

The Experiences of Children with Exceptionalities in Two Mainstream Primary Schools in Postcolonial Guyana

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an outcome from the investigation into the learning and socializing experiences and opportunities of children with Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEN/D) in the two mainstream primary schools in Guyana. This study was conducted using an ethnographic approach over two semesters in 2018 employing participant observation and unstructured interviews. The data gathered was analyzed using situational analysis as posited by Adele Clarke. It revealed that children with exceptionalities also find the two mainstream schools challenging while dealing with marginalization, discrimination and stay in your lane directives differently than their peers who were perceived as unteachable and unwanted in mainstream schools. The data reveals the innovativeness and resilience of the children with exceptionalities as they navigate the barriers, they face in the two mainstream schools. Finally, I reveal through the data the power interplay among the individual children with exceptionalities, children without SEN/D and their mainstream teachers.

Keywords: culture, discrimination, exceptionalities, marginalization.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers think they are all-knowing. I know the teacher makes mistakes and keeps quiet because I do not want to be shouted at or looked at badly for correcting a teacher.

(Devi, September 2018-Interview)

This paper tells the story of the children with exceptionalities. The children with exceptionalities were successful in overcoming many challenges and conquered mainstream primary school. Some children like Devi, had a negative perception of the teachers and mainstream schools because of discourses around SEN/D and discipline by religion, secular society and the government that portrayed the teachers as the all-knower and lone perfectionist professionals. Devi indicated that she observed mistakes made by teachers in learning experiences; she keeps quiet because she fears the “stay in your lane” directives would be meted out to her

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper presents the answers to the overarching question “*What are the experiences of children with Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEN/D) placed in Guyana’s mainstream primary schools?*” The subsidiary questions are:

- 1) What can we learn about children with SEN/D experiences and feelings concerning mainstream schooling from what they say?

- 2) What are the social and cultural challenges experienced by children with SEN/D through quasi-inclusion practices in two mainstream primary schools in postcolonial Guyana?

III. APPROACH

I involved thirty-eight children; thirty-six with identified SEN/D and two without identified SEN/D who shared similar relational elements in the experiences of children with SEN/D in the two schools. Using ethnography, I participated in the lived experiences of these children and their mainstream teachers for two semesters in Guyana. In ethnographic studies situatedness of experiences not planned for are revealed in complexities (Corte & Irwin, 2017; Rodgers, 2007). In this study such situated experiences occurred when parents visited the schools and voluntarily shared their views on the experiences of children with and without SEN/D. I added their voices to the discourses because they were part of the situation and social arena. This was an approach to situational analysis taken by Adele Clarke (Clarke, 2005) and it was used to gather and analyze data in this study. Purposive theoretical sampling guided me to seek out additional data sources to collaborate the situated meanings of interviewed children with SEN/D. The sample included children with following impairments/disorders:

- 1) Speech Impairment-Mute.
- 2) Learning Disabilities/Learning Challenges.
- 3) Emotional Behavior Disorder.
- 4) Dyslexia.

- 5) Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).
- 6) Intellectual Disabilities.
- 7) Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- 8) Exceptional Intelligence/Giftedness-Exceptional/Giftedness.
- 9) Dysgraphia.
- 10) Down Syndrome.
- 11) Not known.

All the names given to the participants are pseudonyms.

IV. INFLUENCES OF MEMORIES

To acquire an understanding of the lived experiences the outstanding children with SEN/D, an exploration into my first experience with a child with SEN/D within a mainstream primary school in Guyana is presented. Aquennie's experience is one of two distinct cases concerning children with SEN/D from my mainstream teaching experiences. These memories illustrate some of the many negative experiences that children with SEN/D face in mainstream primary schools in Guyana. Moreover, such experiences were the rationale for conducting this research. The challenges to inclusion experienced by Aquennie were the result of Guyanese cultural attitudes expressed and practiced by both his peers and teachers who saw Aquennie as the "problem" and did not give him the opportunity to participate in school activities. This kind of exclusionary practice was evident within the two mainstream schools understudy in postcolonial Guyana.

SEN/D experts in Guyana (Ajodhia-Andrews, 2007; Andrews & Frankel, 2010; Fraser, 2014; Lashley, 2017, 2019; Mitchell, 2005; Sam, 2015), parents of children with SEN/D and other stakeholders in education indicated that Guyana's mainstream education environment is unsuitable for children with SEN/D. It also became apparent to me that these children may be facing more than environmental challenges in mainstream primary schools as is also documented by other researchers cited above. It seems that Guyanese children with SEN/D are not receiving the educational opportunities they need to achieve, in comparison to their peers who are perceived as SEN/D free. There is evidence to suggest that the culture, discourses, and discursive practices of the mainstream primary schools are not sufficiently inclusive to accommodate and value children with SEN/D. These children face multiple barriers within the structure of the organization and with perception and discourses on SEN/D that are present in mainstream primary schools in Guyana.

Several authors (Ainscow, 2010; Ainscow & César, 2006; Andrews & Frankel, 2010; Singal, 2016 & Tomlinson, 2017) have indicated that children with SEN/D continue to be the most marginalized and excluded group. Globally, a high percentage of children have been deprived of an education because of their exceptionalities (Cook *et al.*, 2014; Florian, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). Locally, statistics reveal that approximately 16,500 children out of Guyana's approximately 740,000 citizens suffer this kind of educational deprivation (Bureau of Statistics, Government of Guyana, 2018). In Guyana, SEN/D has been an area that

has attracted very little research and interest to date. While the few studies available have provided essential knowledge about education for children with SEN/D and the discourse on disability in Guyana, they do not represent the stories told by the children themselves.

As was mentioned before, Aquennie was one of the children with SEN/D whose experiences triggered my interest in SEN/D. Aquennie completed both mainstream primary and secondary schools without any adjustments made to accommodate him. Aquennie reflected on the barriers he faced daily in the mainstream school because of his impairment.

September 2018-Interview

Aquennie: (Questioningly) I was wondering how you came back to teach but I heard some children saying you are doing research.

Researcher: What was the biggest barrier you faced at Saints Primary School?

Aquennie: (With sadness and depressive tones) Lidon I remembered facing a challenge every day. When it was not the name calling, it was been overlooked for competitions I knew I could have won for the school, isolation without friends who were not my relatives, teachers uncaring and inconsiderate attitudes, never completely having the notes because teachers always clearing the chalkboard and being told to give up. The barriers made school experiences unpleasant.

He reflected on the name calling, being overlooked for competitions he knew he could have won, uncaring and inconsiderate attitudes within mainstream school discourses and practices around SEN/D, teachers' habit of clearing the chalkboard without him getting the notes and always being told he cannot keep up with mainstream expectations. The barrier which he saw as being major was the negative conceptions of SEN/D which made him feel helpless, powerless as if he really did not belong in mainstream school.

Many other children with SEN/D did not succeed as Aquennie did; they dropped out of school and did not succeed because of the many barriers in the mainstream schools. Their unsuccessful school experiences have led them to become school dropouts fueling the discourse that they were unsuitable for mainstream school from the start. School dropouts according to Njelesani *et al.* (2018) and Robers *et al.* (2010), are more likely to become truants, exhibit violent behaviors and will suffer academically.

When children with SEN/D suffer academically they become more vulnerable in a society in which discourses do not see their ability be meaningful contributors to development. Research from (Hattie, 2005; Liu, 2018; Ramaahlo *et al.*, 2018; Shaddock *et al.*, 2007) revealed that the teaching methods used by the teachers is a crucial to prevent students from suffering academically. There were many opportunities where teachers could have helped children like Aquennie overcome many of the barriers and challenges, but they were sometimes unaware how to help.

September 2018-Interview

Aquennie: *(Very concerning) I wish it would. Look at Saints Primary School. The building is the same. There were many renovations, but the traditional structure is maintained like a heritage site, yet it is still not easily accessible for physically disabled children. The barriers I faced in the past and obstacles to children presently.*

Aquennie pointed out that as a child most of the obstacles he faced from 2004 to 2010 are barriers which other children presently face, which indicated that there is still limited intervention. Early intervention reduces the long-term effects of which include a reduction in the need for special education and repeating grades and increased school completion rates (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Haslip, 2018; Weiss & Stephen, 2009).

V. THE EXPERIENCES OF THE CHILDREN WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES

The presentation of the experiences of the children with exceptionalities starts with Jasmine.

A. Jasmine

Autism is a life-long developmental disability that prevents people from understanding what they see, hear, and otherwise sense (Baron-Cohen, 2008; Hendry *et al.*, 2018). This results in severe problems with social relationships, communication, and behavior. Baron-Cohen, (2008) and Hendry *et al.*, (2018) are of the view that because children with autism often look perfectly normal physically, it was thought that the condition was wholly psychogenic or purely in mind. A vast number of children with autism are exceptionally gifted, as well (Kennedy & Farley, 2018; McElwain & Paisner, 2008). Jasmine was exceptionally talented in Mathematics and Science like Quan, Devi, and Alicia, but they did not have autism. She figured out mathematical and scientific equations and challenges independently. She preferred to work alone, without interruptions.

December 2018-Interview

Researcher: *How are you, Jasmine?*

Jasmine: *(Very mechanical and emotionless) I am doing Mathematics Mr. Lashley.*

Researcher: *Can we talk for a while?*

Jasmine: *(Very mechanical and emotionless) It is Mathematics time.*

Researcher: *Should I come back at playtime?*

Jasmine: *(Very mechanical and emotionless) Yes then is free time Mr. Lashley.*

Jasmine must do things routinely. She could not handle the challenges which came with being disorganized. She struggled to explain her emotions and to communicate her feelings and always came across mechanical and emotionless. During communication, she is often seen as being inappropriate or insensitive as she did not understand the context of communication very well. She did not

understand various emotional tones, and never realized when other children were expressing different feelings from hers. Her mechanical and ridged responses have also led to being excluded from activities by the teacher and her peers, especially unplanned learning, and socialization experiences.

Despite Jasmine's skills and talents in Mathematics and Science, Quan and Devi refused to work on projects with her because of her robotic reactions to everything. It was quite uncomfortable for them. The class teacher did not have any experience working with autistic children. She found that dealing with Jasmine was very challenging. The teacher reported that Jasmine drained her mentally and emotionally. Thus, the leaning process was often delayed, and this angered other children and the teacher.

Jasmine's Teacher: *I do not know how to facilitate her learning without affecting her or other children. I teach the whole class and hopes she figures things out as we go along. I try to stick to the timetable as much as I can because she would announce that it is the time for a particular subject, and if we are still working on another she stops working altogether. I would ignore her until I finish with the others so we can all start the next subject and by then she gets distraught, and I have to take much time to calm her down which affects the entire learning process. The other children find this frustrating, and it takes a lot out of me, mentally and physically. This is a class that has to write the National Grade Six Assessment, and we had limited time to complete the syllabi. Jasmine reactions delay the learning process a lot and I sometimes get distraught, which also makes matters worse. It is draining on all of us mentally.*

The teacher was frustrated because she had a limited knowledge of how to deal with Jasmine. According to Banks and Zuurmond, (2015) teachers' limitation in the knowledge of children's need leads to frustration in the classroom for both children and teachers. This suggests another dilemma created by the government portrayal of teachers as lone perfectionist. The teacher was often uncertain how to support Jasmine, and the constant outbursts by her were affecting the entire teaching and learning process. The teacher was more concerned about the approaching National Grade Six Assessment. This always took precedence because excellent passes provide the teacher with power in the mainstream education arena.

B. Alicia

Alicia was functioning at Grade Six level while she was merely in Grade three. She found her age peers childish and often went into Grade Six and did the work without challenges. She was under-challenged in her class, but Alicia was never socially isolated. Her actions differed from what researchers claimed brilliant children often are socially isolated and under-challenged in the classroom (Bianco & Leech, 2010; Fletcher-Campbell, 2003; Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). She differed qualitatively from her peers, and she socialized well with everyone.

Intelligence is not a fixed entity, but a flexible and dynamic one; it is a form of developing expertise which is

an ongoing process of the acquisition and consolidation of a set of skills needed for a high level of mastery in one or more domains (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002). Alicia was flexible in the ways she approached learning and the tasks associated with being in social settings. She was excellent at connecting learning and would apply skills learnt in one subject to another and social situations. Alicia was striving and superseding expectations with limited resources in overcrowded and open classrooms.

When Alicia found the task in Grade three annoying, she had books which she read. The education system has a responsibility to provide an appropriate level of challenge for students of all abilities (Kennedy & Farley, 2018; Nett *et al.*, 2016; Winstanley, 2004). This is true, even in cases where the student's potential performance exceeds the requirements and set standards. Alicia's was often bored and frustrated especially when her class teacher forced her to remain in Grade three. Boredom often turns to frustration and results in underachievement and disaffection with the learning process for gifted children (Nett *et al.*, 2016; Winstanley, 2004).

December 2018-Interview

Researcher: *Do you believe you grew up at Saints Primary School?*

Alicia: *(Cheerfully and confidently) I am growing. I find my own activities to challenge my knowledge. I also get challenges with the Grade six teacher and the Grade Six children.*

Researcher: *How do you cope with the older children?*

Alicia: *(Cheerfully and confidently) Remarkably well. They are insecure but more mature than the children in my class.*

Researcher: *How do you cope with children in your class?*

Alicia: *(Cheerfully and confidently) They think I am the teacher. They looked to me for guidance, and it upset the teacher. She is always upset.*

Researcher: *Do you think this school supports you well?*

Alicia: *(Cheerfully and confidently) This school is a limiting place which is sometimes frustrating. If it was not for the Grade six teacher this place would be boring. My mom and dad challenge me at home. Daddy is at University of Guyana doing his masters and he lets me sit up with him and read some his work.*

Alicia revealed that she was sometimes frustrated and overwhelmed but she did not have the power to change things. Alicia, like Quan and Devi from Angel Primary School, felt they needed to exert independent power to meet their needs. Alicia gets more stimulation at home and when it is not matched at school, it frustrates her. She has beyond the ability and well-developed verbal language skills to pass all the assessments which made her ideal for mainstream school, but she is not of the expected age. This has created barriers for Alicia in mainstream school. She demonstrates confidence which sometimes is perceived as arrogance and disrespect which puts her at odds with her class teacher but not the Grade Six teacher. Alicia sees school as a challenge which in itself is not inclusive. Alicia indicated that she had learnt that in everything, there will be challenges and Saints

Primary is just one of her life's challenges she has the power to overcome.

C. Daniel's Struggles

Daniel was super intelligent, yet he was unable to focus. His previous teacher explained that if Daniel could only sit and concentrate on his work, he would be one of Saints Primary School's outstanding pupils.

Daniel's Previous Teacher: *Daniel is remarkable. He makes me laugh. He is also very humorous. He must wash and iron his school clothes because his grandmother is unable to take all that fatigue. As a result, he comes to school untidy and smelly on most days. This is so because he is a boy, and you know boys will roam in the savannahs and play rough and dirty. He needs guidance to maintain his hygiene. He is energetic and unable to focus on class and makes silly mistakes in assessments. I know he can be the most outstanding pupil in this school. He needs to calm down and focus. I do not mind his shabby and untidy appearance, but some teachers treat Daniel differently because of it. I do not know why he cannot focus on and complete any task. I want to believe it must be something in his diet or something. I like that boy. I wish I knew how to help him, or he was still in my class. He is in Sir's class now, and Sir also does not know how to get him to settle. He is always walking around Sir's class.*

Daniel previous teacher's explanation of his character suggested his intelligence. She also pointed out that he seldom completed learning tasks. His inability to concentrate resulted in silly mistakes in tests resulting in his poor performance. While it appeared like the teachers overlooked the signs of ADHD for the four previous years he spent at school, it was not the case. They reported that he had always been that way, but they were unaware of the signs of ADHD. I observed that Daniel also faced difficulty following through on instructions and in organizing tasks. He always deviated from instructions. His workstation was always disorganized. He constantly shifted from one uncompleted activity to another. His previous teacher had already documented all I observed and stated the same to me in our discussions.

Daniel had the combined form of inattentiveness and hyperactivity-impulsivity. This was consistent with the occurrences I observed during my interviews with Daniel.

December 2018-Interview

Researcher: *Daniel it is so nice of you to agree to talk to me.*

Daniel: *Hmmmm! I want to know more about what you do.*

Researcher: *I am a researcher, and I am talking to children and writing about it.*

Daniel: *Ok I am Daniel. I am a pupil and my son also. That is supposed to be a joke, Mr. Lashley. Do you like Cricket?*

Daniel interrupted the interview and started talking to children who passed by.

Researcher: *Yes, I love playing cricket. Do you like school?*

Daniel: *Yes, I like school! I do not like some of the teachers. School is the place I get to be free. I roam and I wonder, and I learn.*

Researcher: *I was told you do not finish any tasks.*

Daniel: *There are boring. I lose interest quickly. The teachers want me to sit in one place all the time and do one thing over and over. How many times must I practice multiplying fractions in one day?*

Daniel interrupted the interview and started playing with the buttons on his shirt.

Researcher: *Daniel. Can we refocus here please?*

Daniel: *Oh yea, sorry about that. What were we saying?*

Researcher: *You were talking about doing multiplying fractions and sitting in one stable position.*

Daniel: *Oh yes, I cannot stay in one place too long it gets boring, and I get agitated. I want to move and interact and even when I try to control it, I cannot control it. This frustrates and annoys the teachers. Then they shout at me and become rude. And I get rude in return. This is our daily lives now. I have grown accustomed to it.*

Daniel interrupted the interview, and I allowed him to go play with his friends as it was recess.

Daniel's inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity were the core causes of his inability to focus on learning experiences or tasks and completing them. It also accounted for the simple mistakes and oversights he made in assessments. A child's academic success is often dependent on his or her ability to attend to tasks and classroom expectations with minimal distraction. Such skill enables a student to acquire necessary information, complete assignments, and participate in classroom activities and discussions (Forness & Kavale, 2001; Moldavsky *et al.*, 2013; Pyle & Fabiano, 2017; Wagner & Blackorby, 2002; Youssef *et al.*, 2015). Daniel's inability to attend to tasks and teachers' expectations of minimal self-distraction had been barriers to his learning. He did not have the power to control his behavior without support and this led to his exclusion through being ignored. It was not because the teachers were unwilling to help but because of the lack of the skills and knowledge needed to help.

D. Akon

Akon was the barefooted but talented rebel who was outstanding. Akon would be seen traversing and playing with his peers on the route to school but was seldom seen in class. He was found most days in the rice fields or swimming in the local canals. Because of his learning disabilities, and not receiving support, he could neither read nor write. He was very charismatic and quite a charming communicator.

He was in the same class as Ravi. Akon came to school shabbily. He always sat at the back whenever he was present. This was far less than the amount of time he was absent. He was caught loitering in the rice fields by the child welfare authorities and returned to school. This had not changed anything because he always returned to his truant practices.

It became apparent that Akon's inability unable to read and write at the basic level was a direct result of neglect at school because of his learning disabilities. The teachers who taught him previously and were still at the school said he could not learn. He was not willing to be helped. The teachers concluded that it was a waste of time, resources and not worth the stress to try to help Akon. This was a common discourse about wasting resources on learners classified as incapable of learning or unteachable.

Akon's class teacher would call upon every other child to participate except Akon and Ravi. I had not seen the teacher directly call on Akon to participate. He participated independently when he felt interested or inclined. He mostly did this in Science and Social Studies classes. The over emphasized one size fits all instructions neither cater for Akon's needs nor interests. He informed me that he watched the discovery channel. He was very knowledgeable about scientific facts beyond the Grade five levels.

During harvest time when rice farmers were reaping and preparing for cultivation of a new crop, Akon was not present at school. I visited the rice fields to the North of Angel Primary because I was informed that Akon was there. I met Akon driving a tractor. He did a superb job at it. His maneuvering skills were excellent. We had an interesting conversation which revealed that he was aware that he was being neglected. He concluded that since he was supported at school his experiences were meaningless. The rice farmers provided him with socialization and experiences not provided at school. He was also very knowledgeable about all the intricacies of rice cultivation. This was superb for a child who the mainstream school neglected because of learning disabilities.

Akon's Interview in the Rice Fields, 2018

Akon: *(Very excitedly) Mr. Lashley what are you doing in the rice fields?*

Researcher: *I came to see you.*

Akon: *(Very excitedly) Do want a ride on the tractor while I plough the fields? I have to finish this field before the mid-day sun.*

Researcher: *Ok!*

Akon: *(Very excitedly) Come on Mr. Lashley. I like the fact that you are very accommodating.*

Researcher: *Why do you skip school?*

Akon: *(Very confidently) I will learn to drive this tractor one day. In one week, I learned to plough and chip the fields in preparation for planting. I can count the rows and bags of fertilizers. I also know how many acres I can prepare with one tank of fuel in the tractor. All this is reasoning.*

Researcher: *This is impressive. Who taught you all this?*

Akon: *(Very excitedly) The great teachers, the rice farmers over there. They are patient and teach you practically. I cannot learn the way things are taught in school. The teachers think I am a dunce and I have no future. They ignore me without care. I have found my bright future. It makes more money than teaching.*

Researcher: *I think you still need to learn the basics like to sign your name on a cheque and other basic things.*

Akon: *(Very excitedly) The farmer who has been teaching all about rice farming taught to write and read using the*

newspapers. I can read and write a little the same month you came but I still pretend that I cannot. The teachers carry on ignoring me and I just go enough so the welfare would not look for me.

Researcher: I understand. I must get back to school.

Akon: (Very excitedly) Wait for me I am almost done, and I have my school clothes over there we can go back together.

Akon explained to me that things he found frustrating to learn at school were easily learnt in the rice fields outdoors with a practical approach. Akon's explanation suggests that children needed individualized lessons which they were not receiving in either of the two mainstream primary school's understudies. Many children with SEN/D benefit from the use of metacognitive skills to help them focus on what they are doing and to plan for how to employ strategies as needed and change directions when appropriate (Mevarech & Amrany, 2008; Schiff, *et al.*, 2015). These needed metacognitive skills Akon learnt in the rice fields. All children, but particularly those with impairments, need to have teachers explain clearly and fully in context learning tasks (Chan, 2017; De La Paz, *et al.*, 2000; Lashley, 2017, 2019; Schiff, *et al.*, 2015). The whole class approaches utilized at school did not meet the needs of Akon. He got that individualized and contextualized support to develop his metacognitive skills in the rice fields with the rice farmers.

VI. CONCLUSION

Akon found an avenue to meet his needs with the supportive rice farmers. Numerous other children with SEN/D were directly neglected in mainstream primary school. They attended mainstream school daily without having the experiences and socialization needed. They never overcome the challenges and barriers encountered. Directly neglecting children who are perceived by teachers to be incapable of learning was a common practice observed in both schools, but the gifted and outstanding children showed how they independently overcame challenges and barriers encountered. This paper presented evidence and arguments to highlight that some children who are gifted and outstanding face obstacles to learning and socialization social and cultural Interferences. In this paper I showed how the children with exceptionalities were successful in overcoming many challenges and conquered mainstream primary school. I revealed how some children with SEN/D rose above the negative perceptions of the teachers and mainstream schools because of discourses around SEN/D and discipline by religion, secular society and the government that portrayed the teachers as the all-knower and lone perfectionist professionals. These children used the barriers and challenges to showcase their skills and talents and create a subordinate discourse of power and SEN/D in mainstream schools. Some of the children with exceptionalities did not fear the "stay in your lane" directives and did not subject themselves to marginalized and tiered socialization as was presented in the paper titled "*Stay in Your Lane: Experiences of learners with Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEN/D) in rural postcolonial Guyana.*"

VII. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Stringent efforts were made to safeguard all participants' identity with the use of pseudonyms. Precautions were also taken to protect the safety of children and their integrity in their learning environment. All participants were told of their rights to withdraw from the study at any stage. They could have their contributions omitted from the research and any documented pieces shredded or returned to them. I ensured that my research complied with BERA 2011 and with articles 16-21 (Children, Vulnerable Young People and Vulnerable Adults) with additional emphasis on Articles 3 and 12 from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 states that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 states that children who are capable of forming their views should be granted the right to express their opinions freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity. All the children with SEN/D who participated in this study were allowed to form their opinions about their experiences within mainstream primary schools and to express these views freely in all matters affecting them. I gave all participants information that was, as far as possible, easily comprehended, so that they could have voluntarily decided whether or not to participate in the research. While the informed consent process is prospective and takes place before any research activity, consent would also be an ongoing interaction between the participants for the duration of the study.

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