012/2013 scholastic year.

- Interviews will be recorded, subject to your permission. Recordings of interviews will be transcribed by myself and deleted upon transcription You may also withdraw any data/information you have already provided up until it is transcribed for use in the final report on 1st September 2013.
- Submission of a completed questionnaire implies consent to participate
- The questions asked may be of a particularly sensitive nature for some of the participants so the MCAST will be providing the services of 2 counsellors and a psychologist if any of the participants feel that the interview or focus group led to any feelings of distress associated to the transition between secondary and post-secondary schools.
- You will be asked to choose a different name for yourself to ensure confidentiality and when the research is finished you will be able to review the information you gave. The study will also include some information about you such as you age, gender and where you live and this information will be included in the final dissertation.
- The final dissertation will be available to the public locally from the National Commission for Persons with Disability, the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme and also from the University of Birmingham in the UK
- A copy of the final report will be available for all participants at the end of the study.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact the researcher using the following contact details:

Sonja Casha

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] [redacted]

____

Sonja Casha

____

Date

APPENDIX THREE - INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What do you understand by Inclusion?
2. Do you know where you want to go after finishing school? Further education or work? Why?
3. What options are available to you?
4. Are you getting help to access further education?
5. What are the barriers you are facing now that you want to access further education?
6. What do your parents/ guardians say about this?
7. Is there anything that worries you or scares you now that you are finishing secondary school?
8. Are you looking forward to enter further education?
9. What can be done to make the transition smoother?
10. What are the barriers you face as a student with ID within further education?
11. What support do you get?
12. What are the barriers faced by students with intellectual disabilities when they leave further education?
13. What and how can things change to improve accessibility in further education for students with ID in Malta and Gozo?
14. Further education is generally considered successful if it leads to employment. Do you agree?
15. How did your further education experience affect your life situation?
16. How could it have been improved?
17. What are your 3 main dreams for the future?

APPENDIX FOUR - FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

- Introductions/ demographic data
- Rules (confidentiality, recording, language, use of material)
- Explanation of research

1. How was your experience of moving out of secondary school?
2. Did u have an idea of what you wanted to do?
3. Did anyone explain the options?
4. What did u need to do to continue studying?
5. How was your experience in post-secondary?
6. What were the barriers you faced in post-sec?
7. What could have been done better to help you?
8. If you work, who/ what helped you get your job?
9. What were the barriers to further education?
10. What were the barriers to employment?

APPENDIX FIVE - CONSENT FORMS

Participant Consent Form

I voluntarily agree to participate in an interview regarding post-secondary inclusion options and barriers for students with intellectual disability in Malta. I understand that this interview is being conducted by Sonja Casha, a PhD student with the University of Birmingham in the UK.

I understand that the evaluation methods which may involve me are:

1. my completion of evaluation questionnaire(s) and/or

2. my participation in a 30-60 minute interview.

I grant permission for the interview to be audio recorded and transcribed, and to be used only by Sonja Casha for analysis of interview data. I grant permission for the evaluation data generated from the above methods to be published in an evaluation report to the University, the funding body (MGSS), the National Commission for Persons with Disability (KNPD) and in the dissertation and future publication(s).

I understand that any identifiable information in regard to my name and/or agency name may be listed *only* in the above-mentioned evaluation report to the funder, that is, this information will *not* be listed in the dissertation or any future publication(s).

____
Research Participant

____
Date

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Barriers to Further Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Malta

Name: Sonja Casha

Programme of Study: PhD student, University of Birmingham, UK

[redacted] [redacted]

[redacted] [redacted]

[redacted] [redacted]

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

I understand that my son/ daughter's participation is voluntary and that he/ she will be free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

I agree that my son/ daughter takes part in the above study. ☐

I understand that information given in this interview/ focus group will be kept in strictest confidence and anonymity maintained. ☐

	Yes	No
I agree to the interview/ focus group being audio recorded	☐	☐
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications	☐	☐

Name of Participant ________________________________

Name of Parent / Legal Guardian ____________________

Date ____________

Signature __________________

Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
______________________________	__________________	__________________________

APPENDIX SIX - IEP BREAKDOWN INFO / PARTICIPANT BIOS

	PARTICIPANT NAME	SHORT BIOGRAPHY
1	Ina	[redacted]
2	Abby	[redacted]
3	Oliver	[redacted]
4	Martha	[redacted]
5	Molly	[redacted]

6	Charles	[redacted]
7	Judy	[redacted]
8	Nadia	[redacted]
9	Stella	[redacted]
10	Sina	[redacted]
11	Ned	[redacted]
12	Kieran	[redacted]

		[redacted]
13	Caleb	[redacted]
14	Tristan	[redacted]
15	Crista	[redacted]
16	Conrad	[redacted]
17	Mina	[redacted]

18	Larry	[redacted]
19	Nathan	[redacted]
20	Steph	[redacted]
21	Malcolm	[redacted]

APPENDIX SEVEN - SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS

FOCUS GROUP TWO

[redacted]

APPENDIX EIGHT – SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRIES

[redacted]